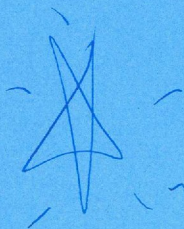
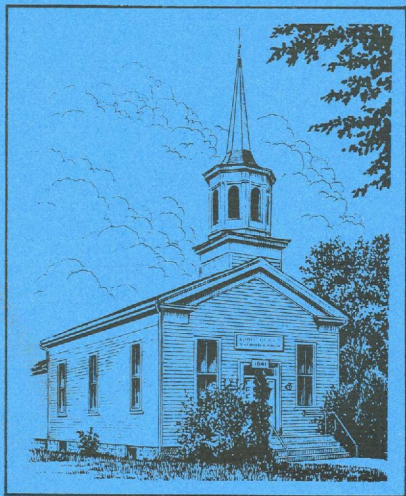
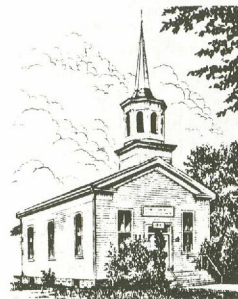


# COMMERCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**This book commemorates  
the dedication of the  
COMMERCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
as an official historic site  
of the State of Michigan,  
June 1, 1986**

## **COMMERCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**



### **INTRODUCTION**

During the early years of the nation--those last decades of the Eighteenth century and the early decades of the Nineteenth-- diversity of American religious life intensified. Worship in America was influenced by the freshness and excitement of political independence, immigration, the rise of the lower classes, and the special flavor of the frontier movement.

To examine early American Churches is to learn not only how Americans responded to the mysteries of the universe, but what they thought of human personality, of principles of government, and of such institutions as private property, marriage, and slavery.

The Methodist movement, soon to be separated from the parent Anglican Church, was the first to adopt the new democratic forms. In 1784, at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, the Methodist preachers formally elected Dr. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as their bishops of the newly organized Methodist Episcopal Church. A movement had begun.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who deserve thanks for their help in preparing this memorial book on the history of the Commerce United Methodist Church.

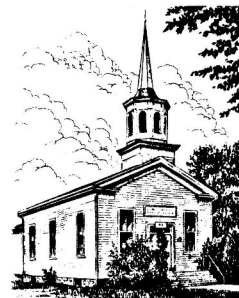
Getting the project started would have been impossible without the help of Church historians Beulah Thompson, Leitha Collins, and Lucie Skarritt. The lengthy research of Linda Kornatowski and Laura Contesti proved invaluable. Our gratitude also to the Missions Commission for providing photographs, to Micki Nelson for her photographic talents, and to Peggy Allen for providing a history of the Women's Society.

Pauline Skarritt's personal recollections and her personal photographic collection of early Commerce made a rich addition to our story. Our thanks, also, to the Western Conference of the United Methodist Churches for their research determining that the Commerce United Methodist Church is the second oldest Methodist Church building in Michigan.

A special thanks to Reverend John Park for his continual encouragement, his helpful guidance, and his many hours in giving proper direction to the project.

Finally, thanks to Glenn Ruggles, history teacher at Walled Lake Central High School, for organizing and composing this book.

1986



## A SECOND FAMILY

It took only a few seconds to respond. The question was asked, "Why is the Church important to you?" and the words came instantly:

"It's like a second family...I was baptized, confirmed, and married in it, and my children will be, I hope."

Linda Kornatowski thought for a moment, and continued:

"My grandfather Earl Skarritt was Superintendent of the Sunday School and my mother taught Sunday School for years and when I was old enough, instead of going to Sunday School, I helped her teach."

Beulah Thompson, a member of the Church since the 1940s, and historian for the Church, looked thoughtfully and commented:

"It's an important part of my life. I've always worked in the Church. My children were brought up in the Church and married there.....it's a family church."

"I think the people who work in the Church get the most out of it."

## THE CIRCUIT RIDERS

The history of Methodism and the history of the United States parallel each other. In fact, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the first to pledge its support to the new government under the constitution made in 1787.

As the young nation spread across the Appalachians and into the Northwest Territory, it was the Circuit Rider who preached the gospel and brought Christianity to the primitive communities along the shores of the Detroit, Rouge and Huron Rivers.

The pioneer Circuit Rider who left the new state of Ohio and headed north into the Michigan territory had to be the hardest of individuals. The Indians were still hostile, and there was no continuous settlement extending to the Michigan boundary. Between the last village in Ohio and Detroit lay a hundred-mile wide strip of land known as the Black Swamp. Four or five days of hard travel on horseback were needed to cross it. The water was not safe to drink and the swarms of flies and mosquitoes made travelling unbearable. In one stretch, no houses existed for forty miles.

