

WALDRON UNITED METHODIST

An example of the strenuous life of the early Methodist circuit riders in this area is indicated by the following: John Strange, a presiding elder (district superintendent) in 1815, had as his circuit Charlestown near the Ohio River to Crawfordsville, Indiana, four times a year on horseback which is about 1200 miles today via good roads.

Prior to 1832, the present United Methodist Indiana Conference was a part of the Illinois Conference; but during that year the first session of the Indiana Conference was held in New Albany on October 17. We have no official records to show which circuit rider was visiting this section at that time.

We do know, however, that Rev. Lewis Barlow was born March 18, 1807, and began holding Methodist meetings in a territory centering around St. Omer, Indiana, about 1832. This territory later became the St. Omer Methodist Episcopal Circuit. Besides preaching at the church in St. Omer, which at that time was the largest church on the circuit, Rev. Lewis Barlow traveled on horseback throughout the area preaching and helping to organize new churches. Rev. Barlow died near St. Omer February 23, 1887, and was buried in the Star Church cemetery. His granddaughter, Mrs. Eva M. Johnson, was a member of the Waldron church for many years.

Waldron and Middletown were early assigned to the St. Omer Circuit. Official Annual Conference records show that R. P. Sheldon was assigned to that post October, 1849, and the following year Rev. J.W.T. McMullen came to the pastorate which consisted of six churches and paid the huge salary of \$216 per year. James Havens was the presiding elder.

According to tradition, before 1850 a Methodist preacher named Henry Fisher came to Waldron to hold meetings in a typical pioneer log cabin, 22 feet long, made of unhewn logs, puncheon floor and benches with clapboard roof and a chimney of rived sticks and mortar. With the assistance of John Cartwell and others, a Methodist society was organized for the many Methodist families already settled here. This building stood on the southwest corner of Washington and Main Streets in Waldron.

According to several old histories of Shelby County (1832 to 1887) Waldron was early known as the consolidation of the old appointments — Middletown and Conn's Creek. Middletown was established in 1836 with Frank Toler as Class leader, and Whitten and Birt as preachers. Conn's Creek organized as an appointment in 1840. Some of the original members of Conn's Creek were William Knight, Elizabeth Knight, Levi Knight, Reitter Chaplett, Washington Bless, and Mary Bless. Afterwards, Margaret VanPelt united with. They worshiped in a schoolhouse until about 1857 when a brick church was erected. The class leader in 1845 was George W. Bless. It was not long after Waldron became fully established that the Middletown society was mostly absorbed.

William Long was assigned pastor in 1851. At that time there were 405 members and 87 probationers on the roll. The churches were valued at \$1,200.00. There

were six Sunday Schools, 68 officers and teachers, 280 scholars and 570 volumes in the library. Joseph Tarkington was the presiding elder.

When John Welch became pastor in 1852, his salary was \$180, and the next year his congregations on the same circuit paid him \$316. Listed in the official Southeast Indiana Conference Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church for 1853 are the following persons from Waldron who became members of the conference missionary society: James Knight, Hannah Knight, Mrs. VanPelt, Squire VanPelt, and Levi Knight.

Henry M. Boyer was appointed pastor in 1854 on the salary of \$100, and the next year his successor, R.N. Beswick received \$132. At that time there were 120 scholars reported in the Sunday Schools.

John Mann became the superintendent in 1857, when Mr. William Henry Harrison — a Conn's Creek school teacher — was appointed a preacher by the Methodist Conference. He was given charge of the St. Omer Circuit, preaching on various occasions in the Stroupville School and reorganizing the local Methodist Society. During this time a building committee to erect a new church was appointed. On this committee were Levi Knight, Aaron VanPelt, Enoch Tindall, John Moore and John Monroe. Money was raised by subscription and the lot was donated by the Haymond heirs.

Clay used in making bricks was obtained, and was burned on the lot back of the church by David Fassett. This church, which stood in the then extreme southwest corner of the old town, was built in 1858. George W. Carlisle, Jacob Garrison, and David Hartzell were the brick masons. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Joseph Cotton, standing in a window of the church. Women congregated in the building while the men stood under beech trees outside.

This building was about sixty feet long and forty-five feet wide. There was a double door in front, a single door in the rear, and three windows on each side. The benches were made of yellow poplar. There were two center aisles and each contained two lamp posts surmounted by a kerosene lamp. On each side of the organ which stood in the southeast corner of the building near the choir was a lamp. At one time there was also a lamp on the Bible desk. Afterward there was a large hanging lamp over and in front of the pulpit.

A large box stove which burned three-foot lengths of wood stood on either side of the church about midway between the pews. After burning wood for years coal was tried and then coke which was kept in the shed attached to the rear of the church. The large bell in the belfry had a tolling attachment and when anyone died in the Conn's Creek community, it tolled his or her age. In front of the church was placed a gas street lamp to light the way for evening meetings. Prayer meeting was usually held on Wednesday night. Most of the activities of the community were held in the church: socials, festivals, temperance rallies, Sunday School plays, Christmas trees, school commencements, magic lantern and stereoptican lectures. Small benches were kept under the large ones and were called "Mourner Benches" and were used during revivals in front of the

pulpit.

