

In September, 1896, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the First Presbyterian Church passed without celebration or even the slightest recognition of the event. Perhaps the members of the congregation were so shaken by the untimely death of Mary Doughty and so concerned with their vacant pulpit that their thoughts lay not with the past of the church but with its future. At this juncture they turned for help to Charles McKenny.

Earlier in the summer the State Board of Education had named McKenny, a graduate of Michigan Agricultural College and at the time an English professor at Olivet College, to succeed Charles Bellows as principal of the Central Michigan Normal School. Although he apparently had no formal theological training, McKenny was a devout Christian, an inspirational speaker, and evidently an ordained Congregational minister. On many occasions during his career as an educator he had been called upon to supply a pulpit. When he first visited Mt. Pleasant shortly after his appointment, he worshiped at First Presbyterian. Late in August he moved his family to town, but he had yet to settle them in their home when he learned of the crisis confronting the local church. At the "invitation" of the Session, Professor McKenny agreed to fill the Presbyterian pulpit "temporarily."

McKenny evidently had no thought of serving the Presbyterians for more than a week or two. On the first two Sundays in September he preached to large congregations at both morning and evening services, but on the next Sabbath he was in the Methodist pulpit and two weeks later assisted the minister in the Baptist Church. Without any immediate prospect of engaging a pastor and reluctant to have their pulpit vacant during the holiday season fast approaching, the Presbyterians, early in November, invited the professor "to officiate as their pastor." McKenny consented and thereafter served the church as a "temporary pastor" until the following spring on a purely voluntary basis and apparently without compensation. This interlude permitted the church to add to its slim resources. For example, the Ladies' Aid Society at its "Mothers Home Market" in December took in \$90 in sorely needed funds.

The Session records reveal that the "Reverend McKenny" met with that body as the "chosen" pastor of the church, and presided over the quarterly communion service in January. He continued to preach at both Sabbath services as the search for a new pastor went on. In March the congregation voted to offer the pulpit to the Reverend H. Van Ormeren, a Congregational minister at Grass Lake, Michigan. The offer was accepted and on the 21st of the month McKenny preached his "farewell" sermon and, as events were to prove, "temporarily" retired from the Presbyterian pulpit to become once again an educator exclusively.

Van Ormeren began his duties in Mt. Pleasant early in April. He had agreed to a \$600 contract for a year of service with four Sabbaths "for himself." On the Sunday before his first appearance in the pulpit, the church held a reception for the young minister and his wife in the church parlor. Invitations to the affair had been read from the pulpits of the local churches on the previous Sabbath. Full notices of Sunday church services appeared in the local newspapers soon after Van Ormeren occupied the pulpit. The program for May 2, 1898 read:

Rev. H. Van Ormeren, pastor

10:30 a.m. - "The Three Dimensions of Life"

12:00 m. - Sunday School and Bible Classes

6:30 p.m. - Christian Endeavor

"Christian Enterprise"

7:30 p.m. - "The Spirit and Purpose of Reform"

Despite conscientious service, Van Ommeren soon became aware of the problem that had confronted the Reverend Shanton and others before him—paydays at the First Presbyterian Church were unpredictable. Indeed, the wave of national prosperity then sweeping the country was not reflected in the financial affairs of the church. In August the church treasurer reported that total funds on hand amounted to only \$9.36. At the time, the trustees owed the pastor \$70.70 in back salary. To resolve the matter the trustees voted to pay Van Ommeren the \$9.36 and to ask the Ladies' Aid Society to turn over to him "what money they now [had] on hand." When it complied with the request of the Board of Trustees, the Ladies' Aid Society was again without funds. To replenish its treasury, the members decided that instead of holding a bazaar, they would take orders for "various fancy and useful articles" which they could make in their homes.

Evidently, Van Ommeren had made good use of the "free Sabbaths" allowed him in his contract and had looked about for a church with better prospects than First Presbyterian. Although he had agreed to serve a second year, he submitted his resignation as pastor after the morning service on October 30, 1898. A delegation of elders and trustees met with him in an endeavor to persuade him to reconsider, but to no avail. The pastor had received a call to the Congregational Church in Armada, Michigan, and wished to leave at once. The Session accepted his resignation, but the trustees, lacking funds as usual, were forced to negotiate a loan to pay the departing minister his salary to date. Some years later however, he would return to Mt. Pleasant and serve several years as pastor of the Unitarian Church.

