

A Brief History of Mancelona United Methodist Church

Among churches with an interesting history in the Grand Traverse District is the one located at Mancelona in the northern part of Michigan. It is near what used to be the Industrial Center of the Antrim Iron Works (*no longer in existence*).



The first religious services in Mancelona were held on the old Elliott farm, one-half mile west of the town in what is now part of a cemetery.

During the conference year of 1873-1874, the first Methodist preacher visited Mancelona. He was the Reverend M. Browning of Alden, then called Spencer Creek, the head of the Torch Lake circuit. He preached in the log hotel owned by Perry Andrus. During this conference year, he continued to preach occasionally, as did his successor, the Reverend N. E. Preston in the year 1874-1875, when the name of the circuit was changed from Torch Lake to Spencer Creek and Mancelona. This arrangement continued until 1877.

In the autumn of 1877, a new circuit was formed, known as the Mancelona and Kalkaska charge. The Reverend Joseph Greenstead was the pastor, but he did not begin work until the spring of 1878. The services were held in the depot.

During the years 1878-1880, the Reverend O. J. Golden supplied the charge, and the first class was organized, consisting of the following persons: S. M. Bean, Bertha Bean, Keron Bean, Sheridan F. Hill, Hattie Hill, Josiah Potter,

Lucia Potter and Francis Monroe. The records show that during that same year the following members were added: Frank and Amelia Besaw, Tobias and Catherine Bechstein, Mariah Kellogg and Lucy Marsh.

In 1880, Mancelona was separated from Kalkaska and made the head of a new circuit. While Mancelona was the head, the body and tail consisted of Pleasant Grove, Bellaire, Central Lake, and the York and Taylor schoolhouses somewhere in the region beyond. It was evidently a two-weeks circuit, with six preaching places. The Reverend James McKinley, a cousin of the martyred president, was the pastor in charge. It was at this time that the Reverend F. J. Freeman of the Michigan conference, then superannuated on account of impaired health, came to Mancelona and established himself in business. Brother Freeman was a very efficient helper in the work of the church. He left a very interesting account of the building of the church.

Brother Freeman said that when he came to Mancelona in the fall of 1880, there were but thirteen buildings in the town. There was no church edifice and the Methodists were worshipping in the school house. He began to agitate the building of a church. But it looked like an impossibility to most of the members, as there were but sixteen in all. The board of trustees consisted of Josiah Potter, S. M. Bean, Sheridan E. Hill, E. Elkins, A. G. Jackson, Perry Andrus and J. E. Clines. The building committee consisted of S. F. Hill, J. L. Farnham and the pastor, the Reverend Mr. McKinley.

They commenced to build under great discouragement. Bids were solicited, but no one responded. No one had any confidence in the enterprise. Brothers McKinley and Hill felt the Lord's call was to "rise and build," so they got some rough material together and set men to work; but they could not get enough lumber to keep them busy.

In the spring or early summer of 1881, Chaplain McCabe came to help the project forward. The meeting was to have been held in the grove, but upon the invitation of the Congregational pastor, they went into that unfinished church. There was no floor in it, so they carried lumber from Mr. Bean's sawmill and put in floor and seats. During the service, a very severe thunderstorm raged; whether that had anything to do with the financial results is unknown, but the money raising, from which so much was hoped, was not a desired success. The chaplain lectured on "The Bright Side of Life in Libby Prison." Chaplain McCabe promised some help from the Church Extension society, and a donation from that society of \$250 and a loan of the same amount gave some encouragement to the enterprise and the work went forward. The summer passed and nothing was heard from the Extension society. The note at the bank was almost due and no money to meet it. The chaplain was to lecture at Ovid and the trustees decided that Brother Freeman should go down there. He tells what happened in his own words:

"When the chaplain saw me after the lecture, he said, "What are you here for?" I said, "Chaplain, our note is about to go to protest, and we have nothing to meet it." He said, "Didn't I tell you that you should have the money?" "Yes," I replied. "Did you ever know the chaplain to lie?" "No," I answered. "Well," he said, "you go back home and have your trustees make out a note for \$500 to me and I will send them the money. No, I will give it to you now. I had just as soon have your note as theirs." So, I gave him my note for \$500 and he gave me a check for the money. I came back and on the way deposited the check in the Fourth National Bank of Grand Rapids. From that time, the building went forward steadily. The workmen came to me and I paid them what was due them, and also paid the other bills as they came due."

The trustees insisted on adding Brother Freeman to the building committee because of the services he had rendered.

The church building was commenced under the ministry of the Reverend McKinley, but the larger part of the work was done during the pastorates of the Reverend J. R. Savage and the Reverend F. J. Freeman. Brother Savage only stayed nine months and the year's work was completed by Brother Freeman. The Reverend C. W. Jones was pastor the next year, 1882, when the church was finally completed and dedicated.

On October 22, 1882, the dedication sermon was preached by Dr. Moses Hill, a superannuate of the Genesee conference who was living at Kalamazoo. The cost of the building was \$2,300; \$700 was raised at the time of dedication. It was free from all debt, except the \$250 borrowed from the Church Extension society.

The conference minutes show that at the organization of the Mancelona-Kalkaska circuit in 1877 there were 24 members and 17 probationers.

At the Annual Conference in 1882 (just a month or two before the dedication of the church) there was reported 37 members. The Reverend C. W. Jones reported in 1883 a membership of 68. This was increased the next year to 108.

The following is the list of pastors who have served this church:

- M. Browning (Supply) 1873
- N. E. Preston 1874
- O. J. Golden 1875
- James Greenstead 1877
- O. J. Golden (Supply) 1878
- James McKinley 1880
- J. R. Savage & F. J. Freeman 1881
- C. W. Jones 1882
- J. C. Ambrose 1884
- J. Gulick 1887
- G. S. Robinson 1889

- J. C. Beach 1894
- J. W. Hart 1896
- R. N. Middleton 1899
- A. H. McComb 1900
- D. E. Reed 1903
- J. C. Newcomer 1904
- J. E. Foote 1906
- W. W. Lamport 1910
- W. F. Moeher 1917
- R. C. Parshall 1919
- A. A. Stevens 1920
- J. B. Seymour 1923
- J. W. Rochelle 1924
- F. J. Mills (Supply) 1925
- M. A. Oldt 1928
- C. E. Thies 1930
- D. L. Reedy 1933
- H. G. Osanne 1934
- G. G. Whipple 1936
- J. M. DeVinney 1937
- Luther Brokaw 1941
- E. T. Smith 1943
- L. J. Hoover 1949
- K. L. Snow 1955
- Birt Beers 1956
- Howard G. Moore 1957
- L. Winegarden 1960
- G. L. Terpening 1965
- Helen Jackson 1968
- G. Gierman 1972
- Curtis Jensen 1976
- Tim Graham 1983
- J. W. Boley 1992
- Carol Floyd 1997
- Kathy Steen 2000
- Steve Weinberger 2007
- Todd Shafer 2010

This material was compiled by R. E. Meader, Y.M.C.A., Kalamazoo, Michigan, for the historical directory of the Michigan Annual Conference of the Methodist Church to be placed in the Stockwell Memorial Library at Albion College, Albion, Michigan.