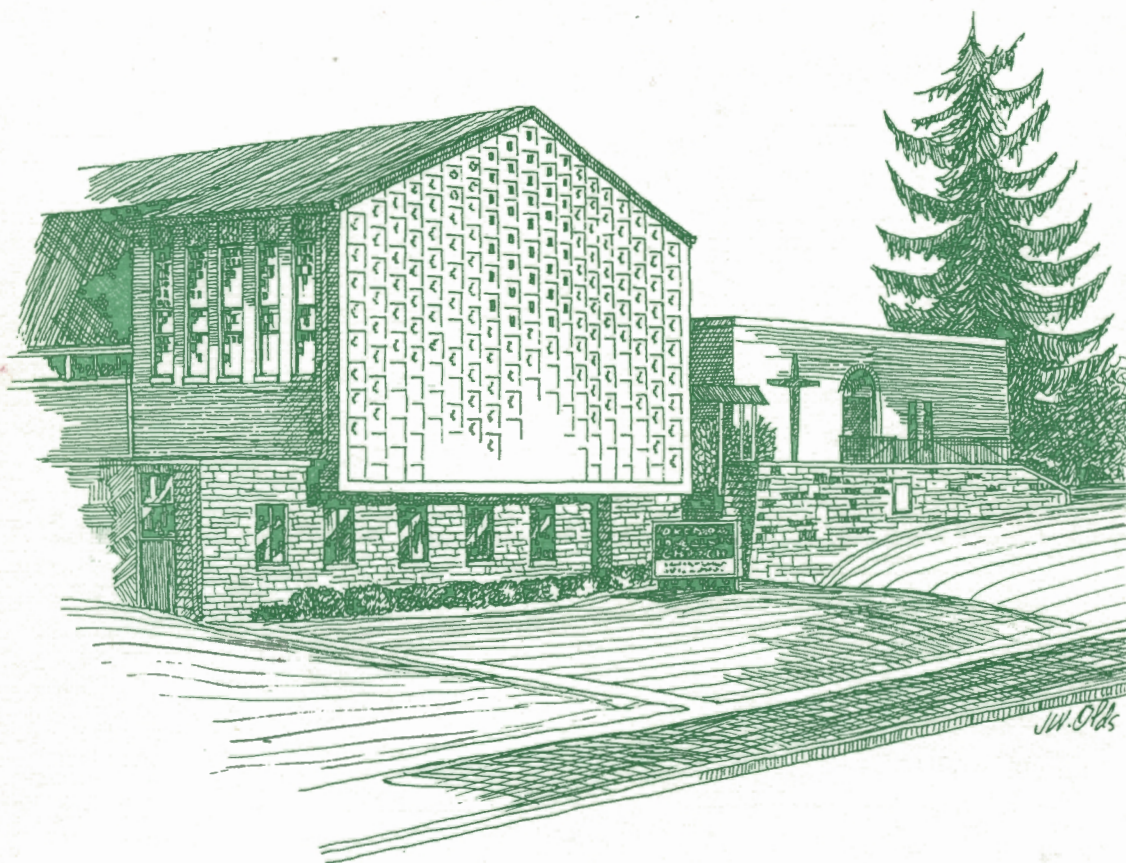


# A History of OKEMOS METHODIST/COMMUNITY CHURCH



By Dr. David S. Evans  
with Lyle Blackledge

## PASTORS OF OKEMOS COMMUNITY CHURCH

1857-58	H.P. Barker	1900-03	J.H. Hoover
1858-59	B. Searles	1903-04	N.S. Tuttle
1859-60	George W. Sherman	1904-06	Albert D. Newton
1860-62	Charles Chick, Jr.	1906-09	Charles H. Kelsey
1862-63	Jehiel Gulick	1909-12	Carl Seipp
1863-64	Supply-S. Dodge	1912-16	George Brown
1864-65	Supply-A. Gore	1916-18	John G. Biery
1865-67	A.L. Hoag	1918-20	William P. Ainsworth
1867-69	Alvern A. Rolfe	1920-21	E.O. Gildart
1869-71	A.L. Crittenden	1921-22	William H. Helrigel
1871-72	T.J. Hill	1922-23	C.A. McAntafer
1872-73	Samuel G. Blanchard	1923-26	W.E. Calow
1873-76	Byron S. Pratt	1926-27	V.B. Niles
1876-78	Jason R. Cadwell	1927-31	Paul Boodagh
1878-80	B.W. Smith	1931-32	O.F. Bulman
1880-81	W. Taylor	1932-34	Stanley Thayer
1881-82	No information	1934-36	Ralph J. Wooten
1882-84	George A. Odum	1936-41	Myron E. Hoyt
1884-85	George E. Hollister	1941-50	Harold Jayne
1885-87	A.E. North	1950-59	David S. Evans
1887-88	John Dobson	1959-62	Richards Raines
1888-89	A.H. Sturgis	1962-66	Allen E. Wittrup
1889-91	Thomas Riley	1966-87	John E. Cermak
1891-93	Duncan M. Ward	1987-89	Verne C. Summers
1893-94	Judson P. Durham	1989-96	Charles D. Grauer
1894-95	W.L. Holmes	1996-	James W. Boehm
1895-96	John Klose		
1896-97	Arthur W. Simmons		
1897-	J.H. Skinner		
1900			

## ASSISTANT PASTORS OF OKEMOS COMMUNITY CHURCH

1956-59	Archie Roberts
1959-62	Richard Singleton
1963-64	Harold Coger

## ASSOCIATE PASTORS OF OKEMOS COMMUNITY CHURCH

1965-89	Lynn Grimes
1989-91	Richard L. Sneed
1991-93	Pegg Ainslie
1993-94	Joyce Detoni-Hill
1994-	George R. Grettenberger

\* William Mullen served prior to 1882, date unknown  
L.W. Earl served prior to 1882, date unknown



# **A HISTORY OF OKEMOS METHODIST/COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**with Lyle Blackledge**



**Added material by:  
Ruth Stillman, Thelma Lamb and Mary Roney**

**Okemos Community Church  
P.O. Box 680, 4734 Okemos Road  
Okemos, MI 48805**



### STEPHEN MINISTERS

Left to right front row: Margaret Foster, Sue Keegstra, Robert White,  
Joan Travis, Connie Manwaring,, and Virginia Fisher  
Back row: Charles and Pat Grauer



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DEDICATED TO HELEN BURTON AND DR. I. J. (BRECK) BRECKENFELD

(1910 - 1989 and 1905 - 1981)



Helen and Breck were longtime residents of Okemos and members of the Okemos Community Church. Helen, from Elgin, Illinois, and Breck, from Racine, Wisconsin, met as high school teachers in Belvidere, Illinois in 1930. Breck later returned to the University of Wisconsin for his masters, and then went on to Kirksville College of Osteopathy in Missouri. They married in 1939 and settled in Edina, Missouri, where Breck had a general practice and their three sons were born.

Helen and Breck and their sons (Jim 6, Bob 4 and Bill 2) moved to Okemos in 1948. Breck took over the general practice in the old downtown area, and for a number of years he was the only doctor in the community. The family soon became actively involved in the Community Church, where Helen and Breck maintained strong ties the rest of their lives.

In 1964, Helen returned to teaching and taught math for ten years at Okemos High School. Breck retired from medicine in 1973. For a number of years during retirement Helen and Breck ran the 1849 House Antique Shop in the old downtown area.

Okemos Community Church provided the spiritual center for much of Helen and Breck's lives. It was the source of many lifelong friends, as well as the foundation for much of their social life. Their longtime association with and commitment to Okemos Community Church, makes the dedication to the church history a fitting memory to Helen and Breck.

## FOREWORD

Writing a church history with the time span of more than 200 years such as this presents a number of challenges. As with many frontier churches, what written records there might have been are long lost. In part we have to rely upon books written about the Methodist church in Michigan, accounts of Protestantism in Michigan and local histories of Ingham County. As the 20th century began there were some written recollections which have been most helpful, in addition to oral history material from older members. Ruth Stillman's earlier church history pointed the way.

We are fortunate to have a wealth of material researched by Thelma Lamb, a retired school teacher. Using local sources, she was able to do some biographical material on the early settlers in Okemos. She also went through the files of the Lansing papers for notices of church activities and reports of ministerial changes from 1850-1900. In later years, Lyle Blackledge was able to put together details of church life from the "Parish Herald." In this period it has been possible to draw on recollections of current members. West Michigan Conference journals supplied more details.

In the process many persons were of great help including Lyle Blackledge, especially with the photograph work; Mildred Andrick, Joan Travis and Charles Grauer. Diane Warncke lent her fine computer expertise and Ann Lohman did the excellent montage work for the "Family Album." My thanks also are expressed to Lyle, Mildred, Charles and my wife, Catherine, who read the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions.

We appreciate the generous willingness of the three Breckenfeld sons, Jim, Bob and Bill, to underwrite the cost of this history in addition to the Memorial Fund gifts.

I would be remiss if I did not express my affectionate gratitude to my comrade Charles Grauer whose inspiration and support have been wonderful; and to my beloved Catherine who has tolerated my long hours and littered workroom for so long. Now I can tackle the job jar with vigor!