Meanwhile, Professor and Mrs. McKenny had become members of the First Presbyterian Church and had at once become much involved in its affairs. In addition to his work with the Christian Endeavor group and as Superintendent of the Sunday School, McKenny also served as a ruling elder and clerk of the Session. Thus, with the pulpit once more vacant, he could again take over as temporary pastor. For the ensuing six months he shared the preaching with visiting ministers and with "Major" Charles W. Campbell, founder of the Christian Crusaders, an interdenominational evangelistic movement.

The search for a new pastor continued throughout the winter. In January the congregation offered the pulpit to Reverend J. A. McGreaham of St. Louis, Michigan. Although on this occasion McGreaham refused the offer, some years later he would accept a call to First Presbyterian and play a most significant part in its development. The congregation was more fortunate in its second attempt to secure a pastor. Late in April, the Reverend William H. Simmons of Corunna, Michigan, preached to the Presbyterians and a week later received and accepted a call to the Mt. Pleasant church. He began his pastorate of three and one-half years at First Presbyterian on June 11, 1899.

From all indications, Simmons' ministry in Mt. Pleasant was satisfying to him and fruitful for the church and the community. Soon after his arrival the Ladies' Aid Society gave a reception in honor of the pastor and his family. Time and again, thereafter, Simmons and his wife entertained the Society in their home or made it available for money-raising "socials." In October a delegation of ministers and laymen from other cities in the Presbytery arrived in Mt. Pleasant to assist in the formal installation of the new pastor. At the invitation of his fellow clergymen, Simmons preached "a very able and interesting sermon" to a large audience gathered in the local Church of Christ for a union Thanksgiving Day service. On a Sunday late in

March the congregation bade farewell to Professor McKenny who was about to leave Mt. Pleasant for a new post in Wisconsin. After baptizing the two young sons of the educator, Simmons relinquished his pulpit in order that the congregation might one more time find inspiration in McKenny's words.

Although the departure of McKenny was a serious loss for First Presbyterian, the congregation could find gratification in reports that the church had made substantial progress during Simmons' first year as pastor. In addition to "sustaining its regular work and making an offering to all benevolent boards," the church building had been painted throughout and new hymnals purchased. Perhaps in celebration of this welcome but unusual news, the ladies of the church treated all who attended the annual meeting to light refreshments.

The Ladies' Aid Society had also prospered during the past year. Its membership of more than fifty women now consisted of a North Division (north of Maple Street) and a South Division. In December, 1900, the Ladies' Guild of the local Episcopal Church utilized a fund-raising device previously untried on the local scene--a rummage sale. The \$90 realized from this sale was sufficient reason for the Presbyterian women to attempt a similar venture only a week later. "At the store on South Main Street where the former rummage sale was held," read the notice issued by the North Division, "articles of almost every description will be sold. Open mornings, afternoons, and evenings." Evidently Presbyterian castoffs were as much in demand as Episcopal, for the sale was highly successful. Not long thereafter the South Division conducted another sale. Thus was established in Mt. Pleasant a tradition that in the century about to dawn would involve Presbyterian women ad infinitum.

The First Presbyterian Church marked the passing of the century with appropriate observance. On the last Sunday in December, the Reverend Simmons' remarks at the morning service were "retrospective of the nineteenth century." In the evening his theme was "prospective of the twentieth century." Somewhat in the same vein, at the communion service celebrated on the first Sunday in the new century he entitled his sermon, "Looking Forward and Backward." For several weeks thereafter members of the church gathered nightly in the sanctuary to pray that the new century might witness a renewal of faith in Christ and His teaching.

The first years of the new century were satisfying indeed to the First Presbyterian Church. Under Simmons' leadership, church membership and resources grew apace. For a time the congregation feared that they might lose their beloved pastor to the Presbyterian Church in Howell, Michigan, but to their relief he decided to remain. At the annual meeting in 1902, at which Professor Charles T. Grawn, the new principal of the Normal, presided, all divisions of the church reported exceptional progress. Instead of the "light refreshments" of a previous year, the "happy gathering" celebrated the "excellent condition" of the church with a banquet--"a good feast enjoyed by all."

But the year was to end on an unhappy note. At a meeting of the Session on Sunday morning, November 30, 1902, Simmons tendered his resignation as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Later in the day the congregation reluctantly agreed that the Session should "unite with the pastor in asking Presbytery for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship." The decision by the "esteemed pastor and citizen" caused "universal regret." He had received a call to the Presbyterian Church in Mason, Michigan, at a larger salary, the local editor reported, "for which he is fully justified in making the move." On the day following the pastor's surprise announcement, the Ladies' Aid Society countered by surprising Simmons and his family with

a going-away party in their honor. With \$31 contributed overnight by the women of the Society, they purchased and presented to the pastor "a beautiful library table" that he was known to have admired, and presented the remaining \$11 to his equally beloved wife. The evening was one "which made every one happy--save for the regret that it marked the departure of a good man from the community."