Trade restrictions with Canada discouraged northward travel, and rumors that Michigan had such poor land that it wasn't worth farming made settlement even more difficult. The circuit-riding preacher often had a discouraging trip.

A Circuit of three or four weeks was common in the early 1800s. This meant continuous and incessant travel for the minister if he was to reach the twenty to twenty-eight previously announced preaching appointments. These were located in schoolhouses and private homes. Even as Michigan began to attract large numbers of settlers, it was rare that a Circuit possessed a separate Church building.

But aside from the primitive conditions that faced most pioneers, it was rugged individualism of the Circuit Rider who added an excitement to

those early days of Methodism.

Pioneer Methodist sermons were ardent, repetitious, and always extemporaneous. A fully written sermon or even the use of notes was considered a sign of weakness in a minister. He expected emotional interruptions that would be called hysterical responses today. Frequent shouts of "Amen," "Praise the Lord," "Hallelujah," or "The Lord Help" came from the congregation. The minister paid no attention to crying babies, crowing roosters, grunting pigs, or noisy and rowdy members.

The Reverend W.B. Williams described Methodist preaching in Charlotte, Michigan in the 1840s. What he said was just as true of earlier performances as later. He wrote in part:

"Whenever we could capture a minister of any denomination we gladly set him to preaching. Wesleyan sermons and prayers sounded strangely enough to those familiar only with the staid and proper worship of the Unitarian Churches of New England. Men would bawl at the top of their voices until they were hoarse, as if the Lord were deaf or they difficulty make Him hear. Preachers would speak until they frothed at the mouth and were almost exhausted."

Methodist preachers were widely known for their penetrating voices but the prize must go to the one who, on his way home from Detroit late at night, encountered a large bear right in the middle of the road. He leaned over his horse and "gave a scream such as only a full fledged Methodist preacher could furnish voice to give and the bear ambled away."

The camp meeting was a unique method of reaching people in a wilderness society. It grew out of the frontier in Kentucky and had been the combined effort of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists. But by 1822, most other denominations had dropped out and it became regarded as a peculiarly Methodist device.



The camp meeting was not an official institution of the Methodist Church, and it is not described in Church records as having any particular form. It was a custom that the Presiding Elders and Circuit Riders found helpful. There was no definite time, but the tendency for the camp meeting was late summer or early fall. It has been claimed that the circuit rider and the camp meeting together tamed the wild west.

Few details of early camp meetings have survived, but the account by Alexis de Tocqueville, in 1831, gives a vivid picture. When de Tocqueville asked a Michigan settler if religion had ever reached that "half-peopled country, the Michigan man replied:

"Almost every summer...some Methodist preachers come to make a tour of the new settlements. The noise of their arrival spreads with unbelievable rapidity from cabin to cabin it's the great news of the day. At the date set, the immigrant, his wife, and children set out by scarcely cleared forest trails toward the indicated meeting place. They come from fifty miles around. It's not in a church that the faithful gather but in the open air under the forest foliage. A pulpit of badly squared logs, great trees felled for seats, such are the ornaments of this rustic temple. The pioneers and their families camp in the surrounding woods.... During three days and three nights, the crowd gives itself over to almost uninterrupted religious exercises. You must see with what ardor these men surrender themselves to prayer, with what attention they listen to the solemn voice of the preacher. It's in the wilderness that people show themselves almost starved for religion."

Most of the Circuit riding ministers were eager to cover as much ground as possible. They often preached from twenty-five to twenty-eight times on a trip around a Circuit. But one sermon could be used over and over again until perfected. The only day most Circuit riders did not preach was Monday.

Large Circuits often had a senior and a junior preacher, who travelled in opposite directions in order to reach the standing appointments more often. Most Circuits had also local preachers and exhorters licensed annually by any Quarterly Conference. These men assisted at revivals and camp meetings or locally after the sermon. The term CIRCUIT RIDER was applied to all grades of ministers from the travelling Elder, Deacon, and young man just "admitted on trial" to the exhorter and local preacher.