David S. Evans  
Okemos Michigan  
June 1, 1996





## A HISTORY OF THE OKEMOS METHODIST/COMMUNITY CHURCH

### I. BEGINNINGS

Ruth Stillman begins her history of Okemos Community Church with the following description:

"It has been said that the American Pioneer took with him his plow, his gun and his Bible. His interests, primarily, were clearing ground for production of food and security of his family and along with these each family sought to keep alive the religious foundations laid in their earlier home. So the Bible gave spiritual guidance and often was the first, if not the only, textbook for his children."

With the end of the War of 1812, the westward movement of the American people accelerated aided by several factors which included the gift of land to returning service men, the completion of the Erie Canal across the top of New York state from Albany to Buffalo, and the introduction of steam-driven ships on the Great Lakes.

The flow of settlers moved mainly to Ohio, Indiana and Illinois though there were some hardy souls who sought to settle in Michigan. In 1818, the Michigan territory gained the land of the Northwest Territory north of the new state of Illinois and west of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. However, the territory was not well-regarded by some.

In response to an inquiry from William Woodbridge of Ohio, appointed Secretary of the Territorial government, General Duncan, stationed in Detroit wrote:

"I have no hesitation to say that it would be to the advantage of government to remove every inhabitant of the Territory, pay for the improvements and reduce them to ashes, leaving nothing but the Garrison posts. From my observation, the Territory appears to be not worth defending and merely a den for Indians and traitors . . . nine tenths of the land in the territory is unfit for cultivation."(1)

Nor was Michigan's reputation enhanced when the surveyor general of the United States, Edward Tiffin, reported that "Michigan apparently consisted of swamps, lakes and poor, sandy land which was not worth the cost of a survey." As surveying was resumed in 1816, it was discovered that there were great forests and rich soil. As historian Philip Mason notes, "By 1830 the Tiffin report was proved erroneous and the influx of settlers began."(2) According to historian Bald, after Woodbridge arrived, in spite of Duncan's negative assessment, he and Territorial Governor Lewis Cass worked to improve conditions.



With the negative assessments proven to be inaccurate, the tide of immigrants began to move into the central part of the territory. In 1833, Sanford Marsh bought land south of the Cedar River (now Red Cedar) and built a cabin there clearing the land to farm. Later he established the first post office and named it Sanford. More settlers arrived to occupy the land they had bought in the great land sales. The water power provided by the Cedar River was a valued resource.

From 1830 to 1840, Michigan's population went from 30,000 to 212,000 with a majority of the settlers coming from New England and New York. These included: Joseph Kilbourne and his brother-in-law, Freeman Bray, appointed the second postmaster by President Tyler. Bray platted the village in 1841, naming it Hamilton, in honor of Alexander Hamilton.

Later, on the death of Chief Okemos, the village was renamed Okemos.(3) According to Jessie Turner's history, he was a long time resident of the area with his small band of Pottawatomi, Chippewa and Ottawa Indians whose number had been decimated by disease.(4) Severely wounded in the War of 1812 fighting for the British, he recovered and was elected chief, an honorary title recognizing his valor. In his later years, he was a familiar sight in and around Okemos (then Hamilton), receiving food from kindly disposed residents. He died in 1858 near DeWitt, and was buried near Portland at Shin-ne-con in Ionia County.(5)

## II. THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH BEGINS WORK

As Ohio and Indiana were settled, the organization of the Methodist Church became established with Annual Conferences in them. Organization of churches and preaching circuits in the southeastern and central part of Michigan were a part of the Ohio Conference and the southwestern part was in the Indiana Conference. By 1836, the Michigan Methodist Episcopal boundary was established at the state line thus separating it from the Ohio Conference. In 1840, the General Conference separated the Michigan churches from the Indiana Conference. The Michigan Conference was thus defined by the state boundaries. (6)

As communities grew and became established, churches were built with various programs such as missions, Christian education, along with worship, revivals and community activities taking place. But away from these urban centers the villages and settlements were scattered across the landscape. To meet the religious needs of these people, the establishment of circuits—a number of preaching points—to which circuit riders traveled in rotation—to preach, marry, baptize and perform other religious services, were organized.





The class meeting was started which was the first step in the process of building a congregation; then the group would grow to become a society. When their numbers made it possible to support a minister, a preaching station was established, usually to be followed by the erection of a house of worship.

If life on the frontier was difficult and often harsh, it was more so for the circuit riders who followed the settlers to bring them the message of the gospel. Riding on their circuit, which usually was a three-week swing, they preached every evening at the settlements, usually in homes. They traveled in all kinds of weather, often forced to ford streams or to swim them, following the route of their circuit. This demanding work took a severe toll of the carriers of Christianity, for many died in their thirties from the rigors of their calling.

Elijah Pilcher, an early frontier preacher who later was to write a history of protestantism in Michigan observed: "Much of this circuit was very difficult to travel on account of the swamps and marshes. It was no holiday sport to make the rounds on it." One of his accounts tells of his attempts to reach Coldwater from Marshall, which had to be abandoned when they could not find their way through the forests and swamps they encountered. Later he was successful in arriving at the two cabins thereby following a course from Moscow. Usually there were no roads.

The annual Conference of 1839 established three circuits: Albion, Mapleton and Eaton Rapids. Okemos was a point on the Mapleton circuit along with Maple Rapids, Little Prairie (near St.Johns), Mason and DeWitt. Circuit riders serving the Okemos point, listed by Durant, included Jackson: Lapham, Blades (known as the "Boy Preacher"), Whitmore, Bessy and Glass.

The first Okemos class meeting included: Joseph H. and Susannah Kilbourne, Mrs. Phebe Kilbourne (Joseph's mother), George and Rebecca Bayard, Mrs. Maria Matthews, Russell and May Sowle and Freeman and Caroline Bray, who was the sister of Joseph Kilbourne. It is interesting that no mention is made of Sanford Marsh. This was the nucleus of the Methodist society formed in 1840.(7)

In 1846, a cooper's shop located near the junction of Hamilton and Dobie Roads, was remodeled to be the first schoolhouse for the village. Now the little congregation had a place to meet for its worship and the task of Christian education. Durant and others describe the various activities of the community: a saw mill, a grist mill, a hotel, and other businesses as well as farming. With the establishment of the state capitol in Lansing in 1847, and the



subsequent building of the plank road through Okemos to Lansing, the pace of life must have increased.

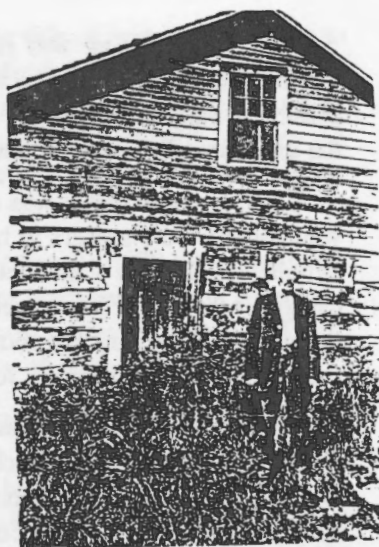
Unfortunately, we have no record of the activity of the Okemos Methodist Episcopal church; we are forced to rely upon Durant's history, notices in the Lansing newspapers and private recollections for information.

By 1869, the congregation had grown enough to undertake building a house of worship. A high point of land which, as a part of the Bray farm, had been the family burial ground was purchased for \$200. The family remains had been moved to the Okemos Cemetery. On this land they erected a church Ruth Stillman describes as "a one room meeting house type of building" with buggy sheds in the rear. It had a bell tower and a spire (added later). Cost was \$2400. She states that the three churches - Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist - were built for \$7100 by an aggregate membership of 75 which must represent a considerable sacrifice on the part of the members. Jessie Turner estimated the Methodist congregation numbered 30.(8)

In 1871, land was purchased from T. Davis, at a cost of \$750, for a parsonage to be built.

Between 1896 and 1990, renovations consisting of ingrain carpet, new chandeliers to replace oil lamps in the wall brackets on the side walls, and a new organ were purchased for the sanctuary.

By 1876, the Ingham County Atlas lists two hotels, the Okemos House and the Union Hotel; shoemakers, wagon manufacturers, buggies (painted to order), horse shoeing, cabinet and casket making, doctors, drugs and general merchandise stores, saw and grist mills. And of course many farms in the Okemos area.



First School Building

### III. CHURCH AND SOCIAL LIFE 1850-1900

There are a number of sources for information about community and church life for this period including: diaries, letters, newspaper notices and recollections of individuals passed to later generations. Several years ago, the diaries of Lizzie Dravenstat, a Methodist farm





wife near Portland, Michigan, gave a view of her life and times in much the same time span. For people whose lives were centered around the congregational life, there was possible a busy social life of worship, class activities, socials and fund-raising efforts. Then, too, being on the route between the state capitol and Detroit would provide opportunities for exchange of ideas and information.

### THELMA LAMB'S JOURNAL

Thelma Lamb, a longtime member of the Okemos Community Church and a retired school teacher, researched the Lansing newspapers and other sources for details of the church and community life in the last half of the 19th century. Here are some of her revealing finds:

#### Church Activities in the late 1800's

"Socials were not only an activity to be enjoyed but also one of the chief ways of raising money. They were held in homes, at church, and sometimes in a public building.