Simmons gave up his pulpit early in December at a time when church and community were formulating plans for holiday celebrations. Although there is no evidence for the assumption, one can well believe that the departing pastor may have encouraged "the novel and very appropriate change" which took place in the Presbyterian Sunday School's observance of Christmas. Instead of "the customary tree" and the "giving of presents to the school," stated a church official, "each class was made responsible for the Christmas cheer of a family who would otherwise not have had any. Baskets of good things and delicacies with toys for the little ones were left at a number of poor homes, and in this way the pupils learned the lesson that it is more blessed to give than to receive."

On several Sabbaths following the departure of the Reverend Simmons, the Presbyterian pulpit was silent. Late in January, however, the congregation issued a call to the Reverend Maurice Grigsby of Ellwood, Illinois. The minister accepted and arrived in Mt. Pleasant in February, 1903, to begin his duties. With a full program of religious observance now in prospect, a pleased observer could note, "The Presbyterian Church is again running wide open."

The women of the congregation never lessened their efforts in support of the church and its ministry. Their reception for the new pastor and his wife late in February was a "very pleasant affair," featured by "music, light refreshment, and social visiting." At this time "influenced by a deficit" and with their treasury empty, the women determined to raise funds by a new and rather unusual means--an "experience social." Each of the more than fifty members of the Ladies' Aid Society set about to earn one dollar in a month's time, strictly by her "own personal efforts." At the end of the month, twenty-seven of the women assembled at the home of one of the members. Then, as needles darted over "fancy work," the hostess collected the money and each contributor in turn "told of her experiences in earning her dollar." Some had made and sold such items as bread, "sweet-meats," or kitchen aprons. Others had earned their dollars by doing their own washing or ironing. One woman gave lessons in "Navaho Indian work." All thoroughly enjoyed the affair and recommended it to other groups as a painless method of raising funds. With money thus obtained the women promptly purchased "two handsome offering plates," which, their spokesman remarked pointedly, all members, friends, and visitors, were "invited to use . . . when attending the church."

Within a short time the new offering plates were indeed put to good use. During April and May, the First Presbyterian Church joined with the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ in sponsoring an "old time revival." The evangelists were Charles Cullen Smith and C. S. Colburn. For two and one-half weeks every available auditorium in town was filled nightly. "The city," said the local editor, "is now feeling the refreshing and reviving influence of a religious movement." It was not one, he added, which influences people "to leap over chairs and fall under the 'power'," but one

in which the spirit of God through the lips of some common, consecrated man speaks to the hearts and consciences of the people, until an unworthy past becomes hateful to them and they catch a glimpse of

better things in store for them . . . ; men whose thought seldom rises above the cash counter and the cattle-car are reflecting upon their personal relation to the providence about them

To conclude the first week of the event, 500 men packed every available space in the local Opera House to hear the Reverend Smith discuss the question, "Will Living a Moral Life Save Me?" Earlier in the evening at a mass meeting of women in the Presbyterian Church, Smith's topic was "The Awful Price." Massed choirs, soloists, and "soul-stirring music" featured every session. Truly, "the spirit [was] abroad." People came from a wide area to attend the meetings. Indeed, the Presbyterian Church, the headquarters for all of the women's activities, remained open for some time each night that the wives of regional farmers might await their husbands there.

On a Tuesday evening shortly after the revival ended, Presbyterians gathered in their church to witness the installation of their new pastor. Officiating at the ceremony were four ministers appointed by the Presbytery, with the pastors of local churches assisting in the opening services. The Reverend A. D. Grigsby of Cheboygan, father of the new pastor, delivered "a very strong sermon . . . on the subject of 'Faith.'" The Reverend Clixbe, a former professor of the younger Grigsby, gave the charge to the pastor. Thereafter, the Reverend William H. Simmons, the former pastor of First Presbyterian, delivered the charge to the people. A "fine ladies quartet" furnished the music for the evening. "The whole service," reported the local newspaper, "was very impressive and will be long remembered."