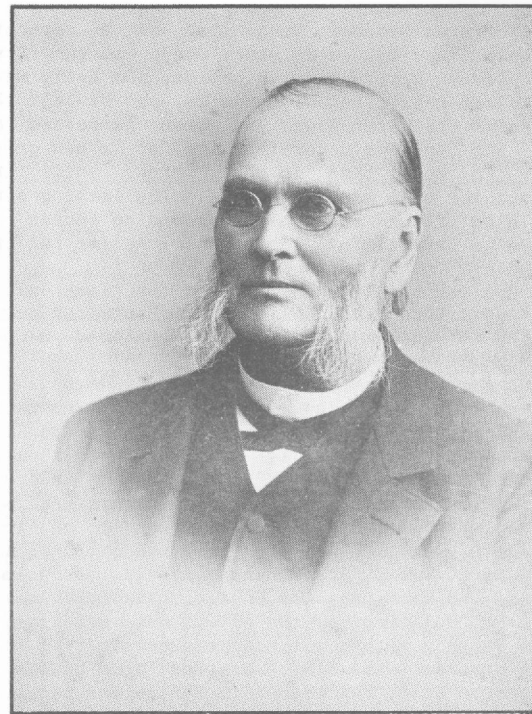


## COMMERCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 gave a great surge to the growth of Michigan. Running from the Hudson River at Albany, New York to Buffalo on Lake Erie, it provided a continuous and unbroken waterway from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes. No longer would the pioneer family have to trudge north from the Ohio River. The Canal provided an added "push" to the already existing "pull" of cheap land. That second chance, that new opportunity, became a reality. And with a heavy influx of new settlers, the Michigan Territory would be just a few short years away from statehood.

Abram Walrod came from Onondaga County, New York in the year the Erie Canal opened. It is not certain that he travelled on the canal, and it is less certain why he came. But he settled on Section 10, known as Commerce Village today, and was the lone settler for many years until Reuben Wright arrived in the fall of 1832. Development in Commerce was slow. Records indicate that approximately one family a year settled down in the area. John Cook came in 1834, Jonas Higby in 1835, and Seth Paddock in 1837. There was Reuben Quick, and Harley Rounds, who with his son, Asa, became the first wagon maker of the community. Bill Tills was the first "village smithy"; Sam Brown was its first cobbler and Henry Clark ran the general store.

In that year of 1837 when Michigan became a state, Jared Neusom, J.L. Humphrey, and Thomas Smith settled in Commerce. There was Payne, James Olmsted, George Malcolm, Amasa Andrews, Joe Farr, the Crawfords, Porters, Sleeths, Langbreys, Coulters, Magills, Knapps, Mascords, and Harpers.



*The Reverend D. C. Jacokes, first  
minister of Commerce Methodist  
Church, 1841*

The area had been organized as a separate township in 1834 and Henry Dodge was the first supervisor. Drs. Hunter, Richards, and Kelly were the first physicians of Commerce, and by 1838 the waters of the Huron River had been harnessed by Farr and Andrews' construction of a new grist mill. For more than seventy years, until the 1920s, the mill would run. Grinding local grain, providing flour for the surrounding homes it became a symbol of the economic life of the community.

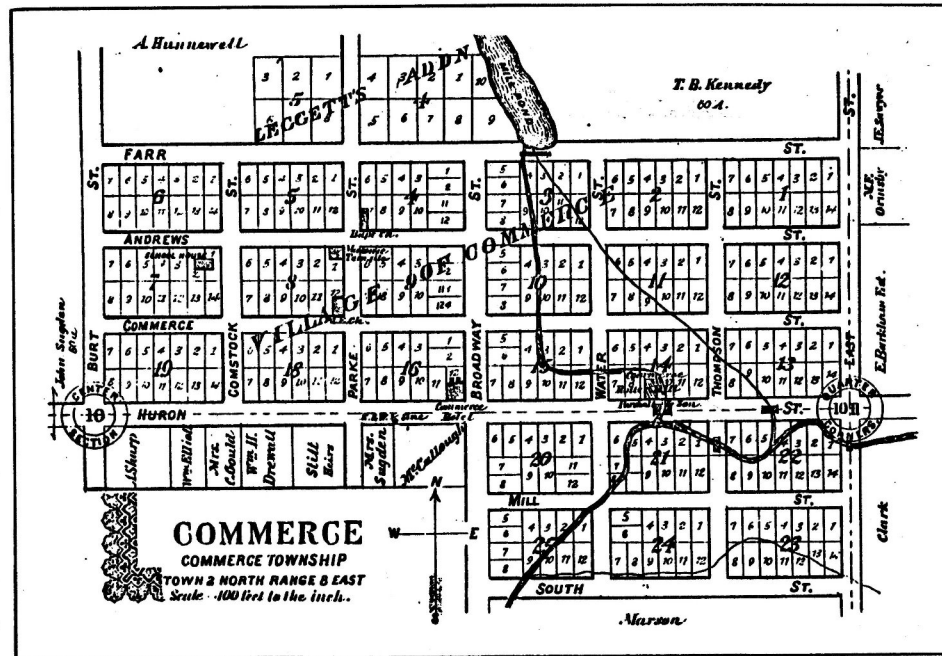
But for some reason, perhaps the lack of a railroad, the small village of Commerce never reached the economic levels its name had always promised.

A second grist mill was built by Henry and Jerome Paddock a few years later, but it never seemed reach a successful level. Burning to the ground, it was rebuilt, but the profits were limited. It was converted to a woolen factory, and run by three or four Methodist ministers, who were not as successful in operating it as they doubtless were, or might have been, in running what Mark Twain irreverently calls a "gospel mill." The machinery was subsequently removed and the building, by the 1870s, was used as a cider factory with questionable success.