During the 1870's, 80's and 90's, Lansing newspapers reported news sent in by local correspondents. Such items as a warm sugar social at the M. E. Church netting profits of \$4.50, or a social held at J. W. Barton's by the young people, or an M. E. Ladies Missionary Social with receipts of \$4.50, were reported.

A concert at the M. E. Church in 1872, given by Prof. Hill's singing class was a success. They gave a creditable performance in spite of having instruction for only eleven days. 'No one can doubt Prof. Hill's qualifications as a teacher or his gentlemanly deportment,' reads the news item.

Revival meetings were held at the church.

Several persons were baptized at the church by immersion in 1882\*

In February of 1883, the M.E. Church had a successful wood bee by securing enough wood for the coming year. In 1884, in a Jan. 8th news item, Historical Day was described. Appropriate services and a monument which had been erected and decorated with evergreens were observed. There were responsive and scriptural readings by H. W. Hagerman, R. D. Sowle and Wallace Sturges. Wallace Sturges

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\*Since the building had no baptistery built in, one wonders how this was accomplished.



read a paper on historical events of the church, Manley Sherman on historical names of the church, and Rev. Geo. Odum on 'History of Methodism in Michigan,' closing with an appeal in behalf of the worn-out Methodist preachers of the Michigan Conference. (The appeal sounds familiar, doesn't it?-T.L.) A liberal collection of \$21.00 was taken.

A quarterly meeting was held at the M. E. Church the first of March in 1884. The Presiding Elder, Rev. James Hamilton of Lansing, preached two sermons marked for force, clearness and breadth of thought. The congregation was large and all were satisfied. (Wouldn't it be nice if all good sermons could be reported?-T.L.)

The Home Workers Society (an organization formerly known as the Methodist Church Social) elected officers; Mrs. J. H. Kilbourne, pres.; Mrs. Wm. H. Turner, vice-pres; Mrs. P. Herre, sec.; Mrs E. D. Crittenden, treas.

The Missionary Society and Home Workers sometimes met jointly. At other times they received recognition for the work they did in their home church, such as beautifying the front of the church by purchasing a large chandelier and a hanging lamp for the pulpit.

In 1880, the S. S. of the M. E. Church had a membership of 134 members with A. L. Sturges as superintendent and a staff of 12 teachers. The officers, in addition to Mr. Sturges were: Secretary-Harry Lapham; Treasurer-Clara Sturges (Augustus Sturges' daughter); Librarian-Carl Herre.

In Dec. of 1881, the scholars of the S. S. went to Lansing and had a group picture taken to send to their late supt., A. L. Sturges. I believe that Mr. Sturges had been S. S. Supt. for ten years. (TL)

(Cowles' History of Michigan states that Mr. and Mrs. Sturges went to Virginia in 1881 where he had bought land and stayed there ten years before returning to Okemos.)

On New Year's Day, in 1890 the children were all made happy by a loaded New Year's tree. Both old and young joined in having a good time.

Other S. S. activities reported included an oyster supper in Jan. of 1873 at the home of James Allen for the benefit of the S. S., a June strawberry festival, and an August, 1884 picnic at Pine Lake."





### Methodist and Baptist Joint Meetings

"From 1875 through 1884, a number of joint meetings exemplifying what I feel is the true Christian spirit were held by the Baptists and Methodists. They held these meetings on subjects and spiritual topics that were of concern to them at the time.

Rev. B. S. Pratt of the M. E. Church of Okemos and Rev. Comchite, a Baptist from Vernon in Shiawassee Co., held a series of revival meetings for a month in the fall of 1875. Rev. Parsons of Lansing often participated and about 35 conversions took place.

At Thanksgiving time a union service was held in the Baptist Church with the M. E. minister preaching.

Several years later a Dr. Henry Reynolds made an appeal for temperance at an afternoon meeting in the M.E. Church and at the Presbyterian Church in the evening. Many people from all churches attended both services.

In 1880, a week of prayer was observed alternately at the Baptist and Methodist Churches under the auspices of Rev. B.W. Smith (M. E.) and A.H. Parsons (Baptist).

Union Thanksgiving services were held in the Baptist Church in 1881.

The Methodists and Baptists united for a Thanksgiving service in 1884 with the pastor from the Wesleyan Methodists preaching. The Wesleyans had a society of about 50 members at Meridian Station. This was a small settlement on South Meridian Rd. People often went there to take the train. Their society then was about seven years old.

Through the early 1800's, the newspaper carried a number of reports about the Red Ribbon Club."

### The Red Ribbon Club-1880

"Churches often held joint services for this temperance organization. Addresses were given by local ministers or by visiting speakers and ministers. The meetings were frequently held on Sunday afternoon or evening with a large audience from all churches attending.



1880 Red Ribbons and socials and meetings at people's homes and at church were often hindered by bad roads.

A warm sugar social, a mush and milk social, an ice cream social (\$10.43 profit), and a Strawberry Festival were reported as Red Ribbon activities.

1880 - An eloquent address on temperance was given at the Baptist Church by Mrs. Wesley Emery of Lansing.

June - a meeting was held at the M. E. Church to organize the band of hope.

June 9 - A young people's temperance union was partially organized at the M. E. Church on Wednesday evening.

June 16 - RRC appointed delegates to attend county and state temperance conventions.

1882 - Temperance addresses are held almost weekly at the churches.

1882 - Mar. RRC elected officers at the M. E. Church and met at the Presbyterian Church on Sunday evening. Nine names were added to the pledges.

1883 - A Red Ribbon Society was organized here 6 years ago.

Temperance meetings have been held almost every Sunday or alternate Sunday evening since that time.

1883 March - RRC netted \$13.30 from the dramatic entertainment held at Cushman's Hall (Union Hotel).

RRC had Delhi Dramatic Club "Ten Nights in a Barroom" and rec'd one half of the profits.

RRC held a night-cap sugar social.

1884 - Rev. Mr. Wilson of Lansing and Presiding Elder Rev. James Hamilton delivered temperance lectures."

#### Donations

"It was a common occurrence to report donations that were given to the current minister. The who, where, when, and often the why were described in detail.





There must have been a parsonage before the Methodist church was built because when Rev. A. L. Hoag was minister in 1866, the Lansing Republican newspaper reported marriages that were performed there.

In January of that year, his friends in the M. E. Church gave him a donation of \$110.00.

In May, recent donations from the Okemos Circuit received by Rev. Hoag amounted to \$175.00

In July, Rev. Hoag lost a buggy valued at \$150.00 when Mr. Hamilton's barn burned. From the items listed, this barn must have served as a kind of livery stable. There was a total loss of \$1000 with no insurance.

In August, a festival was held at Pine Lake for his benefit, with receipts of \$65.00.

(I enjoy the wording of some of the news items. Some correspondents were very careful and precise in their choice of words as well as in their judgement of how to say things). (TL). Also in August, the Masonic Lodge presented Rev. Hoag with a purse of \$30.00 in token of their friendship and brotherly love and also in sympathy with his loss in the late fire. Since this donation was made privately, "Rev. Hoag took occasion on the Sabbath morning, after service, of publicly tendering his acknowledgements to the brethren for their generous and timely gifts."

The next year a donation was made at the Union Hall of O. C. Fall. This was probably the Union Hotel on Hamilton Rd. Great pains were taken to have a good turn out.

Donation parties were often held in the homes and such a one is reported in 1875 for Rev. B. S. Pratt. 'Every room in the house of J. H. Brown was filled and the net result was the smug sum of \$90.00.'

By 1880, the Rev. Mr. B. W. Smith was made happy by the surprise donation of \$16.00 from a number of the villagers.

In 1882, Rev. and Mrs. William Taylor were agreeably surprised by a gentle pounding in the shape of a pound social. They received about \$12.00. (Did you ever hear of a pound social? I haven't-TL.) (Pounding is an archaic term for bringing gifts of food or money. When a new minister would move in, parishioners would bring gifts of food to the parsonage, i.e., 'Pounding the parsonage'-DSE.)



That fall there was a surprise party for Rev. Taylor at the parsonage on a Sunday evening and on Sunday morning, the Sunday School gave Mrs. Taylor a gift of \$15.00.

A pound social was held in the M. E. parsonage in 1883 for Rev. Geo. Odium and his good wife who were pounded by their congregation for \$20.00 worth.

In 1885, a donation was given for Rev. G. E. Hollister at the Grange Hall.

Records were not available in the church record books which I examined, but from 1894-1904, ministers' salaries ranged from \$450-565 so it was no wonder that donations were given. Not until 1906 does the salary have a stated sum, plus a house mentioned. (TL)

Building funds for the churches were also raised in the period from 1866 to 1870 and were reported in the papers.

In 1866, the Methodists held a festival at Pine Lake. Considering the inclemency of the weather that July day, receipts were about \$65.00, which were to go toward building a Methodist Church.

In 1868, a newspaper item stated that "the Methodists lack only \$600.00 of having enough to complete their building. They do not commence until they can go through with it. Upon this principle a church cannot help but thrive. The site has been located and obtained from Freeman Bray for \$200.00."

It is interesting to observe from Thelma Lamb's research which covered all three of the Okemos churches for that period 1868-1900, the activities generally were alike. This was the way people lived in a small community. She has been able to capture the essential flavor of life though perhaps two other social events would have claimed publicity--weddings and funerals--yet we know in many instances these ceremonies were very much social gatherings as they are now.

