

MITCHELL-ROUNTREE COTTAGE, A METHODIST SHRINE

The Bicentennial Pilgrimage of the United Historical Society of Wisconsin scheduled for September 18, will feature a visit to United Methodism's Badger State link with the Revolution -- the Mitchell-Rountree cottage in Platteville.

It was built for the Rev. Samuel Mitchell in 1837. Mitchell was a Virginian who saw service in the Continental Army. While still a youth -- 16 years of age -- he was one of Daniel Morgan's dispatch bearers. That was in 1780. The next year he was in Washington's army in the final days of the struggle, and too, part in the historic surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, which marked the practical end of the war for independence.

In the Shenandoah Valley where the Mitchells lived on a plantation, there were many houses similar in design and material to the one erected in Platteville. Lynda Blythe and Judith Kleinmaier, in an article in the State Historical Society publication Wisconsin Then and Now (November 1972) wrote, "Its roots are in Virginia, where limestone houses much like it once abounded in the Shenandoah Valley. And its architectural forebears can be traced back several centuries in rural England."

Chaste and simple, yet with a perfection of form and dimension which gives it unusual beauty, the house faces south. Four windows with the multiple planes characteristic of early homes, grace the front, two on each side of the central entrance. Three symmetrically-placed dormers project from the roof. Large chimneys stand like sentries at each end of the roof.

The Mitchell-Rountree Cottage was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. It is owned and maintained by the Grant County Historical Society. It is open for public viewing during the summer months in charge of the curator, Mrs. Lloyd Grimes.

The other name applied to the famous cottage in northwest Platteville which is the object of the Bicentennial Pilgrimage, Rountree, also has historic importance.

John Hawkins Rountree moved into the house some time after the Rev. Samuel Mitchell moved to Missouri in the 1840's. He is usually called the founder of Platteville. In 1827 he bought a mining claim on the site of the present city, built a sod house, and began the mining of lead. His business prospered, his holdings increased, and he erected a smelter in the area.

Rountree's wife, Mary Grace, was a daughter of the Rev. Samuel Mitchell and brother of the Rev. John T., James, and Frank T. Mitchell.

John donated the building which was the first meeting house owned by the congregation. He was a vigorous supporter of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and a charter member of the Platteville congregation.

In 1871, when for the first time lay delegates were admitted to General Conference (M.E.), he was elected to represent the West Wisconsin Conference -- the first layman in the state to be so honored.

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COBB CELEBRATED

The Methodist Church at Cobb was organized by pioneer folk in July, 1876. The two day celebration honored both the Centennial and the Bicentennial.

TRIBUTE TO METHODIST PATRIARCH

The name Mitchell stands high among the pioneers of the United Methodist movement in Wisconsin. In this bicentennial year it fills a place of special importance for Badger followers of the cross and flame -- a living link with the American Revolution.

Born in 1764, Samuel Mitchell served in the Continental Army in 1880 and 1881. Following the end of the conflict, along with his brother Edward, he was converted under Methodist preaching. Both became licensed as exhorters, and still later became local preachers. They worked with Bishops Asbury and McKendree, travelled circuits, preached at camp meetings, and are credited with the founding of some churches. Whether or not either of them became members of an annual conference we do not know -- but they did the work of itinerant circuit riders.

Samuel inherited slaves -- one account puts the number at 25. His brother Edward was, like him, a slaveholder. Following the close of the Revolution a movement to end slavery through emancipation spread through Virginia Methodism, aided and supported by Bishops Coke and Asbury.

In 1785 a petition, widely circulated among Methodists of the Old Dominion, read, ". . . we humbly intreat the Honourable the Assembly, As their superior wisdom may dictate to them, to pursue the most prudential, but effectual method, for the immediate or Gradual Extirpation of slavery . . ." Asbury and Coke carried one to Mount Vernon to solicit the signature of General Washington. They made their visit on May 26, 1785. While the general expressed his agreement in principle, he did not sign, but promised if the Assembly took up the matter, to inform them of his support.

Among the slaveholders whose consciences were quickened were the Mitchell brothers. Both freed their slaves, and moved to the free territory of Illinois to be rid of the institution. A rather full account of the movement, by Richard K. McMaster, assistant professor of history at Western Carolina University, can be found in the October, 1971 issue of Methodist History.

Three of Samuel's sons, John T., James, and Frank T., followed the example of their father in evangelical zeal, and became Methodist preachers, each of them serving, at one time or another, on Wisconsin charges. John T. was the circuit rider who organized the Platteville Church in 1833. His daughter Mary Grace (Mrs. J. H. Rountree) lived in Platteville, and in 1837 the home on the northwest side of the city, known now as the Mitchell-Rountree cotttge, was built for Samuel and his wife. The couple lived there until her death in 1842. Alone and aging, the Revolutionary veteran and pioneer circuit rider moved to Missouri, where he spent the last years of his life with his son, the Rev. Frank T. Mitchell. On his death in 1855 his remains were returned to Platteville, and he was buried beside his wife in the local cemetery. His cottage and his grave remain today as tangible links between the beginnings of our nation and our Church in the 18th century and United Methodism in Wisconsin today.

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A SERVICE STATION PRESENTS CHURCH HISTORY

The MUSCODA PROGRESSIVE has been carrying articles under the caption A BIT OF HISTORY. Two of the recent advertisements for Duffey's Service Station presents the story of the merger of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches into the new United Church of Muscoda.

WILLERUP CELEBRATES

In 1855 Rev. Christian B. Willerup was called to Europe to help establish Methodism in the Scandanavian countries which until then were predominantly Lutheran.

The American church that bears his name celebrated its 125th anniversary on May 1 and 2, 1976. It is known as the oldest Scandanavian Methodist Church in the World.

This church was incorporated at Madison May 3, 1851

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CLEAR LAKE CENTENNIAL

It was in 1876 that Clear Lake was appointed to the Apple River Circuit (changed later to the Clear Lake Charge). The first sermon was given by Rev. W. Howe on July 23, 1876

On the eve of September 9, 1884, the church was blown down by a cyclone, but in 1887 a new church arose on the site, with the dedication on July 7, 1889

Today the Clear Lake Charge is made up of Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest, and Cylon.

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Notice-- Church Librarians

The Library of Congress is preparing a series of leaflets in the preservation field for the librarian or archivist with a need for basic information on the preservation of relatively small collections but with limited knowledge and experience in the conservation of books and documents. These are available without charge by order from The Library of Congress, Attn: Assistant Director for Preservation, Administrative Dept., Washington, DC 20540

FLASHBACKS

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Do any of the members of your church remember?

Are there happenings of worth only you might know?

- Ministers you remember -- missionary stories you have heard
- lay persons in your church -- old class meetings -- revivals
- camp meetings -- Ladies Aid -- Epworth League --
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Send material to the editor of Flashbacks ---

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