Commerce was first platted and became a village in 1836, the year before Michigan became a state. In 1838 the first class of a Methodist Episcopal Church was organized and its meetings were originally held in an old school house. The church group was part of the Farmington circuit.

In 1841, land was purchased from Amasa and Mary Andrews for the purpose of constructing a church building. In a hand-written deed, it specified that the land, woods, and water rights were to be used for a place to erect a building where the word of God might be expounded. The purchase price was seventy-five dollars.

An 1896 Commerce Village plat map.





*The Commerce Roller Mill at the turn  
of the century*



The very able D.C. Jacones was the first pastor, and under his leadership the church was built in 1842 at a cost of twelve hundred dollars.

There were approximately eight or ten families in the first congregation. The minister received \$500 per year, and he and his family visited around and stayed for meals. Every ten days or so folks would just naturally expect the minister, and would wonder what had happened if the family did not appear. He would often receive gifts of eggs, butter, and other produce.

In 1854, Commerce reported 81 members, 12 probationers, two local preachers, one church valued at \$1,000, and one parsonage valued at \$250. The charge had four Sunday Schools with 145 scholars and 312 books in the Sunday School libraries. The Reverend J.H. Caster had received his salary in full of \$400.

For many years Commerce shared a circuit with Four Towns, Webster, and Porter Schools. The minister preached at Commerce in the morning, Four Towns in the afternoon, and Webster in the evening. one Sunday. Next it was Porter, Webster, and Commerce. All except Commerce were school houses. The minister resided in the Commerce parsonage. Those were horse and buggy days, and the circuit-riding pastor had a full day.

By 1865, Commerce reported 141 members and 13 probationers. The church was now valued at \$800, the parsonage at \$300. The Commerce Circuit now had 4 Sunday Schools, and 750 books in its libraries. The Reverend Thomas Stalker had received a salary of \$375 that year.

The Commerce church, like most others, suffered its ups and downs. In 1875, membership had dropped to 76, and the Circuit was down to 3 Sunday Schools. In 1885, the year the Ladies Aid Society was organized, membership was still lingering at a mere 79. The Reverend C.L. Church claimed a salary of \$525, but was only paid \$425. In spite of apparent bad times, the church continued to reach out and share with the rest of the world. Records reveal fundraising for the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, the Freedman's Aid Society, the Board of Church Extension, and the American Bible Society.

On October 21, 1885, a number of ladies of the Methodist Church met at the parsonage for the purpose of organizing a society whose purpose would be "...to institute methods and form plans for raising funds for the use of the Methodist Church of Commerce. Also to share in all good works for the promotion of Christianity in the village and vicinity."

The constitution of the Ladies Aid Society was written in 1885 and its first president was Mrs. Glendora Haines. Some of the by-laws were interesting and amusing. Each hostess was to serve the following: buscuit and butter, cookies, one kind of cake, one kind sauce, meat, and either pickles or cheese. For any extra dishes, the hostess shall pay a fine of \$1.00.

Another by-law stated that each member was to pay monthly dues of five cents which was shortly raised to ten cents. It was also voted to ask gentlemen to join. The big events of the Society were ice cream socials, maple sugar socials and oyster suppers were held whenever extra money was

needed. For the ice cream socials, all the supplies and materials were brought to the parsonage lawn, and everyone had a hand in freezing the ice-cream. "How they did work for their money."

The Ladies Aid Society is presently known as the United Methodist Women. By 1986, the group was part of a much larger organization within the Detroit Conference of Methodist Churches. The women are still organizing fund raisers such as bazaars, rummage and bake sales, and have become widely known for their smorgasboards.

At a meeting on July 27, 1887 after tea, the ladies adjourned to the Church and proceeded to work, making and putting down carpet, washing windows, and cleaning lamps. The carpet cost seventy cents per yard, and a motion was made that each member should pay one dollar toward its cost.

While there were a few "backsliders" in the congregation, most were faithful to their obligations. Mrs. Dickie, a member for seventy years, lived four miles northwest of the Church. It was an hour ride by horse and buggy. Horses were put in sheds back of the Church where each family owned a stall for their horse.



