Grace United Methodist Church Records MS-866

Finding aid prepared by Annelise Doll, revised by Elizabeth Russell

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections 9/16/2011
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Summary Information

Repository Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country

Historical Collections

Creator Grace United Methodist Church (Houghton, Mich.).

Title Grace United Methodist Church Records

Date [inclusive] 1832-2008

Extent 15.93 cubic feet; 43 manuscript boxes

Language English

Language of Material English

Mixed materials [Drawer] 53

Container I-L

Mixed materials [Box] 1-43

Abstract Collection, 1832-2008, of the Grace United Methodist Church in

Houghton, Michigan. Includes a wide variety of records, such as

sacramental documents, minutes of committees, church newsletters and bulletins, and materials gathered for church anniversaries and historical publications. The collection also contains records from other Methodist church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula which have closed and/or merged with Grace United Methodist Church, including those at Central Mine,

Dollar Bay, Hancock, Hurontown, Trimountain, and Zeba.

Preferred Citation

MS-866, Grace United Methodist Church Records, Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

Organizational History

Grace United Methodist Church was founded in 1854 by Pastor Lewis Earl, who was appointed the pastor of the newly created Portage Lake Mission in 1853 by the Methodist Episcopal Church's Michigan Conference. In 1854 Earl created the first Methodist "class," the most fundamental unit of Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Portage Lake Class of 1854, the first organized religious body in Houghton, later evolved into the Grace United Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Portage Lake Class was served by appointees to the Portage Lake Mission until 1860. A Board of Trustees, a group that deals with property issues, was created in 1856, and a Building Committee was formed in 1857, evidence that members began making plans for a permanent church structure. Up until this time church members had likely gathered in their homes or in a multi-functional school house that offered space to church groups on a first come, first served basis.

A lot was donated for the church building by James Pryor, son of founding members Joseph and Elizabeth Pryor. The lot was just east of the church's present location on the corner of Isle Royale Street and East Montezuma Avenue. Construction of the wooden church began in the spring of 1859 and continued into the fall. It was during this time that pastor Robert Bird was appointed to the Portage Lake Mission. Upon his arrival Bird insisted that construction on the donated lot cease and the church be built on a corner lot. This would presumably give the new church greater exposure and accessibility. The donated lot was sold for \$200 and the present location on the corner of Isle Royal Street and East Montezuma Avenue was purchased for \$250. The partially built frame of the church was moved to the new lot and construction was completed in 1859, when it was dedicated. Bird only remained in Houghton for one year, leaving to become the presiding elder of the Methodist Church's Lake Superior district. David B. Tracy was named his successor, but refused the appointment. His refusal was likely related to the extreme isolation of Houghton, which was virtually closed to the outside world during the winter months. William Brown, a temporary replacement, served until 1861 when William Fox was chosen. It was the policy of the Methodist Church during this time period to move pastors to a new location every year, except in certain circumstances where one was allowed to stay for two or three years. Fox was granted a two year appointment, and after that Grace was served continuously with pastors.

Fox's arrival in Houghton in 1861 also marks the point at which the Portage Lake Class becomes known as Grace Methodist Episcopal Church. Grace became known in its early years as 'Mother Church' because of its role in creating new churches. Members of Grace were critical in the establishment of both the Hurontown Methodist Church and Hancock's First Methodist Church in 1861. By 1866 Grace had grown from its original twelve members to between fifty and seventy members. Official membership grew slowly after this as becoming a full-fledged member of a Methodist Church was an involved process that not all church-goers went through. The congregation was no doubt more numerous than the official membership reveals, since over one hundred children attended Grace's Sunday School Program in 1865.

By the time Calvin M. Thompson arrived as pastor of Grace Church in 1888 the gap in religious education between Sunday School and programs offered to adults was of major concern for the Methodist community. In 1889 Thompson founded a 'Young Peoples Union' to solve this problem. The organization was followed by the creation of the Epworth League, which was the Methodist Church's

national response to the same problem. With the help of the fundraising efforts of the Epworth League, Grace M. E. Church was able to purchase their first organ.