There are several other brief observations as we turn our attention to the 20th century. Jessie Turner and Thelma Lamb both noted the brief life of the Okemos Presbyterian Church. Like the Methodists and Baptists, they began their congregational life in a school building. Begun in 1866, their building was completed in 1868, aided by fund-raising festivals. But for some reason, the effort did not succeed and the church building was sold to the township in 1888.(7) Later it became a library before being torn down in the 60's.





There are two other church activities in the turn of the century period. In 1904, according to Rex Wilkins, his great-aunt, Cynthia Wilkins, built the Wilkins Memorial Church on Sandhill Road in memory of her brother killed in a farm accident. It was serviced by the Methodist minister of the Okemos-Holt charge but he cannot remember the time of Sunday services. How these ministers worked in a third service (Rex thinks it was around noon or early afternoon) is not known. If the minister had an evening service, it must have been quite a day!

One other fact discovered was that there was a German language service at both the Okemos and Holt churches but no other details are known; though retired minister George Grettenberger, recalls, his father Louis, talking about being taken to the services as a young boy, presumably in the afternoon.

One slightly surprising note is that in all of the church activity, there has not been found any mention of the Civil War, perhaps because of the highly agricultural character of the area.

#### IV. INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

Jessie Turner's estimate that the membership of the Okemos Methodist Church at the time of the completion of its building seems low in light of the somewhat sketchy numbers to be found for the first part of 1900. It was often said in later decades that it was the "Methodist Statistical Church" but in 1900 that was not the case. The Michigan Conference journals contained few facts and fewer statistics in contrast to current 350 page journals with a 120 page booklet with reports and statistics!

It would be almost four decades before the simple little church building would be added on to by the "parlors." Thus until this took place, church suppers had to be held at the Masonic hall or town hall. In all probability at the turn of the century, the pattern of activity continued much as Thelma Lamb has described it.

The Michigan Conference minutes list Okemos Church membership at 135 in 1903, 128 in 1904, 135 in 1905, and 130 in 1906. It is entirely possible that the membership quadrupled from 1870-1903 but the sudden surge again in 1910 to 182 and 212 in 1911 only to drop back to 125 in 1912 is puzzling.(9) But it is apparent that there was a solid nucleus of members who kept the church going with socials in homes, festivals in summer at Pine Lake, in addition to revivals and other cooperative activities with the Baptists continued one imagines.

In 1904, work continued to improve the church building by removing the exterior batten



strips, putting on new siding painted white. Two years later a porch and roof were added to the front; adding much to the appearance of the building.

In 1917, the Ladies Aid Society was organized to replace the Methodist Church Social. More building additions followed: in 1929 a balcony was built creating several additional class spaces.

Mary Roney gives us a picture of church life in this period:

### THESE ARE MEMORIES OF MY CHURCH

BY MARY RONEY

"I am Mary Biebesheimer Roney, born March 16, 1906, on Hagadorn Road, on a farm of my father and mother, Phillip and Emma Biebesheimer. I was baptized June 24 in the Okemos Methodist Episcopal Church, by Rev. Newton, the church on the hill as it was known, where you entered it from double doors. You were in an area about 16 sq. ft. A swinging double door opened to the sanctuary. A door on the right and also one on the left opened to two little rooms. These doors led to an area the size of the entrance with a green curtain covering the opening to the sanctuary.

The one on the right was where women took their wraps and took the crying babies out of the sanctuary when they brought them to service. Also, it was used as a Sunday School room. It was here that I had my first remembrance of Sunday School.

On the left the men left their hats and coats. Also, there was a desk where the Sunday School records were kept and the collection was kept.

As one entered the entrance of the swinging doors to the sanctuary, on the center aisle, there was a center aisle to the front, to the rail across the platform, up a set of steps to a pulpit stand which was in the center.

On one side there was a piano where the choir sang and changed different times, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other.

The long windows were of clear glass and they were all above the wainscoting, which was about 30 inches tall. They were covered with tongue and groove siding put on at an angle. The lights were gasoline under pressure with a cloth mantle, and





when they were lit gave a very bright light. They hung down from the ceiling and could be lowered. The church was not built with a basement, but an area had been dug out to put in a furnace. There was a large register in the center aisle toward the front. Often the room would be blue with smoke fumes from the furnace. These were bad for my mother. She often would have to leave the room and go outdoors because of the fumes.

After some years the room was made too dark because the light wood became smoke covered. And so there was installed a covering of wall board. A panel of white board formed a cross in the front of the church, and the wall was painted later with Jesus and the lambs, done by Sterling Alf.

A steeple was added in the 20's and light was shown on it at night. Also, stained glass windows were installed. Our Sunday School Class, 'The Happy Workers', gave money for one of them."

### ACTIVITIES I REMEMBER AT THE CHURCH

"During World War I, to save on coal, which was very scarce, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Church worked together and worshiped together. One Sunday they would worship at one church and the next Sunday they would worship in the other church. Also, the women's societies worked together in putting on dinners and meeting together. Some of the churches had no kitchen. The Town Hall was used for putting on a dinner because they had a gas stove.

At election time when they came to vote, it also was a gathering place for a social time. The aid societies of the churches would take turns to put on a chicken pie supper. The pies were baked at home and brought hot. The dishes were owned by aid societies and since there was no place to store them, we had to store them in the ceiling of the upstairs in the old Odd Fellows' Hall, and later they were brought over to the Grettenberger store, but they had to be carried back over to the Town Hall when they were used.

At the church on Children's Day, which was in June, there was always a program, a dialogue, when each child had a chance to speak. There were also pieces by individuals. One year the daisies were in bloom along the railroad tracks and so we picked pails full and wove them into a chain, then wove them back and forth in the spokes of the altar rail. They made a very attractive appearance.



At Christmas time, there would be a cantata or a play, with a curtain drawn across. The curtain was made of blankets strung on wire across the room. One year a star was supposed to be in the sky at one point in the program. My brother, Ralph, had tied a flashlight up high so he could put a string on it and attach it so he could pull the string and it turned the flashlight on. For some reason it didn't stay on, it flashed off and on, and people wondered how they made that star twinkle.

There were candles on the Christmas tree and they were lit, and Mr. Herre, the custodian, always sat nearby with a pail of sand so if some of the needles on the tree caught on fire he could put them out.

There were gifts for all the children in the Sunday School. Each teacher was given 15 cents per child to buy a present. Also, they got a bag of candy for each child, or a box of candy, and every child in the audience got one, also. These boxes had been filled at somebody's home, often at our place, and they would have in them peanuts, fruit and candy, hard Christmas candy and peanut butter kisses.

The churches always made their Christmas programs so they did not fall on the same evening. One time, one program would be in the Methodist Church so all the children of the Baptist Church and people could come over and watch our program. At other times, when the Baptist had their evening program, we could go over and watch their program. It made a beautiful part of our cooperation together, which lasted for many, many years."

## V. THE FEDERATION

In 1927, the Okemos Methodist Church was part of a 2-point charge with the Holt Methodist Church, while the Okemos Baptist Church was part of a 2-point circuit with the Haslett Baptist Church. In 1927, the Baptist Church lost its minister and a move was undertaken to federate the two congregations (Methodist and Baptist) making possible a full-time minister in the community.

By the time of the September Michigan Annual Conference in 1929, the details had been worked out and the Rev. Paul Boodagh was appointed to the Okemos Community Church after a trial period of one year (1928-1929). Boodagh had been appointed to the Okemos-Holt charge in 1927. At the close of the trial period some of the Baptists withdrew to reestablish the Okemos Baptist Church but others remained in the federation.

The early arrangements were that the conference would appoint a minister and the church





(1) Old brown church, 1885



(2) Old brown church, new siding, with stables



(3) Old brown church, interior with Sterling Alf Painting, 1938



(4) Group worship



(5) Old church and old parsonage, 1923



(6) Old church and parlors



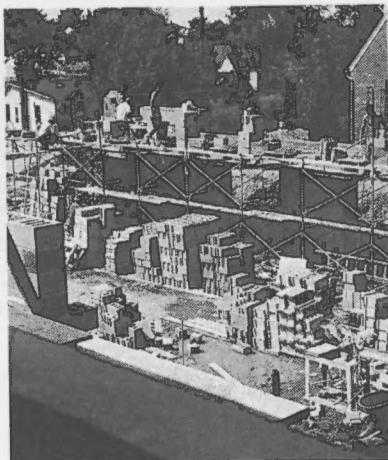
(1) Ground breaking for new church, 1956



