

Time Tracs

By Jim Ingram

As early as 1825, the pioneer missionaries started visiting the early settlers of Orion. Elder Norton, a Baptist, Elder Warren, a Methodist, and Elder Earl, a Protestant Methodist, are remembered as being among the first to proclaim the gospel here.

Those who preached on the the circuit, as it was called in those days, would go on horseback to sparsely settled areas and hold their meetings in the homes of the most prominent settlers.

Later, around 1831, these services were held in school houses. One of these was the Eaton school house which still stands on the northeast corner of Predmore and Lake George Roads.

Scattered throughout the area were Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists. They all felt the need for a house of worship, but each was too poor to build one alone. They got together and agreed to build a common church which they called the Union Church.

This church remains today on the northeast corner of North Broadway and Church Streets in Lake Orion. It was the first church, built in 1854, in what is now Orion Township. It is pictured with this column as it looks today.

It's described in an early Oakland County history as a neat frame church, 35 by 50 feet, to which a session-room, 26 by 18 feet and a kitchen, 12 by 18 feet, were added in 1877.

The entire cost of the building was \$5,000. At its completion, a debt of \$250 remained. The Congregational Missionary Society agreed to pay off the debt in return for being able to dedicate the church and have priority on the time of their service.

At first this worked out well for the Methodists as the Congregationalists decided on a 2 p.m. service and the Methodists chose 10 a.m. for theirs. For some reason they were the only two groups who continued to use the church.

Later, however when the Congregationalists decided to have their service at 10 a.m., it worked a hardship on the Methodists and they began thinking about building their own church. They did so and it was completed and dedicated in 1873.

The following is an excerpt from a history compiled from memory in 1924 on the 52nd anniversary of the Methodist church by John T. Owen, the only man then living who had taken part in the early building program. I think it might also apply to the building of the Union Church.

"Everyone worked as if it were their own house they were building. No one kept track of time or labor unless it was a young fellow who was foolish enough to keep a diary. All horse team work was donated. I have no idea how much others did but in said diary I find this memorandum:

Work done for church: 2 1/2 days drawing stone, 4 days drawing lumber, 6 trips to Roods' mill for lumber, 7 trips to Lapeer for lumber, 2 trips to Parker's mill for shingles, 2 trips to Roods, mills for siding, 4 trips to Pontiac for nails, lime, lumber,



The Union Church

whole number of days work for men and team -32 1/2."

The Union Church became the Congregational Church in 1873, the Methodists having moved into their own new church. It remained so until the early 1900s when the Congregational Society disbanded.

At this point, the Episcopalians used the church for a short time. Following this the Baptists were offered the use of the church in 1912 and continued to use it.

The Congregational Society deeded their property to the Baptists in January 1921 for \$1 with the stipulation it be used for church services only or become the property of the village.

It was then organized as the Orion Baptist Church. After a split in the congregation in 1942, the original members stayed in the church and it became known as the First Baptist Church.

It remained such until 1972 when the Baptists built a new church on Scripps Road in Orion Township.

The church was then purchased by the Village of Lake Orion. Much of the building was converted to village offices and the police station. The sanctuary was used for council meetings and other public meetings.

The village then sold the building to the Apostolic Church which defaulted and the church returned to village ownership.

Lake Orion sold it to Orion Township for \$1 in 1988. It was then converted into a senior citizen's center. The original church, the sanctuary, remains in basically sound condition but is unable to be used because of a structural weakness in the floor.

(The writer obtained much factual information for this column from histories of the First Baptist Church by Beulah Schick and the United Methodist Church by Donald Lessiter, Helen Chapin and Marie Shoup.)