



*Watson Road
1958 -*



*Court Street
1871 - 1907*



*Main Street
1907 - 1958*

HISTORY OF First Presbyterian Church

Mt. Pleasant, Michigan
1871 - 1996

285.1
D144h

Dain, Floyd Russell
History of First
Presbyterian Church,
Mt. Pleasant,
Michigan, 1871-1996.

FEB 2000

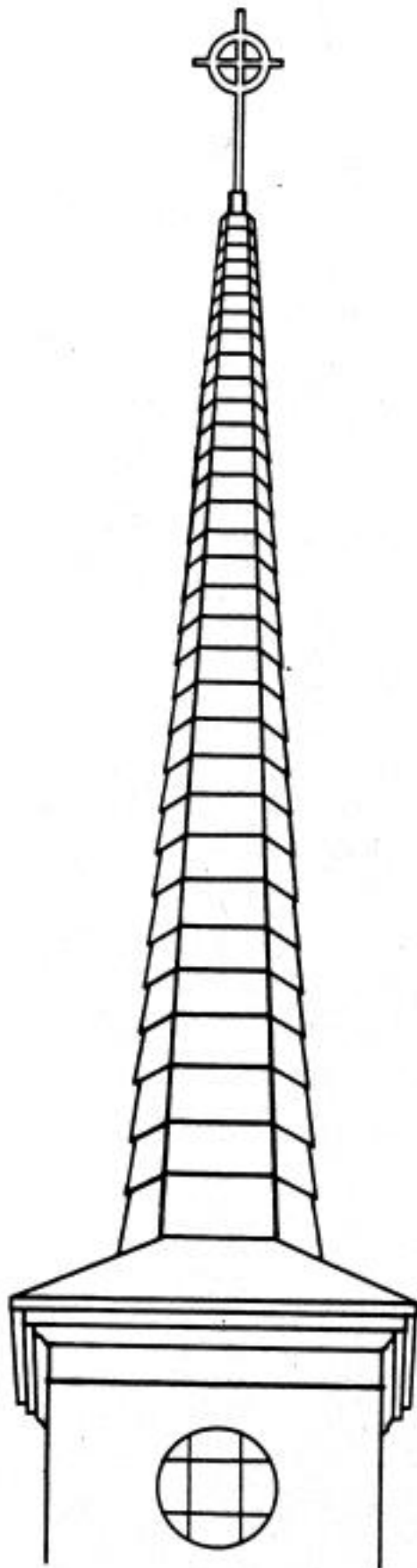


4848 82888 81514 7

Volume I "A Silver Spire"
1871-1971

Volume II "Partners in Christ's Service"
1971-1996

A SILVER SPIRE



**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
MT. PLEASANT
MICHIGAN**

**PUBLIC LIBRARY
501 SOUTH UNIVERSITY
MT. PLEASANT, MI 48858**

1871-1971

A SILVER SPIRE

History of the First Presbyterian Church
of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

Volume I 1871 - 1971

by

Floyd Russell Dain

and

William E. Franklin

Enterprise Printers, Inc.
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan
1971

From the tower of the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, a silver spire points skyward holding high a cross for all to see, for all to ponder. The positioning of this symbol of faith required over the years the prayers of many hearts and the labor of many hands. Since 1871 when a humble few gathered in joyous fellowship to found the church in the then frontier community, three sanctuaries have welcomed those who would find comfort under the cross. This account of one hundred years of dedication, sacrifice, and service comprises, hopefully, but the first chapter in an ever broadening, never ending chronicle of Christian worship.

By the spring of 1871, lumbering had emerged as a major industry in Michigan. In the vast forests of the Lower Peninsula thousands of men labored to harvest the valuable white pine and thousands more found employment in the mills whose whirring saws sent forth a seemingly endless flow of finished boards and timbers. From every point a rapidly expanding nation cried out for pine and more pine. To help meet this demand, mills located on the Saginaw River annually marketed millions of board feet of lumber. Most of the raw timber reached these mills by way of free-flowing tributaries of the Saginaw which, penetrating far inland from Lake Huron, tapped rich mid-Michigan pinelands. One of these rivers was the Chippewa, an ebullient stream which rose among the glacial moraines of central Michigan and coursed through the gently undulating and heavily forested lands of Isabella County to a confluence with the Tittabawassee.