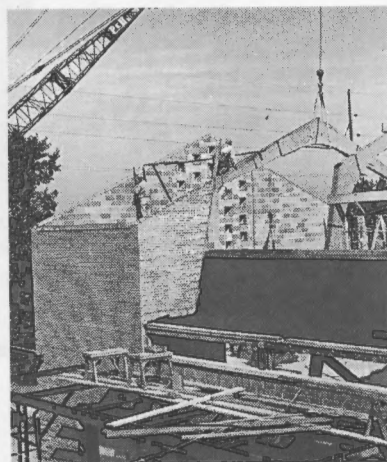
(2) Cornerstone laying, 1956



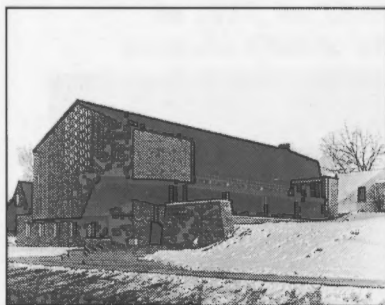
(3a) Construction, 1956



(3b) Construction, 1956



(3c) Construction, 1956



(4) New church with connection to old church, 1958



(6) New church, interior, 1957



(5) New church, exterior, 1957

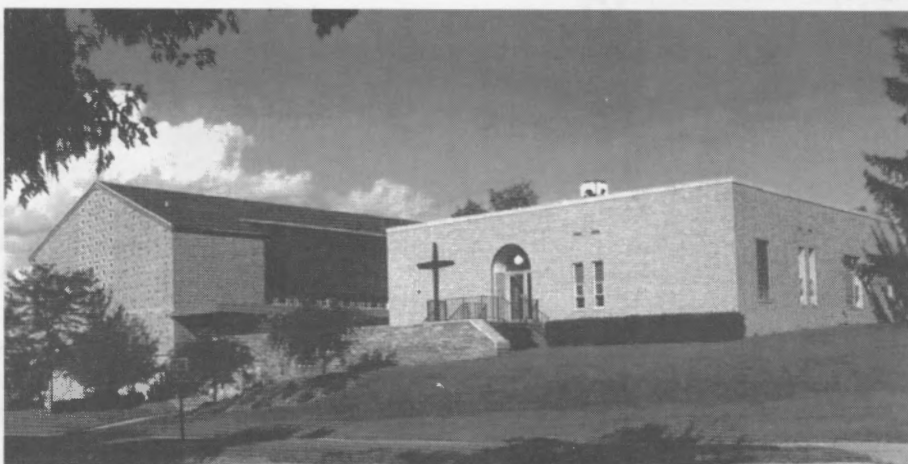




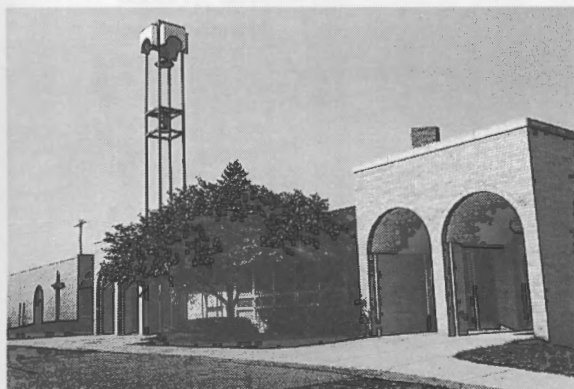
(1) Construction of new wing



(2) Corner shot, new wing



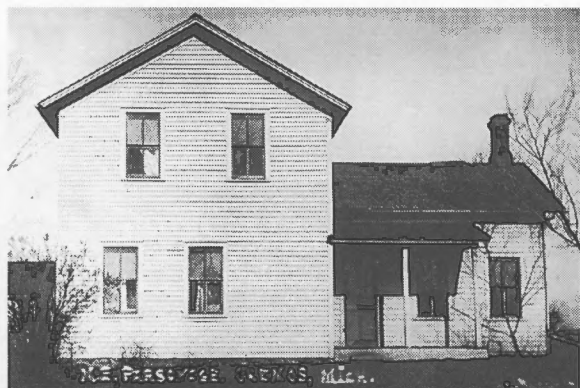
(3) From Okemos road



(5) Educational wing and office looking south



(4) Garden and Columbarium



(1) Parsonage, 1908



(2) Parsonage, 1925



(5) Parsonage, 1989



(3) Parsonage as church house, 1957



(4) New parsonage, 1954





would pay a proportional amount to the conference benevolence/missions apportionments based on the number of Methodist members. The church also would pay into the pension program. Thus the Okemos Community Church (Federated) began. In the 1927-29 period, membership went from 172 to 217.

In 1938, a long needed addition was completed with a structure built along the east side of the church reaching back past the rear (or north face) of the church. The main room could be divided into three classroom sections with the use of folding doors. Each section was heated by a tall gas space heater (an arrangement the Fire Marshall would never approve today. The miracle was that no one ever got burned on a stove!). At the end of the parlors was the kitchen. Also there was one classroom located along the side of the parlors across the back end of the church.



Okemos Baptist Church

Thus the education program gained badly-needed space; the women had facilities for suppers, bazaars and rummage sales. There were other uses possible to enhance the program of the church. Lyle Blackledge recalls church life when he was a high school student:

#### RECOLLECTIONS BY LYLE BLACKLEDGE (1949-1952)

"During my senior year of high school and while attending Lansing Business University, I served as custodian of the Okemos Community Church.

The dimensions of the old white church were approximately 72 feet by 35 feet. There were seven rows of pews on each side of the sanctuary, with an elevated platform at the front, separated by a chancel rail. On the platform was space for the choir and organ on the left, and the pulpit on the right side. In the rear of the sanctuary were two alcoves, one on each side, with three pews in each alcove. There were sliding doors on each alcove which could be closed for Sunday School classes. The floor was a gray linoleum with a carpet going down the center aisle.



At the rear of the sanctuary, a balcony was constructed sometime in the 1920's directly over both alcoves and the center aisle, giving an additional three rooms for classroom activity, and also could be used for any overflow crowd.

The center room in the balcony was directly below the bell and each Sunday morning the bell was rung from this room. The bell rope had to be replaced one time which posed a slight problem as the only entrance to the belfry was through a small trap door in the ceiling. With the assistance of my father, we were able to replace the bell rope without too much difficulty.

The church was heated by an old coal burning furnace. In order to get the proper flow of heat, the windows on the west side of the building had to be opened for a few minutes to create a flow of air as the furnace was designed for gravity flow only. If the wind was blowing just right you could smell coal smoke at times during the service.

There was one particular Sunday service I remember very well. After the fire in the furnace got going, I noticed a hole had developed in the pipe leading from the furnace to the chimney, approximately 15 feet away and the flame was visible through this hole. I spent the entire service ready at any moment to slip a note to the pastor to have the congregation exit the building in the event the pipe should break. Needless to say, by the following Sunday a new pipe had been installed and I do not believe anyone in the congregation was aware of the potential danger they were in that day.

An addition was added to the east side of the sanctuary in 1938, more commonly referred to as the parlors. There were three sets of sliding doors which could be closed for classroom activity. At the north end was the kitchen. For several years, each spring and fall, the Women's Society would put on a chicken supper on a Saturday evening. These suppers became so popular people would come from all over the local area.

Off the center section of the parlors was the nursery, and off the rear section were the restrooms and one small classroom.

The parlors were heated by individual gas heaters. We had to be very careful when there was a strong wind blowing that a back draft did not blow out the flame. If this happened there was no safety valve to shut off the natural gas from entering the room. Usually these heaters were only lit when the parlors were in use, as there were no pipes running under the main section of the parlors, which would freeze.





The kitchen was heated by a separate gas heater.

During the Christmas season a cantata would be performed, generally on a Sunday evening, and the Sunday School classes would also have their Christmas party some other evening, which would completely fill the sanctuary with parents and children.

I look back on many fond memories of the three years I served Okemos Community Church as custodian."

In the period from 1929-1941, there was slow growth with the 1941 membership listed at 189. The increase at the outset of the federation was reduced as some members withdrew. Also changes in the reporting of membership, which did not include inactive members, caused a shrinkage of the figures; but by 1942 membership had increased to 225. Life in the congregation appears to have continued at the same level though the addition of the parlors made possible the kinds of activities noted which had not been possible before the addition. Adult classes were strong and the work of the church women prospered.

In 1941, there began an 18-year period when only two ministers served—Harold Jayne (1941-1950) and David Evans (1950-1959). During the period of Jayne's ministry, the population of Meridian Township almost doubled going from 4,767 to 9,108 as the area began to show suburban growth. Church membership increased from 189 to 285, a net gain of about 66%.

One of the highlights of the '40s was the 105th anniversary of the Okemos church and the 75th anniversary of the church building celebrated on May 25, 1945. The attractive printed program lists the participants in the service including Albion District Superintendent Dr. Spencer B. Owens preaching on "The Best Is Yet to Be." Rev. Harold Jayne and Dr. N. A. McCune, minister of People's Church, East Lansing, took part in the service.

One feature of the booklet is a page headed by the drawing of the American flag and listing 27 Community Church members who were in service in WW II. Many names still familiar in the church are listed on the committees planning the event.

## VI. THE FABULOUS '50S

In 1949, the church had arranged to receive a former slave-labor family from a displaced persons camp in Europe. In September of 1950, Walter and Gerarda Schrubkowski and their four-year-old son, Walentin (Wally), arrived. Church members helped with food, start-up



money, a place to live and furnishings. Walter found a machinist job and the little family was established.\*

The years from 1950-1960 were ones of great church activity and growth, particularly in the Okemos area, as the original three subdivisions, Cedar Bend Heights, Indian Hills and Ottawa Hills were joined by a growing number of new ones beginning with Tacoma Hills and Forest Hills. What a local newspaper had dubbed "the sleepy little village" (at which one local political figure took umbrage) began to grow and take on more of the characteristics of a suburban community. As the community grew, so did the membership of Okemos Community Church from the 1951 figure of 243 to 805 in 1960.