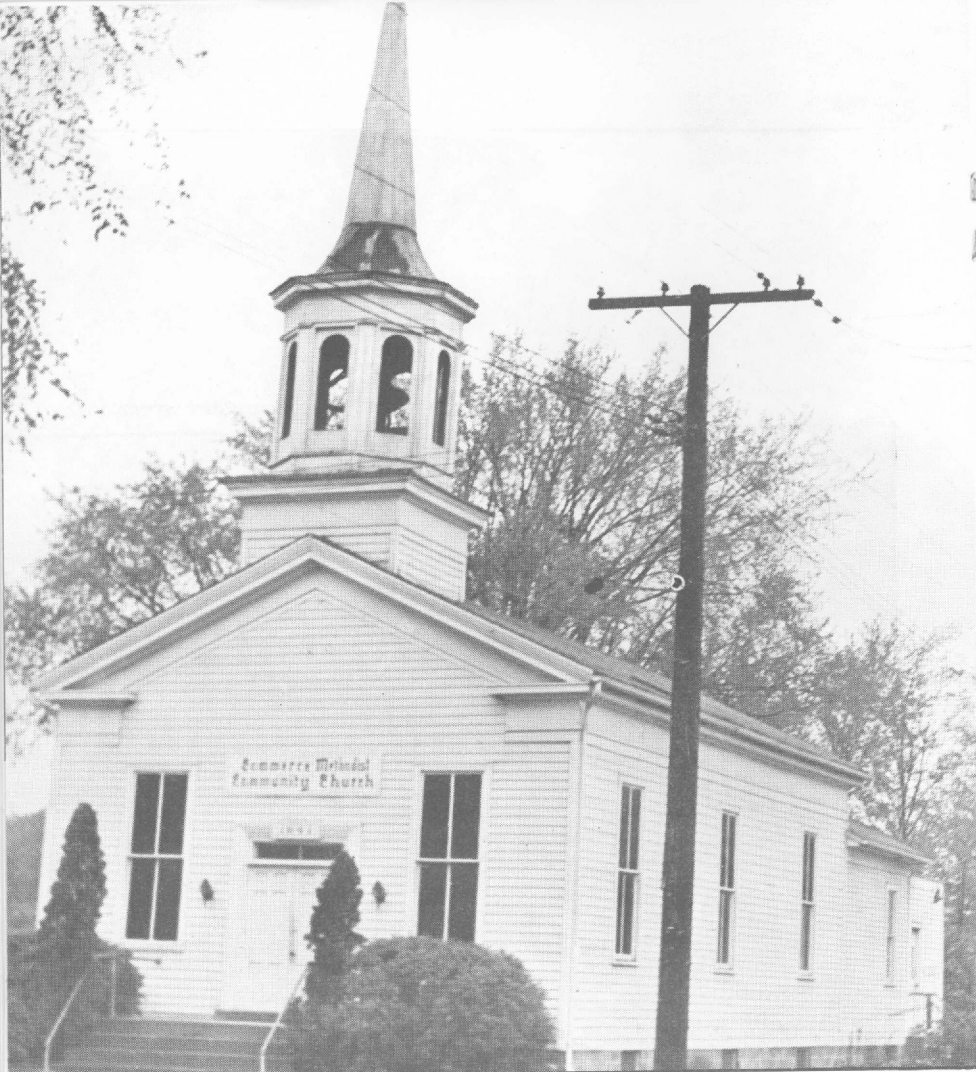


*The pastoral setting belied  
the hardships of pioneer life.*

*Looking West on Commerce Road in the Village.*







*Methodist Church as it stood on the Northwest corner of Commercial and Ponderosa in Commerce Village.*

## MY CHURCH

There's no tower, hundreds of feet tall  
No stained glass windows, with carvings to enthrall  
No pillar inside to hold up the stone roof  
Just an old fashioned church, seeking only the truth.

Just an old fashioned church in a quaint little Town  
A town that time forgot, but one that God found.  
An old copper spire with a cross on the top  
That bids you welcome as you draw near and stop.

There's an altar up front, an invitation for all  
To seek his forgiveness, even though we may fall  
Instead of pillars there's arches like arms circling round  
And there in the quietness God can be found.

We built a new part - blending old with the new  
For we've many children and much teaching to do.  
I hope some day that the new part may be  
As precious to them as the old is to me.

For it isn't the grandeur but the fellowship that's there  
and God's love in your eyes and the smile that you wear  
It's the friend beside you as you bow together to pray  
And ask for his guidance, that his will be done each day.