For a decade and more, lumbermen had cut pine in Isabella County. Each year from rollways along its banks they choked the Chippewa with freshly cut pine logs and floated them downstream to the Tittabawassee and on to the Saginaw. Near the center of the county at a point where the Chippewa bent to the north and to the east lay the village of Mt. Pleasant. Surrounding it were wide stretches of stumpland where newly-arrived farmers now labored to improve their homesteads.

Except for the river and a primitive road entering from the south, the town was all but isolated from the rest of the state. The Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad, which reached the county in 1871 and began laying track across its northern townships, could do little to aid Mt. Pleasant situated fifteen roadless miles south of the right of way. To market their small surpluses, local farmers could look only to the lumber camps and to the few hundred people living in the unincorporated village. In spite of its seclusion and its want of elegance, Mt. Pleasant served as the seat of county government. A local newspaper strove valiantly to promote the town, but most of its merchants and professional men found business slow and profits small. Each spring the town could anticipate a few weeks of excitement and the merchants an upsurge in business as the log drives descended the Chippewa. Sobering to the townspeople, however, was the realization that this green wealth was leaving the county without contributing to its well-being or its progress and that years would pass before the cutover lands could be settled, cleared of stumps, and made productive.

A long dry spell in the summer of 1871 added to the difficulties confronting Mt. Pleasant. Farmers saw their crops wither and die during the rainless weeks. Merchants looked to the fall and winter with misgivings, knowing that there would be little trade. All eyes turned to the western skies hazy with the smoke of distant forest fires. At this unpropitious and threatening hour, the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant came into existence. Within another month the devoted few who founded it had good reason to seek God's mercy. Their prayers were in behalf of the

sufferers at Chicago, which was now in ashes, and for aid in quenching the fires presently raging in Isabella and neighboring counties. Although smoke sometimes blotted out the sun over Mt. Pleasant, the town was more fortunate than others in Michigan and Wisconsin and escaped the holocaust.

For some years after its founding in 1861, Mt. Pleasant was too small to support an organized church. Many who lived in the town were transients, men who customarily followed the timber, moving on to another camp or another job after spending a season or two in a local lumber camp or saw-mill. Together with the more stable element in the town, these hard-working, hard-living citizens welcomed the arrival of the occasional evangelist or missionary and listened with appreciation to his exhortations. But seldom were they to be found in the coterie of dedicated Christians who hungered for more substantial and satisfying religious expression and gathered regularly for worship in private homes or in the log schoolhouse. Sometimes in these improvised sanctuaries this small fellowship met only for prayer; at other times a local preacher, himself a pioneer, delivered a sermon. Wherever and whenever they congregated, these people prayed for the day when their collective strength would prove equal to their fondest dream—and a house of Christian worship would rise in Mt. Pleasant.

Missionaries representing the Methodist Episcopal Church were among the first white settlers to come to Isabella County. After several years of devoted service among the Indians of the region, they extended their work to its coarse lumber camps and its raw frontier towns. A week-long series of Methodist meetings in Mt. Pleasant in 1864 attracted Christians of various creeds as well as the uncommitted and the unprofessed. As a result, a wave of religious enthusiasm swept the town. Before the year ended staunch Methodists found brethren of other faiths and beliefs laboring beside them to construct the village's first house of worship, the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The occupation and dedication of the Methodist Episcopal Church early in 1865 was but one indication of strong religious conviction among the people of Mt. Pleasant. Revealing, too, was the organization that year of the Union Sunday School. As its name implies, this school served several denominations. Convened in a log building provided by John Kinney, local merchant and postmaster, it offered Christian instruction for all ages until its dissolution in 1868. This unhappy event materialized when the Methodists determined to establish their own Sunday School and attracted to it most of the students, teachers, and officials associated with the jointly operated institution.

