



## UNITED METHODIST HISTORIAN DEAD

The Rev. Herman A. Block, author of Historical Data, Wisconsin Conference, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1840-1869, the history of the Evangelical and United Brethren denominations in the Badger state, died February 29, 1980, at Evergreen Manor, Oshkosh, where he had resided for many years.

Born in Germany July 5, 1879, he celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday last summer. Relatives, friends, former parishioners, and fellow historians paid tribute to his service to the church as pastor and historian. The conference Commission on Archives and History presented him a plaque expressing the appreciation of the United Methodists of Wisconsin for his valuable contribution to the history of the denomination in the state. His wife, the former Louise Neubauer, to whom he was married July 8, 1908, preceded him in death April 5, 1971.

In addition to the history of the E.U.B. conference, Mr. Block wrote a number of historical pamphlets, including one on Bishop Samuel J. Umbreit and the Umbreit family, and another on the two young Wisconsin-born Evangelical missionaries, Rev. Lewis C. Sæder and Rev. August Nierens, who were martyred by Indians in Minnesota in 1862. He also served as a valued consultant during the research and writing of Cross and Flame in Wisconsin, going over each manuscript chapter as it was prepared, and making suggestions for its final draft.

A graduate of North Central Seminary, Naperville, Illinois, Mr. Block served as a pastor for 48 years until his retirement in 1950.

A service was held March 3 in the Seefeldt Memorial Chapel, Oshkosh, with Rev. Melvin J. Roehrdanz (Evergreen Manor chaplain) and Rev. James Verduin officiating. A complete memorial service was held in Albright United Methodist Church in Milwaukee March 4. Participating were: Rev. Kent D. Richmond, Albright pastor; Rev. Dr. Raymond Veh (who had worked with him on historical projects); and Rev. Elmer Harvey, retired administrator of Evergreen Manor. Burial was in the South Milwaukee Congregational Church cemetery.

A daughter, Mrs. Ruth Puhl, Sun City, Arizona; and a son, Paul Block of Glendale, Arizona; six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren survive.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. J. R. Steiner of Loyal, Wisconsin, has asked why the FLASHBACKS account of Camps Byron and Lomira did not include Erhardt Woods, a place dear to him. The FLASHBACKS article was more or less a brief review of memoriscient talks given at the Pilgrimage and may not have agreed with all the details of the research article in DIMENSIONS.

The five page letter which told of the family of Alice Cowles Steiner having a cottage at Camp Byron and Mr. Steiner's parents having one at Lomira will be sent to the Archives to go with other material on these two beloved camp sites.

## BLACK CHURCHES IN EARLY WISCONSIN

Black United Methodists in Wisconsin are found in three centers, Milwaukee, Beloit, and Racine. Within the Wisconsin Conference at present are the following congregations: Milwaukee St. James; Beloit St. Matthias; and Racine Faith (integrated by merger of the white and Black congregations Bethel and St. John's). Faith continues as an integrated congregation, with fairly good Black participation, although the latter makes up only about 10% of the membership. Originally called Bethel-St. John's, the name Faith was adopted in 1975.

Churches related to other Methodist bodies are: Milwaukee St. Marks (African Methodist Episcopal), Milwaukee St. Matthew's (Christian Methodist Episcopal), Milwaukee Clement Memorial (African Methodist Episcopal Zion), and Beloit Wesley (Christian Methodist Episcopal).

However, immediately following the Civil War, several settlements of Blacks developed in the Badger state. Two such communities were in Fox Lake and Hurrican Corners, the latter a few miles south of Lancaster.

A congregation of Blacks was organized shortly after the close of the Civil War in both localities. The one near Lancaster was the result of United Brethren missionary effort. It was connected with the regular White structure, although Black in membership. In 1883 and 1884 the pastor was D. W. Smith, who, when the conservatives seceded around 1890 under the leadership of Bishop Milton Wright to form the United Brethren Church (Old Constitution), went with the latter group. The church was part of the Platte River Circuit, for that was Smith's appointment those two years.

In Fox Lake the colony began just after the close of the war between the states. War casualties from the area had been heavy, and in addition quite a few able-bodied men moved to take up available land west of the Mississippi. Hence farms were short of help.

In a community effort spear-headed by Quartus H. Barron a carload of Black families, uprooted by the war, was brought to the village with the help of a New York-based organization devoted to helping newly-freed Blacks. About ninety individuals made up the group.

Initially they lived on the farms where they worked, but winters were hard on them, and they came into town and established themselves in the eastern part of the village. The men worked on the farms during the summer months, and proved to be capable and industrious.

Among the families was that of Samuel and Sarah Matthews. Due largely to the leadership of Mrs. Matthews, Aunt Sally as she was known to everyone in town, a Black Methodist church was organized in the 1870s. A building was erected and served as the home for the congregation during its life.