In about 1890 Grace's congregation began making plans for a new sandstone church building, which was designed by William T. Pryor, descendant of charter church members Elizabeth and Joseph Pryor. Pryor was assisted by A. C. Lane, Michigan's state geologist and faculty member of Houghton's Michigan College of Mines. Sandstone was donated from Jacobsville quarries. Construction was completed in 1893 and featured not only a basement, which had been absent in the wooden structure, but also a boiler room and rooms for Sunday School, a kitchen, and space for socializing. The church also had frescoes covering its walls that were considered quite impressive.

Grace M. E. Church fell on hard times after the completion of the sandstone church; a depression in 1893 left the congregation struggling to pay off its debt. Church membership had begun to grow in the years directly proceeding, but then dipped. However, last payment of the debt was paid by 1902, around which point membership rose again. By 1915 Grace had grown to 225 official members, which may be attributed to the relaxation of rules related to full church membership.

On November 24, 1916 a fire broke out in the church building. The organ, kitchen, and furnace room were destroyed, but many of the pews, the stained glass windows, and the floor remained intact. Numerous community churches and groups offered their support and space during Grace's time of need, and the congregation decided to rent the hall of a Masonic Temple for \$10 per week until the church could be rebuilt. Many members of Grace felt that a new church should be built, one that could better accommodate the space needed for Sunday School, which at this time was increasing in importance within the Methodist Church. However, even after extensive planning and the purchase of a plot nearby, the new church was never constructed; World War I began and the cost of material and labor skyrocketed. The congregation eventually decided to restore and expand the old sandstone church. Because of financial hardship, restoration and construction was not completed until 1925. By 1929, Grace's 75th Anniversary, all construction debt was paid.

After a short period of prosperity following the completion of the church, Grace once again fell on hard times when the Great Depression struck. Despite the uncertainty of the 1930s the congregation was able to secure enough pledges from the congregation for the purchase of a new organ. After much difficulty paying the debt, final payment was made in February of 1937.

With the onset of World War II Grace Church's outreach to college students and youth expanded. In 1942, then pastor Gernsey Gorton secured a Wesley Foundation for the Michigan College of Mining and Technology. The Wesley Foundation had for several decades served as a formal student-oriented religious presence on college campuses. Pastors appointed to Grace also served as directors of the Wesley Foundation for several years, and while initially there was not a separate building for the Wesley Foundation, the Detroit Conference did appoint a Board of Trustees and provide funding for programs and equipment.

By the mid to late 1950s membership had swelled to over 400, and by 1956 pastor Ken Callis began the tradition of holding two services, as the sanctuary could hold 275 at most. The large increase can be at least partially attributed to the growth of Michigan Tech during this period. The congregation once again began to consider expanding the church and purchased a house on the east side of Grace Church in 1955. The house was demolished and signs intended to attract new members were erected along the highway.

Today this spot is the church's "Memorial Garden." Improvements were also made to the parsonage on Agate Street, which had been owned since 1908.

In 1961 a second property adjacent to Grace, on the south side of the church, was purchased and used for additional Sunday School classes. It was also hoped that this would provide the opportunity for further expansion to the church if the need arose. In 1965 a Long-Range Study Committee was organized by pastor David Church to discern if such an expansion was necessary. While the Committee found that the church sanctuary was still adequate, many other issues were examined. More space was needed for Sunday School and there was a need for easier access to the church for the elderly and disabled. In response to this, the recently purchased house was demolished in anticipation for a new education building.

In 1966, examining the combined cost of a new Sunday School space and the continued upkeep of the sandstone church, many believed that abandoning the historic church and rebuilding would be the best decision. In 1967 four acres were purchased on the corner of Sharon and Garnet Streets in Houghton for the relocation of the entire church. However, this new church was never erected. Even though a majority of the congregation approved of the Building Committee's recommendation to relocate, a significant minority fought against it, either because they did not want to move locations, or did not like the proposed location. This, combined with a conflict over legal control of property between the Detroit Board and the Wesley Foundation Board, caused support for the building project to disintegrate.