In the spring of 1867, meanwhile, an organization of Mt. Pleasant women undertook to raise funds for the partial support of a minister who would hold services in the town and aid in the establishment of a local Presbyterian church. To help raise money they knitted, sewed, and sponsored "ten-cent socials" at which they marketed their handiwork. When they had accumulated \$1,000, they invited Presbyterian clergymen and laymen to the town to investigate the feasibility of their plan. Among the visitors was the Reverend Chester Armstrong who conducted services for several weeks during the summer and spurred interest in the establishment of the church. By the next spring several men had joined in the promotion. Evidently strengthened in its resolve by a promise of aid from the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, the group brought the Reverend D. D. Campbell to town to guide it in the organization of the church and to serve as its first pastor.

Campbell and his supporters began their efforts to establish the church in April, 1868. Late in the month they inserted a notice in the local paper calling upon all who were "interested in the formation of a religious

society" to meet at "the School House" at 3:00 P.M. on Sunday, May 10. At the appointed time nine men, including Campbell, responded to the call. They elected Isaac A. Fancher, a lawyer, to serve as chairman of the meeting and Albert Fox, publisher of the local newspaper, as clerk. Campbell explained the object of the meeting and reviewed the steps necessary to establish a church. After prayer, he presented the draft of a proposed constitution. Adopting it with slight modification as "the Articles of Association of the First Presbyterian Society of Mt. Pleasant," the group requested the clerk to ready the document for ratification and signature at a future meeting. It directed Campbell to publicize the Society at a religious service that evening and arranged for similar announcements at future meetings of the Union Sunday School. Determined to abide fully with the state law governing the formation of religious societies, the group set May 30 as its next meeting date, thus allowing two full weeks for additional public notice.

During these spring weeks, Campbell preached regularly to the men and women who were promoting the Society. Although the women had been the prime movers in establishing a ministerial fund, they were evidently willing that their husbands should manage it and should attend to the actual founding and organization of a Presbyterian church. At the second meeting of the Society on May 30, the nine men present elected six of their number to serve staggered terms as members of a Board of Trustees.

For a brief time the Society flourished. By the end of June, eighteen men had signed the Articles of Association. Late in the month the Board of Trustees "unanimously resolved" to seek help from the Board of Home Missions of the General Assembly, calling upon that body to appoint the Reverend Campbell to a one year term, effective June 1, 1868, as pastor to the Mt. Pleasant Society. Not until this appointment was forthcoming could the Society complete its organization by electing ruling elders and providing for their ordination.

Little can be determined from the few extant records of the Society to account for its failure at this time and its inactivity during the next few years. One report states that because of the "removal" of all but one of its members, the Society "was not in a condition to do the work of a Presbyterian church." Some of the members moved away from Mt. Pleasant; others evidently "removed" their names from the Society's roll. The delay in a response from the Board of Home Missions may have influenced some removals, but undoubtedly of greater significance was the break-up of the Union Sunday School. As mentioned earlier, the new Methodist Sunday School attracted most of the Union School's teachers and students and caused the latter to dissolve. Evidently in the interest of continued Christian education a number of would-be Presbyterians left the Society and with their families affiliated with the comparatively well-established Methodist Church. For want of members the Society lapsed into inactivity. So ended the first attempt to establish a Presbyterian church in Mt. Pleasant.

Although a few citizens may have "removed" from Mt. Pleasant, many newcomers arrived to swell the population of the town. Among the latter were some with strong dedication to Presbyterianism. In 1869 Jared Doughty and his brother, Wilkinson, settled in town and established a hardware firm. Soon after their arrival, Wilkinson's wife, Mary, joined with Cornelia Bouton to establish a Presbyterian Sunday School. Cornelia had been a member of the women's group which had raised funds for the support of a minister, and her husband, Henry, had served as a trustee of the First Presbyterian Society. The immediate success of the Sunday School spurred a renewal of interest in a local church.