At that time the circuit was paying a salary of \$149.00, and there were 195 enrolled in the Sunday Schools. S. B. Falkenburg was assigned the new minister in 1860. In 1861 Asbury Wilkinson was the supply pastor appointed by Bishop Morris when the conference met in Jeffersonville. In 1863 a very famous circuit rider, Joseph Tarkington, was given the pastorate. In 1865 Waldron Circuit included Pleasant Hill, Ripple, Winchester and Marion. The name of Ripple was changed to Union Chapel during the year. In 1866 J. B. Lathrop was then the presiding elder and F.S. Woodcock was pastor. On December 12, 1968, the Waldron circuit was changed to the Lawrenceburg District. Jessie Miller was the new pastor and continued as the shepherd of the flock until September 11, 1871.

We have the words of the new pastor as assigned that year and as he recorded them in the official record of the Waldron charge: "In Sept. 1871 D. A. Robertson was appointed to Waldron Circuit, the successor of Rev. Jessie Miller who had been upon the circuit for three years. The circuit was visited with great revivals during the last year of Bro. Miller's reign. At the close of the year Pleasant Hill was dropped from the circuit when the circuit consisted of Waldron, Winchester and Union. Geneva was attached to the circuit in September of 1872." The first organ was purchased during this year.

The next entry in the old record books was written by J.W. Dashiell as follows: "In September 1873, I was appointed to this circuit which then embraced four appointments, viz. Waldron, Winchester, Geneva, and Union. The plan suggested that I should preach at the first three points one Sabbath and the first and last, the next, thus giving Waldron preaching every Sabbath, alternately morning and evening. We are blessed with refreshings from the presence of the Lord, especially at Union and Geneva. Seventy-four were received on probation at those two points and 16 at the other points. Seventeen have joined by letter and 10 have taken out letters. I HAVE EXPELLED ONE BROTHER FOR SELLING LIQUOR AND ANOTHER FOR DRINKING. The society has not prospered well at Waldron; she has only held her own without any advancement this year. The year has been to me for the most part a very pleasant one. May God add his blessings." That year the church paid \$750.00 in salary.

In 1877 George W. Winchester was assigned to the circuit as pastor, and in 1878 J. C. Gullet became pastor. He examined and passed Nathan Riggs as local preacher and Amos Sparks as exhorter.

In the second volume of the historical records of the Waldron Methodist Episcopal Charge, we have the following long and dramatic entry made by J.C. Scull (father of Mrs. Chester Meal and grandfather of Mrs. Dean Gahimer and Mrs. William Laird, who with their families are active in the Waldron church today): "Rev. Alex. Jamison was appointed to the circuit September 13, 1881 and served two years. Removed Oct. 1, 1883. The record shows that during Bro. Jamison's administration he received 22 persons on probation and into full connection 15. Rev. Grubbs was appointed to the circuit October, 1883, and served three years leaving September 21, 1886. During the latter part of his year the Seventh-day Adventists pitched their tents in Waldron and began preaching their doctrine. Quite a

number of the Methodists became affected and for a time there seemed danger of a stampede of Methodists to Adventists. Rev. J.C. Scull was sent to the circuit, preaching his first sermon at Waldron, Sunday Morning on September 26, 1886. It was anything but an encouraging outlook. Waldron was in an uproar. It was hard to tell who were friends and who foes. But with prayers to and trust in God we went to work to repair the broken wall and rally the scattered forces. Some that had been stragglers and had apparently laid aside their armor took on new courage and in a short time the retreating forces were rallied and began to fight under the blood-stained banner of King Immanuel. The loss to the church was but slight. Four left the church at Waldron and two at the other places. Several more were dropped from roll at their own request. It is to be hoped that the Lord will turn them from the error of their way ere they go hence and be no more. The Advents finally built a church by the aid of the Universalists and organized a society of ten or twelve members and now they drop from our history and it is to be hoped we will not have occasion to refer to them again in our records."

Rev. W.O. Wykoff's entry follows: "At the conference held at Liberty, Indiana, September, 1888, W. O. Wykoff was appointed by Bishop Vincent to Waldron Circuit. During the winter we held protracted meetings in all the churches this year, with but little apparent success . . . No repairs have been made on the churches this year, with the exception of changing the doors at Geneva by changing the two small side doors and making one large one in the center. Waldron purchased a new \$85.00 organ and secured a number of gospel hymns, thus adding considerably to the musical department. Five persons united on probation and two by letter during the year. We lost five persons by death and 13 by letter."

Rev. D. C. Benjamin became pastor the following year, and in the fall of 1890, there was a double circuit, composed of the Arlington and Waldron circuits. Thomas Ayres was the pastor at that time. James L. Brown was his assistant. The Rev. Mr. Ayers served until the spring of 1891 when he died. His son, Andrew Ayers, finished his father's appointment.

W.S. Smith was sent to the circuit September 26, 1892. He says "I preached at Waldron on October 2nd at 10:30 A.M. and at the Union at 3 P.M. and on October 9th at Winchester at 10:30 A.M. and at Geneva at 3 P.M. There were large congregations at all the points and each society seemed to be in a fair condition spiritually." He returned for the second year and during that time a new church was built at Geneva, a new parsonage was purchased at Waldron, and he "left them without debt."

John Clouds was assigned to Waldron, September 26, 1894. He writes "I met a warm reception to the circuit, and found people kind and glad to welcome me. Circuit composed of Waldron, Union, Winchester, Geneva — all in good condition and although former pastor had a great revival and it is supposed he took in many probationers, yet he left no record of their names or if received into full fellowship, had kept his records on a small memoranda — found a record of conversions — a few baptisms and those who had united by letter and no more — found that pastor and people had not