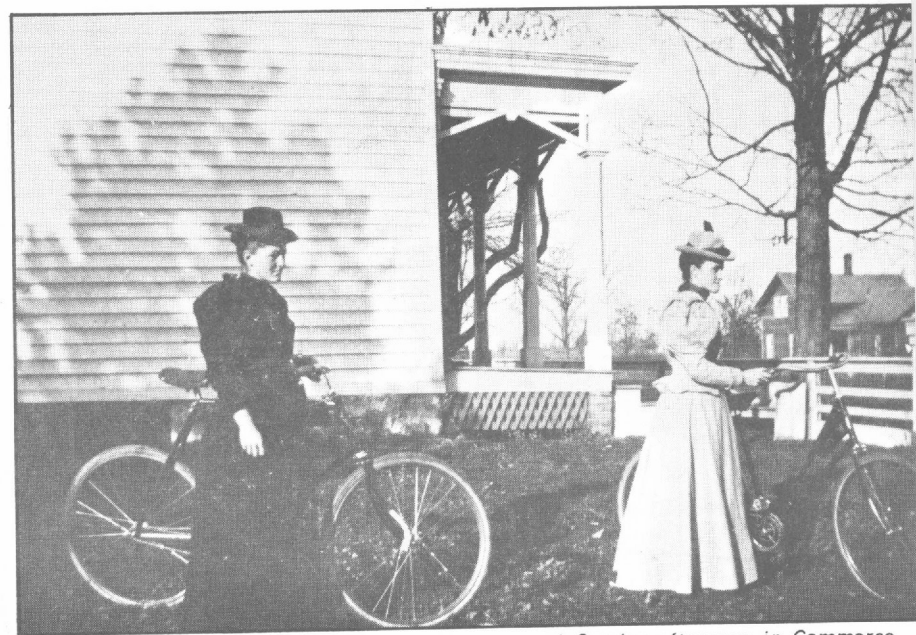
It's the clasp of a hand and the burdens we share  
As we seek to find Jesus and give ourselves to his care  
No Pillars, No Towers, but with windows bright  
A beacon of God's love from my church, shining into the night.

Helen L. Horton  
c. June, 1957

As the Twentieth century arrived, the Church grew in modest ways. In 1914, the Sunday School at Commerce Methodist had an attendance of 34, with a collection of sixty-four cents. The Ladies Aid, and Epworth League were active. More land was purchased next to the church, and the parsonage was remodeled. There were gradual, but ordinary changes that took place in the life of the church.

The Church building was modified from time to time. Painting, replastering, a new floor--these are items in the life of any building. There were those personal touches that mean so much to the vitality of a congregation: the American flag donated by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Armstrong, the shrubs planted in 1938 in memory of Miss Lillian Briggs. There was the farm willed to the church by David Patterson. The sale of this farm led to the establishment of a trust fund that enabled the congregation to undertake repairs to the church that would have been impossible otherwise.

The church had celebrated its centennial in 1941 with the Reverend A.F. Niemann as Pastor. The Trustees had grown from that small group of Hodge, Befisey, Cook, and Spratt in 1841, to Joseph Long, Charles Frusher, Will King, Lydia Long, Leslie Thomas, Mrs. Fred Armstrong, Calvin Ellenwood, Mark Ellenwood, and Marvin Fletemier in that year that the United States entered World War II.



*A Sunday afternoon in Commerce Village (circa 1900)*

THE  
HISTORY of the CHURCHES  
of COMMERCE

as compiled by the  
Historical Committee

for  
THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

of  
The Methodist Church

at  
COMMERCE, MICHIGAN

June 7, 8, 1941

Trustees of the Commerce Church

First Trustees of the  
Commerce M. E. Church:

1841

Billings Hodge  
Samuel Belfrey  
Andrew Cook  
John Spratt

Present Trustees of the  
Commerce Methodist Church:

1941

Joseph Long  
Chas. Frusher  
Will King  
Lydia Long  
Leslie Thomas  
Mrs. Fred Armstrong  
Calvin Ellenwood  
Mark Ellenwood  
Marvin Fletemier

PRESENT OFFICIARY OF THE COMMERCE  
METHODIST CHURCH

Raymond J. Wade, D.D., L.L.D., Resident Bishop.  
Rev. R. M. Atkins, District Superintendent.  
A. F. Niemann, Pastor.  
Marvin Fletemier, Church School Superintendent.  
Mrs. Alma Roselle, President W.S.C.S.  
Marion Thomas, President of Epworth League.  
Mrs. L. P. Hicks, Choir Director.  
Mrs. Lydia Long, Recording Steward.  
Mrs. Eva Roselle, Treasurer.

CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

General, Pastor  
History, Mrs. Rena Law  
Invitation and Guests, Wm. King  
Decoration, Chas. Frusher  
Program, Mrs. Leslie Thomas  
Printline and Publicity, Mrs. Jas. Gardner  
Finance, Lydia Long  
Banquet, Mrs. Chas. Graves  
Reception, Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Niemann, and Official Board  
Vesper Service, The Epworth League

1841 - 1941

CENTENNIAL  
YEAR

Commerce Methodist  
Church

Commerce, Michigan



REV. A. F. NIEMANN

Pastor, 1941



The Commerce Methodist Church



## The Village Church at Commerce

The hist'ry of your little church  
I know not well,  
Nor would I through its records search,  
Events to tell.

Enough it is for me to sing  
Of what I find  
Within your midst that's hovering—  
A love most kind.

I feel it in the way you greet  
A stranger when  
With smile sincere, these words repeat:  
"Please come again."

I feel it often as I hear  
God's truth outpour.  
And that the Pentecost is near  
I think the more.