In 1949 the church had considered, then rejected, a proposed new building program. The Ben and Emma Pease estate had bequeathed the church about \$80,000 after all bills were paid. The final illness of Mrs. Pease had reduced the amount to around \$40,000 and there were stipulations. Since Mr. Pease had been a brick mason, he had no use for brick buildings veneered (i.e., laid up against wood siding), thus the money should be used for a church and parsonage of brick or stone not veneered and there could be no indebtedness on the buildings when the estate was claimed. These stipulations provided a real obstacle until a family member, Attorney Louis Grettenberger, showed the building committee how to handle it as will be seen.

The author recalls the beginning of the building project:

"As the idea of a new building which would house the Sanctuary and a social hall began to be formulated, it was decided that the building should be placed at the rear of the existing structures facing Okemos Road and connected by a hallway. The first step in making this possible was to purchase the brick house just north of the old church on Okemos Road as a parsonage since the construction matched the Pease requirements. This purchase would become the church house with office space and church school meeting rooms.

The new plan however contained one serious problem in it: the new building so constructed would have to be built partly on the Methodist Church land, title of which was held by the Michigan Conference of the Methodist Church as in the case of all conference churches.

To resolve this problem of a building erected on two different parcels of land, one owned by the Michigan Conference and the other by the Okemos Community Church, Albion-Lansing District Superintendent Dr. William H. Helrigel, a former minister of the Okemos

\*Gerarda received her LPN from Lansing Community College in 1969; Wally graduated from Western Michigan in the same year.





church along with Okemos Cabinet Chairman Dr. Claud Bosworth and Trustee Rex Wilkins prepared a proposal for the 1956 Michigan Annual Conference meeting at Bay View in June 1956. It proposed that the conference deed the Okemos Methodist Church and land to the newer entity, the Okemos Community Church. The church would look to the conference for its pastoral appointments and make the conference the main missions and benevolences agency. The agreement was to last to the year 2002. The resolution was passed by the Annual Conference easily after only brief discussion with Bishop Marshall Reed presiding. The way was cleared for the construction of the new church building as soon as the money was in hand."(10)

To provide building funds, a campaign was undertaken. Roland Traver, a member of the fund raising firm Ketchum (!) and Co. of Pittsburgh, PA, was employed to direct the effort. Since he was an ordained minister in the American Baptist church, many saw it as symbolic of the federation. The author's recollections continue:

"We were now underway. The various committees enthusiastically undertook the needed tasks to make the campaign a success. Meetings were held, seemingly reams of letters were written, a brochure and other materials were printed and disseminated as the campaign took shape. The plans for the new building were drawn by architect Elmer Manson of the Manson & Carver firm with a sanctuary to seat 400 and a large fellowship hall and kitchen below.

It was decided that the financial campaign should be for \$80,000, a formidable sum for a congregation still paying off the mortgage on the new parsonage. It would be paid off in 1954.

As the final day of the campaign approached, it appeared we were still several thousand dollars short of our goal. As Traver and I sat in the Church House trying to figure out where we might find the amount to make the goal of \$80,000, in walked a young man who told us he had been away but now wanted to make a pledge which he did putting us over the top. It was a moment for celebration!"

Now construction could start. The contract was awarded to the Carl Haussman firm with ground-breaking set for a ceremony at the close of morning worship April 29, 1956. It had rained for several days prior to that Sunday and it looked like there would be no let up. Fortunately, as the ceremony began, there was a brief break in the weather. Ground was broken and the new church was begun. As the bulldozers bit into the embankment, the clay was almost the consistency of jello from all the rain but the piles of dirt soon hardened to almost a concrete-like substance.



As the construction proceeded, it was apparent that the pledge amounts would have to be augmented by money available as construction continued. At the suggestion of Louis Grettenberger, a \$30,000 group note was negotiated with the East Lansing State Bank, with each of the signers liable for 1/30th of the amount. The note went through quickly since the bank did not require individual financial statements of the signatories. In addition, Grettenberger advised, we could probably have the building completed without any indebtedness, allowing the Trustees to claim the Pease estate monies. This we did.

Building a church so near the parsonage had interesting aspects as the author recalls:

"The existence of large piles of dirt at the side of the site offered the children tempting opportunities for mountain climbing, playing 'king of the hill' and other games. The parsonage washing machine worked overtime and the floors were constantly being cleaned!

To lessen the cost of the building, it was decided not to have on site inspection by the architect. Trustee Rex Wilkins was delegated by the building Committee to see to construction details and to work them out with the contractor. To assist in the process, I would be in contact with the contractor during the day and relay any questions or other matters to Wilkins as we met in the evening then mornings it was back to the contractor. I enjoyed this aspect of the work since we were a congenial group.

Because I lived next door to the project and had to walk through it to get to my office in the church house (the old parsonage), I often wore some of my old Navy tans instead of customary clerical garb. As I was looking around the social hall area, a number of men, some steel workers who hung the grid for the acoustic plaster ceiling and some who were electricians were having a seminar on procedures. The air was very blue with their discussion when one of the men spied me and said, 'Shut up! There's the minister.' Things calmed down and I appeared not to notice what had been going on.

Later, as the building neared completion, I was making a customary tour when I watched a workman who was fastening the symbols on the front of the altar. It was constructed of wood covered by a marble appearing sheet of Naugahyde. As he began to set the marks to bore for the supports of the Greek symbol for the 'Omega' part of the 'Alpha and Omega' (the beginning and the end), I saw to my horror that he was going to place the Omega with the open end up instead of down. When I stopped him he was indignant, informing me that 'You always hang a horseshoe like that.'





The only way I could convince him was to take him to the south foyer door into the Narthex where, fortunately for me, there was a carved Alpha and Omega symbol over the door. He took a look but wasn't wholly convinced, I could see. As he went back to the job he warned me, 'OK, but if it's wrong, it's all your fault.' I said I'd take the blame."

The cornerstone was laid on Sunday, July 22, 1956, in bright and sunny weather. In the cornerstone was a box containing a number of documents, membership lists and other data on the church. Assisting in the ceremony was a Methodist minister and college teacher, Rev. J. Brabner Smith, who at the time was living on the corner of Moore St. and Hamilton Road and who, with his wife who was a librarian, were active in our church affairs.

The church was occupied February 3, 1957. On the preceding Sunday there had been several events commemorating the use of the old church and then, following a brief ceremony, the congregation processed into the new building for the first worship service. It was a great day as the congregation saw the six-year effort come to a victorious climax.

The years through 1957 had been filled with expansion activities such as acquiring the new parsonage, putting on the fund-raising to pay for the construction of the new building with the myriad meetings to decide many details, and there were other activities. For a number of years, there was a successful Sunday Evening Lenten Series with local and area ministers taking part including the famous Dr. Henry Hitt Crane of Detroit's Metropolitan Methodist Church, a bus trip to Chicago for the Youth Fellowship to visit Methodist institutions, the Planetarium and other points of interest.

With the purchase of the new parsonage, the old one was remodeled to provide office space and meeting rooms. Once the new church was occupied, there was more room for dinners, bazaars and rummage sales in the new Social Hall.

In this time of the late '50s, the demand for teen centers was high; the church was urged to provide one in its fine new facility. Here is how the author recalls it:

"As we began to work out the details of the center, the question of dancing arose causing considerable discussion. While the Methodist Church had dropped its official opposition to dancing, there was still some uneasiness, since there were a number of former Baptists for whom dancing in the church was wrong. Failing to secure any helpful guidance in this matter, the decision was to have an open meeting to decide our policy. When I had been on summer Navy training duty, I had driven down after services to talk to a Methodist minister in Joliet whose church had a teen center.



I well-remember his words: 'Dave, if you are going to have a teen center it's no use to try it unless you have a juke box so they can dance.'

So the meeting was called in a rather tense atmosphere. The question of dancing was brought forth for discussion. Mrs. Lottie Hudson, who with her husband Ralph, were leaders of the church and a part of the former Baptist group, stood up. Said she: 'You know I'm the daughter of a Baptist preacher and you know how most Baptists feel about dancing. But I have prayed about the matter and I'd rather have the young people dancing here in the church than have them parked out in the lanes around Okemos.' The tension broke completely and permission to dance was passed unanimously.

With the new social hall and its fine kitchen there were a number of events put on, including the banquet at the first anniversary of the occupation of the new church with Dr. Merrill Abbey of Ann Arbor First Methodist Church, as the featured speaker.

In May of 1959, the author was appointed to Battle Creek First Methodist Church. The membership which had grown to 511 in 1956 (it was agreed that a new church would not be built until the 500 member level had been reached) and had continued to grow to 775 in May."

### A BUSY QUARTER CENTURY 1960-1985

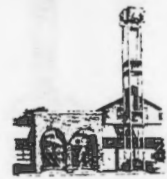
This period was marked with a number of significant events. Early on, in Richard Raines' ministry, discussions began about the need of more adequate educational facilities and office space. As the church grew into new activities, it was apparent that the church house and old church had limited value for growing needs.

In late 1961, a new church library was established, special programs such as the appearance of the 30-voice Albion Goodwill Singers and the beginning of a Sunday Nighters Fellowship was noted in the Parish Herald; along with discussions at meetings about the need of educational facilities. In June, Richard Raines and Sharon Brown were married and Allen Wittrup became the minister.

It is apparent from the membership statistics that the membership rolls were cleaned dropping the figure to 709.

