The Bethel Church of Daviess County

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The name *Bethel* has been applied to three different church buildings in the locality of the present structure. The first was the earliest Methodist church in Daviess County and it was built of logs. It was located west of the present state highway No. 57, south of the Miller farm and west of Mr. Osha's place.1 A cemetery was started near the old church and a few graves are still marked. Mrs. Julia Peek remembers seeing the ruins of the old building long after it had been abandoned. This church was probably erected between 1814, when the Rev. John Shrader of Vincennes conducted services in the settlement,2 and 1817, when the Missouri Conference was held in the old log church.3 Meetings were probably held in the homes of members of the congregation prior to the erection of this first church. During the period of the log church, circuit riders and local preachers frequently held Methodist services in the Horrall school-house which stood near where Ralph Stafford now lives. These services were especially popular because the church was relatively far from the homes of many of the members and at times hard to reach on account of the condition of the roads.

In 1839, the construction of the second church was begun. The site of the old log church was abandoned because churches had been built at Maysville and in Washington and a more central location for the congregation was sought farther south in Section 15, Tp. 2 N., R.7 W.6 This building was completed in 1840. It is said that Anson Johnson made and shaved all of the shingles for this church by hand, riving them with a frow and shaving them with a drawing knife. The leaders in the movement for the erection of this building were members of the Horrall, Johnson, Wallace, Thomas, Peek and Chapman families. In addition, Wm. Ellis, Permenas Palmer, John Batchelor, George Houts, Hezekiah

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1 A. E. Johnson, "Methodism" (unpublished). Mr. Johnson, an old citizen at the time, read this paper before the 1909 session of the Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church at Washington, Indiana.
3 Statement of J. E. Peek to the writer. Mr. Peek is one of the older members of the congregation. The Peek family came to Daviess County very early in the period of settlement.
4 Statement of Mrs. Julia Peek, the oldest living member of the Bethel congregation, who is now in her ninety-first year.
6 Record G., page 21, Daviess County Recorder's Office.
Wood, David Coleman, Elijah Banks and Larkin Ragsdale, the latter a local preacher, aided in the undertaking. The deed to the tract of land upon which the church stood was not secured until 1842, when, at the October term of the circuit court, Samuel Howe Smydith was appointed a commissioner to convey land belonging to Mary Ann Scudder and Margaret Ellen Scudder to John Peek, Wm. G. Horrall, Elijah Chapman, Thomas Horrall and Levi Peek, trustees of the Centenary Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church. This deed was not recorded until January 16, 1847. From these facts, it will be observed that the "old church," as we now know it, was constructed before the deed to the land upon which it stood was secured and that the original name was Centenary Bethel.

This was the largest country church in Davies County and carried with it some of the customs of Methodism; e.g., class meetings were held with closed doors and a doorkeeper in charge. In those days, men always sat on one side of the house and women on the other during services. The first Sunday School was organized in April, 1847, but winter sessions were not held for about forty years.

Camp meetings were held at Bethel in 1849, 1850, 1851, 1868 and 1869. "The Presiding Elder of the Vincennes district frequently assisted in these meetings, and, in 1849, Dr. W. M. Daily, later President of Indiana University took part. Rev. W. W. Pruett conducted the last camp meeting in 1869."

This second Bethel Church (the first on the present location) was used seventy years. In 1910, it was dismantled and the present structure built at a cost of $3,800; Rev. L. B. Johnson was the pastor in charge at the time. The third, and present, Bethel Church was dedicated on May 14, 1911, by the Rev. W. R. Halstead of Terre Haute. Two unusual things marked this dedication: first, the building was paid for and $126 was left in the treasury; second, Anson B. Johnson, who helped build the church in 1839, and who was present at its dedication seventy-one years before, took part in the dedication exercises of 1911. Since

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2 Davies County Recorder's Office, Record G., 21.
4 Recollections of the late A. P. Hawkins, one of the oldest members of the church, at the time of his death, in 1936.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
the third church was erected, a full basement has been added, and only last year (1938), a cistern was constructed to provide a water supply.

Prior to 1860, Bethel was a local preaching point for various circuit riding pastors, among whom were: Thomas Ray, John W. Julian and Daniel Cloud. In 1860, the Washington Circuit was organized, consisting of Maysville, Bethel, Pleasant Hill, Mt. Gilead, Ebenzer, Hudsonville, Pleasant Ridge and Mt. Zion. At one time Glendale was also on this circuit, but the circuit was too large and, when the Alfordsville and Glendale circuits were organized, rearrangements were made until the present grouping was arrived at—namely, Wesley Memorial, Bethel, Maysville and Sugarland. Mrs. Julia Peek says that the house in which Andrew Gress now lives was the parsonage during much of the period when the eight points mentioned above constituted the circuit. She also says that church services were held at Bethel every third Sunday at that time.

The Pastoral record at Bethel since 1860 follows: 1860, S. W. McNaughton; 1862, N. J. Bell; 1864, Levi Johnson; 1866, Elias Gaskins; 1868, W. W. Pruett; 1870, R. B. Martin; 1871, John H. Lester; 1872, Geo. W. Walker; 1873, John W. Kincaid; 1879, R. W. Kemp; 1882, S. W. McNaughton (same as for 1860); 1883, Elias Gaskins (same as for 1866); 1886, R. R. Baldwin; 1888, John Bruner; 1889, C. W. Woods; 1891, J. B. Smith; 1896, W. D. Woods; 1898, L. B. Johnson; 1901, T. A. Ragsdale; 1904, C. A. Ward; 1907, F. T. Hooh; 1908, F. S. Burns; 1909, Wm. E. Hogan; 1910, L. B. Johnson (same as for 1898); 1911, J. B. Robinette; 1913, P. S. May; 1918, E. E. Jones; 1921, E. Barrett; 1923, C. P. Hert; 1926, G. G. Peel; 1933, O. M. Deal; 1936, U. V. Faris.

The parsonage at Maysville was constructed during the pastorate of the Rev. T. H. Willis. The one in Washington was purchased during the pastorate of the Rev. P. S. May. The church membership of Bethel was two hundred forty-eight at the time of the 1937 conference. The Sunday School attendance has averaged more than one hundred for several years, which is rather unusual for a rural church.

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14 Records of Bethel Church.
15 Records of Bethel Church, and Minutes of the Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church.
16 Records of Bethel Church.
17 Records of the Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church.