Despite its failure to organize a church, the now defunct First Presbyterian Society had laid the groundwork for this second effort. Determined to help the cause, a group of local women followed the example of the earlier Ministerial Aid Society and formed a Ladies' Aid Society to raise funds for the church. Perhaps as a consequence of the earlier plea for missionary aid, the Board of Home Missions now sent ministers into the region to conduct Presbyterian services in the wilderness communities.

In April, 1871 the Reverend Luke Nott of the Saginaw Presbytery came to Mt. Pleasant to serve as a missionary in Clare and Isabella Counties. During the ensuing spring and summer he preached regularly at the schoolhouse in Mt. Pleasant. In time he brought together a small group of townspeople who shared his hope of resurrecting the Presbyterian Society. Early in September he received unexpected assistance with the arrival of the Reverend S. Ellis Wishard of East Saginaw who in the company of several clergymen stopped over in Mt. Pleasant to promote Sunday School instruction. Nott prevailed upon Wishard to conduct services in town for several days and to advise him on the feasibility of establishing a local Presbyterian church.

For several days the two men tramped the dusty streets of the village, visiting from house to house, praying with the occupants, and inviting them to attend services which the two ministers were conducting each evening in the schoolhouse. Wishard became convinced that there was sufficient demand for a church and that he should call a meeting to organize it. Within two days of the beginning of the survey, he notified the public that those interested in the establishment of a Presbyterian church should meet with him and the Reverend Nott at the Methodist Episcopal Church on the afternoon of Thursday, September 7, 1871.

Nine women and three men responded to the notice. After selecting Wishard to serve as Moderator and Nott as Clerk, the meeting opened with prayer and the reading of scripture. Thereupon Wishard explained the purpose of the meeting and emphasized the importance of founding a church in Mt. Pleasant. With his listeners attentive to his every word, he conducted a lively discussion of Presbyterian "polity." At the conclusion of his talk, the twelve persons present resolved unanimously to "proceed to the organization of a church to be called the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant, the same to be connected with the Presbytery of Saginaw, Reverend S. E. Wishard and Reverend Luke Nott acting as members of said Presbytery."

With the consent of the small congregation present, the two ministers proceeded to the organization of the church. Each prospective member presented himself and tendered his qualifications for acceptance into the fellowship. James Brodie and his wife, Christian, offered in evidence a letter from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Alexander Gray submitted like evidence from a Presbyterian Church in Detroit. Henry Bouton and his wife, Cornelia, Sallie Hapner, Emily H. Case, June A. Warner, and Althea M. Fancher testified to and won acceptance on their "knowledge of Christian Character." Mary F. Doughty, Sallie Ann Welper, and Sarah Huntress entered into the fellowship on profession of their Christian faith.

When all had been accepted, they adopted a Confession of Faith and Covenant and elected two of their number, Alexander Gray and Henry Bouton, to serve as ruling elders. Before adjourning, the congregation agreed to meet three days hence on Sunday, September 10, for the ordination of Henry Bouton and for the baptism of several adults and children.

All gathered in the Methodist Episcopal Church at 4:30 p.m. on the

appointed day. The session record reads, "After singing, prayer, and a brief address by Rev. S. Ellis Wishard on the ordinance of baptism, both as to mode and the proper subjects, the ordinance was administered to Mrs. Mary F. Doughty, and Blanch Fancher, infant daughter of Hon. I. and Mrs. A. M. Fancher, also to Edna M. Bouton, infant daughter of Henry S. and Cornelia Bouton." Afterwards, Bouton was ordained as a ruling elder "according to the form of the book of discipline." Thereupon, Wishard pronounced the church duly constituted and dismissed the congregation with the singing of the doxology and with the apostolic benediction. That evening the members of the new church in company with brethren of other denominations again gathered in the Methodist sanctuary to hear Wishard's second sermon of the day and, with grateful hearts, to partake of the Lord's Supper. Thus the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, concluded the first day in its first century of Christian service.



Mary F. Doughty, a co-founder of the Presbyterian Sunday School, and one of the original members of First Presbyterian church.