In the Presbyterian Church twenty-four hours later, however, the solemnity of the previous day gave way to hilarity. As the congregation was to learn, all members of the Grigsby clan were talented singers, musicians, and entertainers. Since he would be in town for his son's installation, the elder Grigsby had consented to deliver a "popular lecture" to help the Sunday School raise funds for new song books. "Laugh and grow fat. Laughter hurts no one," read the announcement of the lecture. "Mr. Grigsby is a full-blooded Englishman, but has adopted America, or rather America has adopted him." That evening the crowded church auditorium did indeed resound with laughter as Grigsby, "a natural humorist and a fine story-teller," related "An Englishman's First Impression of Michigan."

The local Presbyterians developed a high regard for the "full-blooded Englishman" who frequently thereafter came to Mt. Pleasant to supply his son's pulpit. On one of these occasions his notice of the next Sabbath's program stated: "Rev. A. D. Grigsby . . . will be pleased to see the Presbyterians of the city in their places. We are all of us miserable sinners but worship may do a little to make us less miserable. Come and try it at 10:30 and 7:00 o'clock standard time."

From the moment the Reverend Grigsby occupied the Presbyterian pulpit, the church placed greater emphasis upon its ministry of music. Popular evening "praise" services or hymn-sings frequently replaced a second Sabbath sermon. Grigsby and his wife were much involved in most of the musical presentations. Indeed, in July when Reverend L. B. Bissell, Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League and father of a former First Presbyterian pastor, preached at both services, "the Grigsby quartet" rendered sacred selections which were "well received" by the large audiences in attendance. The quartet consisted of the pastor's sister-in-law, soprano; his wife, alto; his brother, tenor; and himself, bass. Influenced, perhaps, by the reception given these singers, the trustees in October engaged a quartet of local voices to sing at all regular services under the direction of

Mrs. Harper Maybee. One of the first services to feature the new singers was announced as "an evening with famous hymns and their writers." The quartet on this occasion sang many of the audience's favorite hymns. After each number the pastor commented on the author of the hymn and the circumstances relating to its composition.

The inspiration provided by the expanded musical program gave new life and meaning to holiday observances at First Presbyterian Church. In addition to the Sabbath Thanksgiving service, the church also provided for worship on Thanksgiving Day. "No long sermon," read the announcement, "no long prayers, no long music, but a bright, interesting, and helpful service of thanksgiving. All will take part. Come, and tell us why you are thankful A Thanksgiving offering will be taken for the needy ones. Come and bring the family. Cook your turkey afterwards." As the Christmas season drew near, Mrs. Maybee and Mrs. Grigsby prepared "sacred concerts" for presentation on Sabbath evenings. The program for December 7 offered a variety of musical selections:

Part I

Cantata -- The Holy City
 -- by Gaul
Contemplation -- Organ
No Shadows Yonder -- Tenor and Quartet
My Soul is Athirst for God -- Tenor
At Eventide -- Women's trio (Mrs. Maybee, Misses Russell and Walkenstein)
Eye Hath Not Seen -- Contralto
A New Heaven and a New Earth -- Baritone solo
Choral Sanctus

Part II

Individual selections
Saviour When Night Involves the Skies -- Bass and Quartet
 -- Shelley
O Divine Redeemer -- Mrs. Maybee
 -- Gounod
Great God to Thee Our Evening Song -- Mrs. Maybee, Miss Russell and Quartet
 -- Shelley
But the Lord is Mindful of His own -- Mr. Kellog
 -- St. Paul
I'm a Pilgrim -- Quartet
 -- Pease

At the close of this "sacred concert" and of others which followed, all present were invited to contribute "a silver offering" for the church building fund. At a special meeting only a few weeks earlier, the congregation had voted to establish such a fund to move the church building to a new site and to enlarge and remodel it completely. Early in the next year a congregational committee began the search for a new site.

The annual report of the church treasurer in April, 1904, disclosed that the church alone had receipts of more than \$1300 during the year and was in good financial condition. Despite this good report and the apparent good relations between pastor and congregation, the Session on June 30, 1904 voted to invite a minister from some nearby town or city to come to Mt. Pleasant "to preside at a meeting of the congregation in regard to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship of Rev. M. Grigsby with [the First Presbyterian Church] and call a church meeting accordingly." Although Grigsby did not again occupy the Presbyterian pulpit, the congregation

failed to accept his resignation until the following September. Before the year ended, the late pastor had accepted a call to the Central Presbyterian Church of Roseland, Illinois. But in Mt. Pleasant, unfortunately, the Presbyterian pulpit remained vacant for many months.