By 1963, membership had risen to 782 and growth continued with the expectation reported





in the Parish Herald that the 800 figure would be soon reached increasing the need for more facilities. By the next year, there were 841 members. Spurred on by this growth, the congregation moved to begin the process for building. J. Wesley Olds, an architect and member, was asked to prepare plans for the new construction, with the Ketchum organization contacted about the fund-raising.

The Parish Herald of March 21, 1963, reported that the proposal for the new education wing failed by a vote of 104-90. Among the reasons given for the failure included: the need for a stronger educational program, need for more congregational promotion, need for a parking lot program and some feeling that world service was more important. The financial status was reported as follows: Mortgage on the church \$15,700, estimated sale value of the old parsonage \$30,000; organ fund \$5400 of \$12,500 needed.

In September, the new \$12,000 Wicks organ was dedicated.

In December, it was reported that the old parsonage and land had been sold to O. K. Grettenberger for \$25,000 and that the mortgage on the church would be liquidated. The mortgage burning took place December 13th, with David Evans, Rex Wilkins, Roland Gifford and Minister Allen Wittrup participating.

In June 1965, Lynn Grimes began her work as Director of Religious Education embarking on a 22-year term of service to the church. In her work with the youth she directed numerous plays, musicals and other activities. She also undertook seminary training at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Chicago, being awarded the Master of Divinity degree in May 1983, no small accomplishment while raising a family and continuing her work at the church.

In June 1966, John Cermak began what was to be a 21-year ministry at Okemos Community Church, one of the longest in the West Michigan conference.

The second time around the drive for an educational unit/office complex was successful. The building would include a north foyer to which an elevator would be added later, offices on the west end, a lounge off the east foyer and classrooms on the south side with a garden in the space between the two wings. Because the highway department had widened Okemos Road into a 4-lane artery, eliminating angle parking, what was the back effectively became the main entrance and the parking lot was enlarged on the east.

With what money that had been left over from the sale of the old parsonage and pledges, the church was able to secure a bank loan for the balance of the cost of the unit at \$360,000. On November 2, 1966, the new unit was consecrated. In the process, the old white church had to be demolished because there was no place to which it could have been moved. Sadly



had it taken place two- years later, Olds recalls, the Meridian Village would have been a good location. After saving furniture and the colored glass windows, a bulldozer demolished the buildings and a mighty bonfire was lit—one supposes old timers might have regarded it as a funeral pyre. Olds said he couldn't recall any amusing or special incidents in the building because everything went so smoothly.

Later the space between the two buildings was beautifully landscaped to be known as the DeLind Memorial Garden in memory of Tommy DeLind. The south east corner has been designated as a columbarium.

In December 1969, a fire in the laundry room of the brick parsonage damaged part of the building. It was decided that the Cermaks would find housing elsewhere with the old parsonage repaired and later used as the Lansing District United Methodist office.

Other events during this period included Cermak being granted a sabbatical to work on his Doctor of Ministry degree, which he was awarded. During his absence a retired Michigan Conference minister, Robert Trenery, served as minister. He spoke warmly of the experience and his relation to the members of the congregation. In 1978 Cermak visited the Holy Land.

During these years, Family Nights, special study groups, social events and programs filled the church calendar. One of the most popular programs over the years has been the Memorial Weekend Family Camp at the Michigan Conference Lake Michigan campground. Campers, tents and recreational vehicles fill the facility. There are a lot of good anecdotes told about this event.

The mortgage on the education unit was burned in October 1982, completing the \$360,000 cost in a period of 16 years, no small accomplishment! In 1983, an elevator was installed at the end of the north foyer, a blessing to those who cannot climb stairs and a lifesaver to those who staff the Thanksgiving and Christmas Baskets programs. Cost of the project was \$60,000.

The 80's saw two important milestones in the life of Lynn Grimes and her family. In May 1983, she received the Master of Divinity degree from Garrett Evangelical Seminary and in June 1985 she was ordained Elder at the West Michigan Annual Conference by Bishop Judith Craig.

At the 1987 West Michigan Annual Conference, John Cermak was appointed to Jackson First United Methodist Church, completing 21 years of ministry in Okemos. At his farewell he said he had conducted 401 weddings, 370 baptisms, 254 funerals and had received 1150





members with membership at 852. He had preached 850 sermons. Add this to counseling, other speaking engagements and service on connectional bodies, and he had an imposing total.

Verne Summers was appointed minister, with Lynn Grimes continuing as associate. Two years later Summers was appointed to the church in Mason and Lynn Grimes was appointed to Grand Ledge, completing a 22-year service in Okemos where, starting as Director of Religious Education, she had completed her seminary education, been ordained Elder, and was Associate Minister, then four years later was appointed District Superintendent of the Central District, a record both the Okemos church and she can be proud of.

In 1989, Charles Grauer was appointed to the Okemos church.

Several associates have served with him including Richard Sneed, Pegg Ainslie and part-time Joyce DeToni-Hill, as well as retired West Michigan Conference minister, George Grettenberger.

## VII. AND IN CONCLUSION . . .

The years since 1989, have been filled with a variety of religious and other experiences. Acting on an earlier congregational vote to have an early service, the Cabinet set up a 9:30 a.m. worship service, with the opening devoted to church school and the balance of the service consisting of traditional worship. It has been well-liked by the younger couples with children who prefer a simultaneous church school.

An added feature of the worship services has been the Mission Buckets in the Narthex with a different local charity designated each month (this in addition to regular mission and benevolence budget items). New hymnals and Pew Bibles have been placed in the sanctuary. A Thursday evening summer worship service was offered but was not continued. In 1990, David and Catherine Evans were named Pastoral Emeritus Family.

An important addition to the caring ministry of the church has been the enrollment in the Stephen Ministry Program with ten lay persons undergoing training to visit and care for those who need the nurturing ministry of the church. It has been a heartwarming experience. (1992) Seven others have taken training since the first class, and new leaders added.

In the music area, new adult choir robes were purchased, the south east corner class room was remodeled with risers, robe storage cupboards and other elements for the choirs and a new piano was secured as a memorial to Ed Roney. The former choir room on the lower level became the youth room.



Two parsonages were purchased, one for the senior minister in 1989 and one for the associate in 1990. Several important physical plant projects were carried out, including the resurfacing of the parking lot, the installation of lighting by Bob Vince and Paul Scheibner (a retired UMC minister in the congregation). This team also installed the new sound system in the sanctuary and the social hall. Relocation of the library and reorganization of the office space to create a computer room, as well as a new front church sign and landscaping to complete the installation were completed. In a joint effort with the Women's Society, a new stove and flooring were installed in the kitchen.

Organizationally, the development of the Program Council facilitated the work of the various committees, freeing the Church Cabinet for other administrative matters concerning the church. Welcome and information stations for newcomers were established in both foyers.

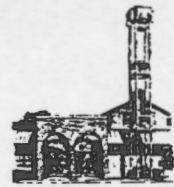
One of the new program features has been the "Wednesday Night Alive" evening. Beginning with a common meal, there are activities for adults, youth and children. One very popular feature has been the "Bonehead Bible Study" conducted by Charles Grauer. It has attracted a growing and loyal following. "Wednesday Night Alive" has also been an opportunity to showcase youth and adult programs, fun nights and other features. Education Director Ann Lohman's innovative work has enhanced this undertaking. Her teaming up with Music Director Donna Green has supplied drama and music programs. Donna has brought a number of new music elements to the first service. Ann has strengthened the Christian education program with a cadre of fine teachers.

There have been a number of important special events. In May 1990, the 60th anniversary of the federation of the Methodist and Baptist churches was celebrated with a special worship service and a dinner. Guest of honor was Chaplaln (Col.) Archie Roberts USA (Ret.) who was an assistant during the time he was a student at MSU 1957-59. There was a slide show on the history of the church, historical displays and a cake.

In October 1991, the sesquicentennial of the Methodist work in Okemos was celebrated. A museum walk of historical exhibits, frontier hospitality tours and historical vignettes were enjoyed.

A panel discussion, "Vision 21: Religious Issues for the 21st Century" was the highlight of the observance. Taking part were: State Rep. Lynn Jondahl, moderator; Charles Chandler, St. Katherine's Episcopal Church, Williamston; Dr. W. Fred Graham, MSU Dept. of Religion; Vernon Moore, Harvest House Ministry, Lansing; Darrel Neves, Faith Lutheran Church, Okemos; Douglas Philips, First Baptist Church, Okemos; Mark Ramsey,





Presbyterian Church of Okemos; David Tobey, Okemos Nazarene Church and David Evans, Master of Ceremonies. The clergy panel engaged in a lively discussion on the future of religion and churches in the 21st century. A banquet followed in the Social Hall.

In this period, the Okemos Community Church Women continued their fund-raising with rummage sales, bazaars and in 1995 sold Koeze nuts. Principal use of their funds has been the support of United Methodist mission projects and a good number of religious and helping organizations in the greater Lansing area. Teaming with the Missions Committee, they have filled 25 Thanksgiving baskets and the same number of Christmas baskets for the less fortunate. Christian Services provides the names of recipients. Under the auspices of George Grettenberger, the church has taken part in the Haiti Hot Lunch program for children sponsored by the United Methodist Church Board of Missions.