In 1968 Grace Methodist Episcopal Church became Grace United Methodist Church, but in reality the congregation was anything but united. A strained relationship existed between the congregation and pastor Carter W. Preston, who many believed was told by the Detroit Conference to remain aloof from members involved in the Wesley Foundation, who also happened to be key members of Grace as a whole. Indeed, many at the church harbored resentment toward the Detroit Conference for penalizing the church after not being given control over the Wesley Foundation at Michigan Tech.

By 1969 it had been decided that money would be put into upkeep of the sandstone church instead of into a fund for a new building. As maintenance had been neglected in anticipation of relocating to a new structure, there was much work to be done on the historic church. In 1971 the property on Sharon and Garnet Street was sold. Though a tense atmosphere existed at Grace during this period, the congregation was able to make several key improvements, including the addition of a fire escape, the construction of a 'cry room' at the back of the sanctuary, and the dedication of a new pipe organ. 1969 also saw Hurontown Methodist Church merge with Grace United Methodist Church due to declining membership. Those left largely welcomed the change.

The arrival of pastor James McLaurin, a Calumet native, in 1970 saw the beginning of a healing period within the church. McLaurin, in addition to building bridges among those in the congregation who had been divided over the building project, also made an effort to reconnect Grace with its Cornish heritage. In 1976 he even participated in a pastoral exchange with Cornish pastor Derek Polgrean. McLaurin and his family journeyed to Polgrean's church in St. Austell, Cornwall and Polgrean and his family served at Grace.

Pastor Alan George came to Grace in 1976 in time for the 125th anniversary celebration, for which he helped plan a building project to commemorate the occasion. The congregation decided to construct an entrance to the church that would make it accessible to those with mobility issues. However, the changes required to make the "New Way In" possible once again created a tense atmosphere within the church.

Many left Grace permanently and membership reached a low that had not been seen since the 1916 fire. However, George remained at Grace until 1987 and was able grow membership slowly until his departure.

In 1987 another Long Range Planning Committee was formed to assess the adequacy of the facilities at Grace. A Task Force on Spatial and Facility Needs was then created to pursue the problems identified by the Committee. Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the past, chair of the Task Force, Jeryl Manchester, insured that the congregation was kept up-to-date with every step of the process. The Task Force extensively investigated options to both stay at the current location, or to relocate. After much deliberation, it was decided in 1988 to expand the existing church.

Though raising the funds that were required to improve and expand the sandstone church proved difficult, the project continued. Adjacent land was purchased for the creation of a parking lot with the help of the city of Houghton. The city needed additional parking for a nearby library and elderly housing facilities and offered labor and materials, and also rerouted Isle Royale Street, in exchange for use of portions of the lot. Construction of the addition to the church proved much more expensive than anticipated, but was completed and consecrated on June 30th, 1991.

Following these improvements Grace was able to host many more events than in the past. Membership grew and a successful Methodist ministry to students at Michigan Tech grew along with the rest of the church. Though little funding was received from the Detroit Conference for campus activities after the power struggle over the Wesley Foundation, students enjoyed the use of a house, the "Blue House," next to the church that had been purchased in the event of further expansion. In 1992 a campus ministry coordinator was hired and the organization became known as Grace Fellowship.

When Tom Anderson became pastor of Grace in 1995 he focused his energies on improving and expanding ministries. His approach was to incorporate a modern feel to the church, but he also wanted to bring back the caring emphasis that had been present in the early, small "classes" of the Methodist Church. For a contemporary feel Anderson added a Wednesday evening service that featured the "Amazing Grace Praise Band," and also focused his efforts on small Bible study groups.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

Collection, 1832-2008, of the Grace United Methodist Church in Houghton, Michigan. Includes sacramental documents, minutes of committees, church newsletters and bulletins, and materials gathered for church anniversaries and historical publications. The collection also contains records from other Methodist church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula which have closed and/or merged with Grace United Methodist Church, including those at Central Mine, Dollar Bay, Hancock, Hurontown, Trimountain, and Zeba.