With the mechanization of farming less labor was needed, and one by one families moved away seeking greater opportunities for work. Many went to live in Chicago. This resulted in a decline in church membership, and about 1900 the church was dissolved and the building remodelled to become a home. Some families remained, and were welcomed into the white congregation.

This church was affiliated either with the Colored Methodist Episcopal (now Christian Methodist Episcopal) or the African Methodist Episcopal Zion denominations. It was known locally as "Zion Methodist," but William D. Ames, pastor of the local Methodist Episcopal congregation, in an entry in his diary dated April 17, 1893, called it the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.

Two other similar congregations existed in southwestern Wisconsin, settled initially by free Blacks prior to the Civil War. One was Cheyenne Valley in the Town of Forest in Vernon County. It was a farming community in which Blacks and Whites owned farms which were interspersed. There was social, economic, and religious integration. A Free Methodist Church served from LaFarge formed the religious center.

The other was the Pleasant Ridge community in the Town of Beetown, Grant County. The first Black settlers were free and settled there prior to the Civil War, buying farms and showing skill in making them productive.

A church was organized, and in 1870 a building was put up to serve as home for the congregation. It was known locally as the United Brethren Methodist Church. What its official affiliation was the writer does not know.

A history of these two Black communities, Cheyenne Valley and Pleasant Ridge, is contained in a pamphlet, Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin by Zachary Cooper, published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

There were undoubtedly other such settlements in the same period, and other Black Methodist, United Brethren, or Evangelical congregations. Any information relating to such churches should be sent to the conference historian, Rev. William Blake, 422 Webster St., Berlin, Wisconsin 54923. Such material will prove especially helpful in carrying forward the Black United Methodist History Project of the conference Commission on Archives and History.

#### A PRAIRIE DU SAC METHODIST CHURCH CELEBRATION

The Zion United Methodist Church, the former Denzer Church, celebrated its 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary on November 4, 1979

In 1844 Bishop Seybert and Reverend Miller of the Evangelical Church, came to Sauk County, visited at the home of Barthelomew Ragatz, and established the Honey Creek church, known as the Ragatz church. Among other churches stemming from this endeavor was the Denzer Church.

In 1961 William Denzer donated land for a church, a school, and a cemetery. By 1864 a log church had been built with the members giving \$3.20 toward the \$25.00 cost of a fence. (In 1961 the present fence cost \$340.00). In 1871 \$22.50 was spent during the entire year.

The present church described as beautiful with tower and bell was built in 1884.

For many years after an evening service the janitor took home a wash basket of chimneys from the kerosene lamps in the chandelier that hung from the circle in the ceiling and from the bracket lamps.

For a time Denzer, Honey Creek, and Stone's Pocket were known as the East Sauk circuit. Sometime the Denzer and the Honey Creek churches met together for communion. Denzer's first Sunday School records are dated 1889. Sermons were in German with the 1897 constitution for young people written in the German tongue. After World War one, English was used. During the years 1925 and 1929 the younger people ceased to observe the custom of the ladies sitting on the left with the male members on the right.

In 1933 the church observed its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and in 1964 its centennial celebration. A brochure written at that time listed all of the ministers. The history of the church written by Arline Waldinger for the 1979 brochure provided the information for the above article.

FROM THE PEN OF EDITH E. NOHLING -

A banquet on Dec. 29, 1979, culminated a year long celebration of fifty years in the present building of the First United Methodist Church in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The theme of the year was "A Heritage to Celebrate" and each month saw a special program in celebration. One of the highlights was former pastor's night in April when two former pastors and five former associate pastors were in attendance. The following day these men assisted in the worship service. This is the fourth building of the 144 year old congregation, and to make it ready for the next fifty years, practically every room has been redecorated, including the large sanctuary. At the rededication service on Sunday, Dec. 30, Bishop DeWitt officiated and the exact order of service was used as at the 1929 service.

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# FLASHBACKS

*Official newsletter of the United Methodist  
Historical Society of Wisconsin*

Miss Margaret H. Scott, *editor*

1400 W. Seminary St., Richland Center, Wis. 53581

Material of historical interest, such as church anniversaries, recollections, activities of local church historical committees, and historians should be sent to her at the above address.

## OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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Membership applications and dues should be sent to the membership secretary at the above address.

"For there are two heavens sweet,  
Both made of love -- one conceivable  
Even by the other, so divine it is;  
The other far on this side of the stars,  
By men called home.

As long as there are homes to which men turn  
At the close of day,  
So long as there are homes where children are,  
Where women stay,  
If love and loyalty and faith be found  
Across those sills,  
A stricken nation can recover  
From those ills."

Leigh Hunt