In April 1992, the church was host to former Iranian hostage, Allen Steen. The congregation was enthralled by his low key description of his five years in captivity.

No church, despite the variety of denominational and congregational programs in various areas, can live entirely unto itself. A part of its presence in the community should be making available its facilities to helping agencies and where needed, the sponsorship of beneficial programs. Okemos Community Church has hosted many community programs such as the S.T.E.P. program for parents, the Kiwanis Club of Okemos, sponsored a local Boy Scout troop, has hosted A.A. (reflecting the historic temperance stand of the denomination); maintaining a food bank for those in need, cooperating and helping fund in part the Council Against Domestic Abuse and Habitat for Humanity, in whose program some church members joined for house-building. The list goes on.

Much of the smoothness in administering these projects and programs can be attributed to the skill of Joan Travis who has presided over the church office and administration for 28 years.

On June 30, 1996, James W. Boehm will become pastor of the Okemos Community Church as preparation for the 21st century continues.



FAMILY ALBUM





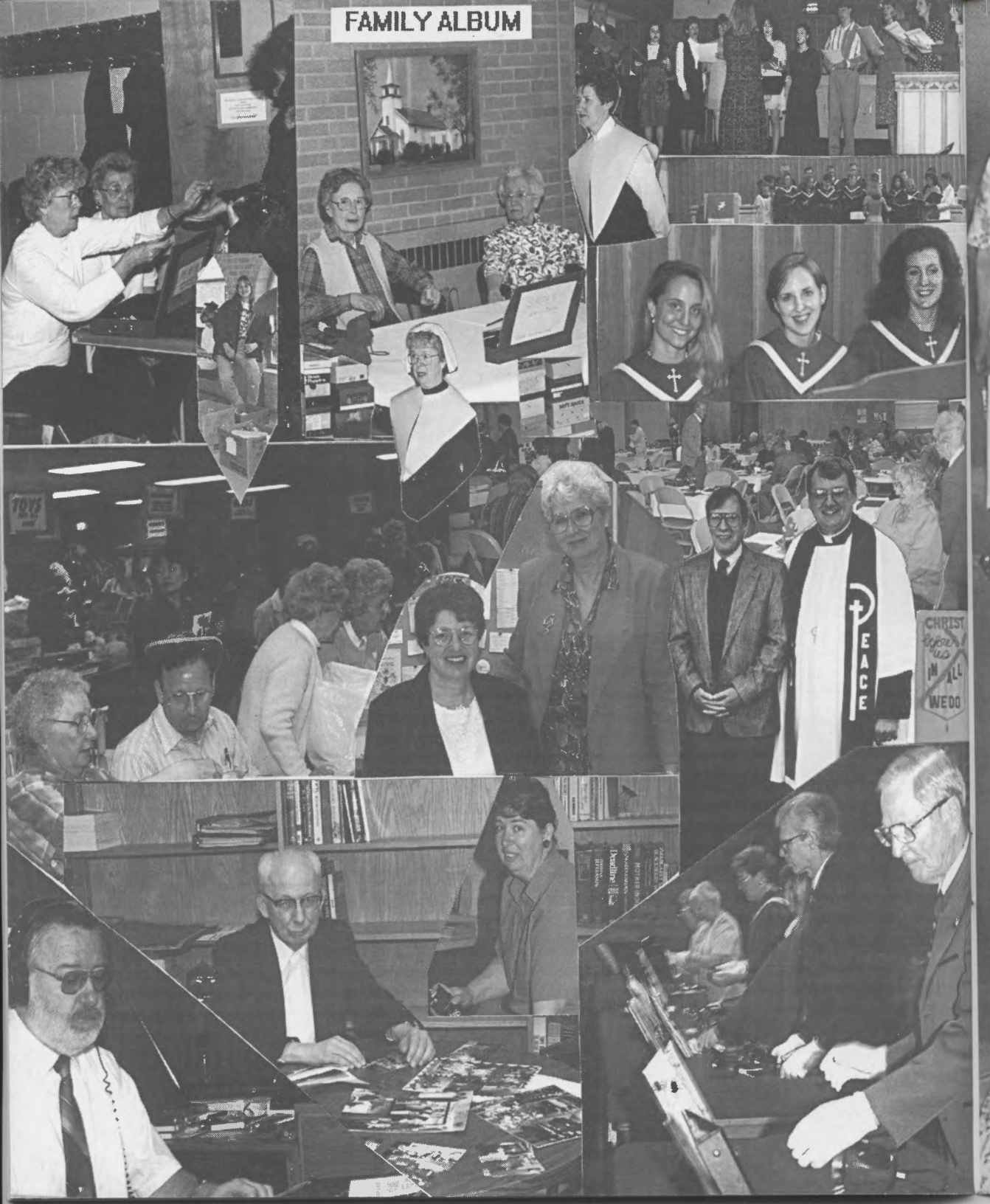


FAMILY ALBUM





# FAMILY ALBUM







FAMILY ALBUM

MISSION OUTREACH 1975

**APPENDIX**  
**POPULATION ANALYSIS**

**GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**

Meridian Township was a rural township in 1940, with a population of less than 5,000, encompassing settlements in Okemos and Haslett, and along Grand River Avenue. The Township experienced substantial population growth in the years following World War II. In the 1940's, the population almost doubled with the addition of over 4,300 residents. The 1960's was the decade of greatest growth, with a population increase of almost 10,000. More recently the rate of growth has slowed, but the Township still added over 6,600 residents in the 1980's (see Table I).

A straightforward interpretation of the figures in Table I is difficult because residential portions of the Township have been annexed into East Lansing over the years. If not for the annexations, the growth rates reported in Table I would be higher in certain decades. For example, a major annexation that occurred in 1979 involving 2,900 residents accounts in part for the slower growth recorded in 1980.

**TABLE I - TOTAL POPULATION**

YEAR	POPULATION	NUMERICAL CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
1930	2,878	—	—
1940	4,767	+1,889	+65.6%
1950	9,180	+4,341	+91.1%
1960	13,884	+4,776	+52.4%
1970	23,817	+9,933	+71.5%
1980	28,754	+4,397	+20.7%
1990	35,644	+6,890	+24.0%

Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce

**SUB-DIVISIONS OF OKEMOS**

ASBURY COMMONS  
BEAR LAKE  
BRIARWOOD  
CEDAR BEND HEIGHTS  
CHIPPEWA HILLS\*  
CORNELL WOODS  
COYOTE CREEK  
FOREST HILLS  
GREEN MEADOW BROOK  
HERRON ACRES

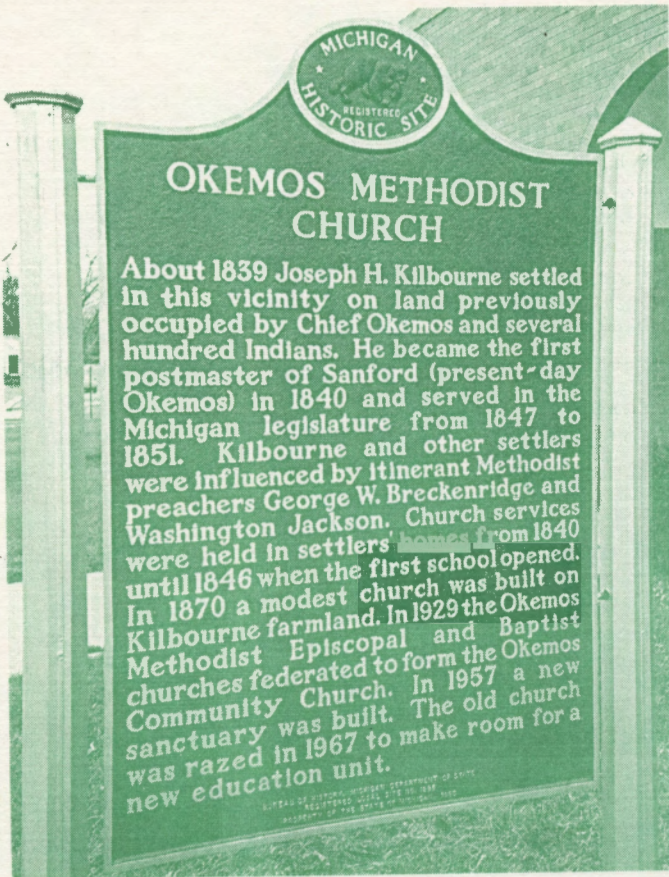
HIAWATHA LAKES  
HIAWATHA PARK  
INDIAN HILLS\*  
INDIAN LAKE ESTATES  
KEYSTONE  
KINGSWOOD  
NAVAJO RIDGE  
OTTAWA HILLS\*  
PONDEROSA  
RIVER DOWNS

RIVERWOOD  
SHAKER HEIGHTS  
SHOALS  
SIERRA VISTA ESTATES  
SUNDANCE ESTATES  
SUNWIND ESTATES  
STONE BROOK  
SYLVAN GLEN  
TACOMA HILLS  
WARDCLIFF HEIGHTS

\*at beginning of 1950



## HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION



Dr. David Evans, Rep. H. Lynn Jondahl, Twp. Clerk Virginia White, Mich. Historical Commission member Sandra Clark, Rev. Joyce DeToni-Hill, J. Wesley Olds and Rev. Charles Grauer. The marker is dedicated to Milton and Thelma Lamb.