Arrangement

Material is arranged by subject in 14 series: Terry Reynold's Church History Files; Grace United Methodist Church History; Anniversaries; Sacramental Records; Membership and Attendance Records; Administrative Records; Committees and Groups; Church Conferences; Newsletters; Bulletins; Events; Miscellaneous; Media; and Other Methodist Churches.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections 9/16/2011

Revision Description

9/24/2012

Access

Available for use in the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections.

Conditions Governing Use

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Acquisition

Material was donated to the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections by the Grace United Methodist Church of Houghton, Michigan on March 18, 2011.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

• Grace United Methodist Church (Houghton, Mich.).

Genre(s)

- Audiovisual materials
- Bulletins
- Histories
- Membership lists
- Minutes
- Negatives (Photographic)
- Newsletters
- Photographs
- · Printed ephemera
- Slides (photographs)

Geographic Name(s)

- Central Mine (Mich.)
- Dollar Bay (Mich.)
- Hancock (Mich.)
- Houghton (Mich.)
- Hurontown (Mich.)
- Trimountain (Mich.)
- Zeba (Mich.)

Subject(s)

- Baptismal records--Michigan--Houghton
- Church buildings--Michigan--Houghton
- Church membership--Michigan--Houghton
- Church records and registers--Michigan--Houghton
- Marriage records--Michigan--Houghton

Grace United Methodist Church Pastors

The following is a comprehensive list of Grace United Methodist Church pastors from 1854 to present: • Lewis Earl 1854-1855 • R. T. Richard 1855-1856 • James R. Noble 1856-1857 • A. J. Black 1857-1859 • Robert Bird 1859-1960 • William Brown 1860-1861 • William Fox 1861-1863 • Geo. S. Betts 1863-1864 • John A. Baughman 1864-1866 • B. S. Taylor 1866-1869 • D. O. Hall 1869-1872 • Joseph Grazer 1872-1875 • John Sweet 1875-1878 • J. W. Johnson 1878-1880 • B. S. Taylor 1880-1881 • William Cook 1881-1883 • L. E. Lennox 1883-1885 • W. E. Biglow 1885-1888 • C. M. Thompson 1888-1893 • E. W. Frazee 1893-1894 • W. C. Hicks 1894-1896 • H. H. Culver 1896-1897 • D. H. Glass 1897-1899 • L. N. Moon 1899-1902 • Ames Maywood 1902-1904 • W. R. Fruit 1904-1909 • A. B. Sutcliff 1909-1910 • H. C. Shaw 1910-1912 • J. R. Rankin 1912-1915 • Grant Perkins 1915-1916 • G. G. Gilette 1916-1919 • John E. Lewin 1919-1925 • R. R. Feuell 1925-1930 • Gernsey F. Gorton 1930-1934 • Arthur E. Smith 1934-1940 • Everett K. Seymour 1940-1942 • Frederick C. Vosburg 1942-1944 • W. Cardwell Prout 1944-1950 • James R. Balfour 1950-1954 • Kenneth R. Callis 1954-1959 • Paul I. Greer 1959-1962 • David E. Church 1962-1968 • Carter W. Preston 1968-1972 • James H. McLaurin 1972-1978 • Derek Polgrean* 1976-1977 • Alan R. George 1978-1987 • Ronald K. Fulton 1987-1988 • David R. Strobe 1988-1995 • Thomas C. Anderson 1995-2008? • David Goudie 2009?-Present * Pulpit Exchange

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Conference Records 1968	25	2
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Hurontown Methodist Church - Church History 1961	3	1
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