The truly humble and the meek  
Come here to pray.  
Sheepfold and shepherd, I would seek  
This home alway.

I'm glad the gentle wind of spring  
O'er field and dell  
Brought to my ear the joyous ring  
Of your church bell.

Forever in my heart its high  
Clear tones will toll  
An answer to a far off cry  
Of yearning soul.

The founders of this work so brave  
I know not of.  
I only know 'twas God who gave,  
For here is Love.

Sept. 29, 1936.

—LUDORA BEVIER.

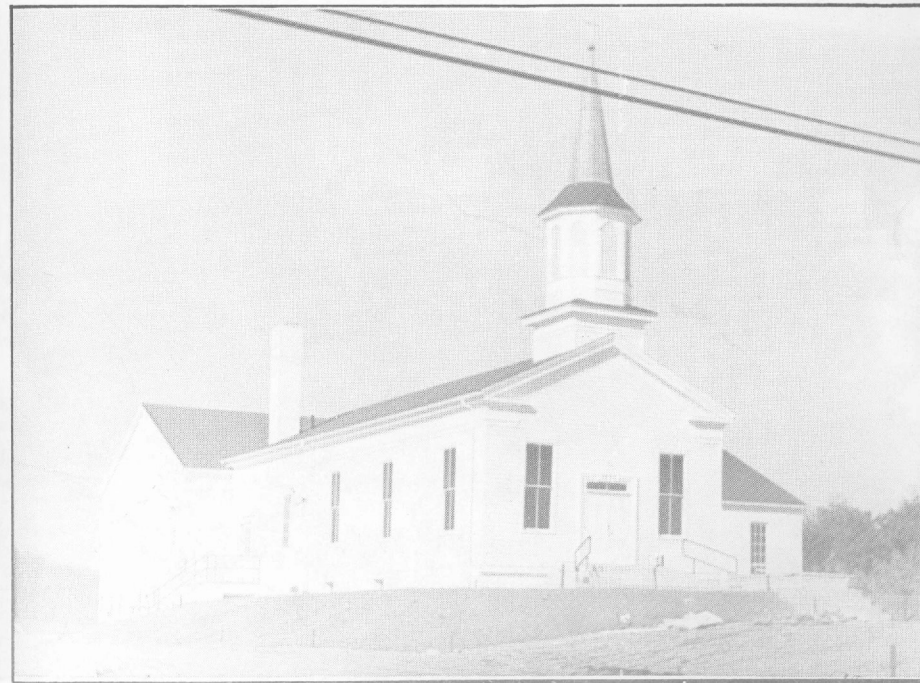
*Financial meeting prior to moving  
the Church, mid-1950s*



As the war drew to a close in 1945, the  
Commerce Methodist Church was growing rapidly, and  
the need was felt for a new home. There was a



*DEDICATION DAY: Congregation marches  
from old Church to the new foundation  
June 2, 1957*



*The Methodist Church, shortly after  
its relocation on Commerce Road, 1957*



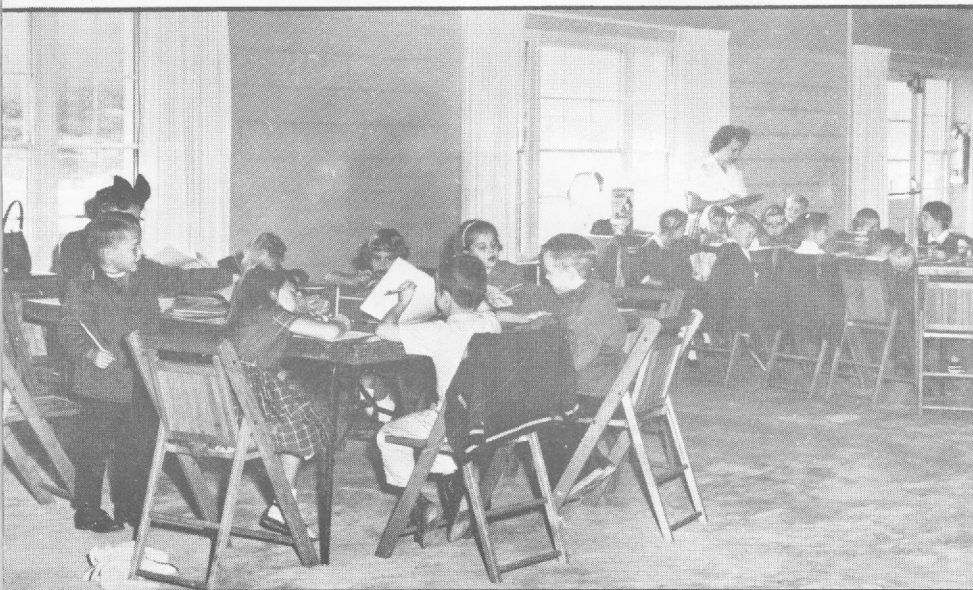
*Congregation in its new church, 1957.  
Reverend Perry Thomas in the pulpit.*



*Sunday School class meeting  
in the attic, 1961*



*Sunday School classes in the unfinished dining room, 1961*



In 1961, the Commerce—Methodist Church reported a membership of 450, and an enrollment in the Church School of 300. In 1962, plans for a new parsonage were made. Today it stands on the lot adjacent to the church.

In 1982, there was a special celebration commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the church at the new site.



*Weekly sermon on the steps with Reverend John Park, 1986*

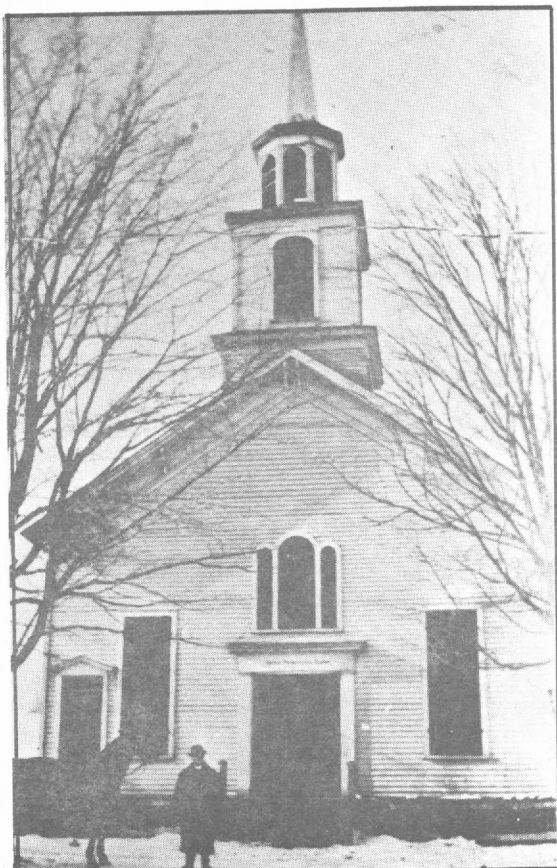


*Sunday School class ringing  
the bell, 1986*



*Cass Community Methodist Church  
in the "Cass Corridor", 1986  
The Commerce Missions Committee  
visits six times yearly, feeding  
more than 200 each trip.*



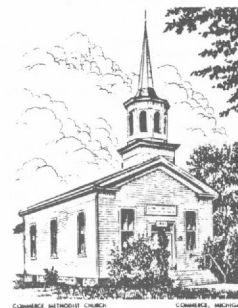


*Presbyterian Church in Commerce Village.*

From 1867, the records are more complete. Beginning with D.C. Jacokes, some of the other early pastors were:

J. Waklin  
Rev. Yeoman  
Rev. Crane  
Brothers: Bird  
Kilpatrick  
Barry  
Crippen  
A.S. Fair  
J.G. Sparling  
L. Batherick  
J.D. Rowe  
C. Anderson  
C.S. Church  
J. Wright  
L. Frost  
P.B. Hoyt  
A. Crane  
J.D. Hubbell  
H.B. Wallace  
F.B. McGee  
L.B. DePius  
H. Schofield

A. Poulter  
R.E. Winn  
C. Woodmansee  
H.A. Cole  
Levi Bird  
C.W. Stevens  
J. Chapman  
Rev. Harris  
Bert Ede  
E.L. Carless  
D.E. Evans  
Frank Miner  
A.F. Niemann  
Rev. Wright  
Rev. Perry Thomas  
Rev. Floyd Porter  
Rev. G. MacDonald Jones  
Rev. John Smith  
Rev. James Smith  
Rev. Gary Imms  
Rev. John Park





There were many people who had a hand in sustaining a church and its congregation for almost 150 years. With circuit-riding ministers, it was obvious that laymen were essential to the daily life of the congregation. The records are skimpy. Sometimes they are inaccurate or misleading, but certain truths emerge regardless. It takes a great deal of devotion and volunteerism to maintain any community. A list of the ministers that served Commerce, though incomplete, might satisfy some. But that would provide a misleading cast. Today, the group that has worked so hard to dedicate the Commerce United Methodist Church as a historic site parallel all those other groups in the life of the church: the Ladies' Aid, the Epworth League, the Choir, the early pioneers who simply "pitched in".

In reflecting on the Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist churches that stood in Commerce for years, an early settler mused:

"The Church was the center of the community and the social as well as the spiritual life was built around our three churches. ... The fellowship was always close between them and later they were drawn closer together in on the congregation."

For 148 years, the Methodist community has been the center of activity in Commerce. Its present vitality indicates that it will be here for its bi-centennial.

