

United Presbyterian Church, Mt. Ayr, Iowa

As early as 1857, there were United Presbyterians in the county. They came from good houses and churches, from places in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, Illinois and Indiana. To them, there was a feeling of destitution, and loneliness, danger in being without a home altar, a house of God. Itinerant missionaries coming through the country from time to time, ministered to them in their homes, or school houses, and even the court house.

At last, it was felt there must be a church home. The first suggestion came in 1860 in a talk between WJ Buck and Asher Lorimor, in one of their homes. They had heard of other United Presbyterians living in the county north on Grand River, in Middle Fork Township, Monroe Township, and Washington Township. After consultation and correspondence with these people, they concluded to ask Presbytery for recognition as a mission station.

The petition for same was written by WJ Buck, sitting on a log at the saw mill in old Marshalltown, a village of the past. This petition was addressed to the Des Moines Presbytery, which was the closest Presbytery at that time. Presbytery was indeed surprised. They did not know there were U.P. in Ringgold County and that they should be hunting Presbytery instead of Presbytery hunting them. It is well to note there was a descendent of WJ Buck as elder continuously for over 100 years.

The mission was recognized and Davis Pressly, MD was sent as the first ministerial supply. He served the mission for two years and practiced medicine at the same time. Healing of the body and soul at the time seemed to be associated. In July, 1860, the organization was completed by a commission from Des Moines Presbytery. The charter numbers were 14 and were as follows: Asher Lorimor, wife and sister; WJ Buck and his mother; James Sharp, wife and daughter; Mrs. Thomas Marshall; Mrs. Margaret and Mary Dunlap; Mrs. CK Pierson; and Mr. John Addison Miller and wife. The meetings were held in the courthouse in Mt. Ayr until the first church was built.

The early settlers and charter members could be seen on Sabbath morning coming across fields, as there were no roads to follow, on horseback, in spring wagons without the benefit of even a spring seat. Some walking distances of six to fifteen miles. None of these charter members lived closer than six miles.

During Rev. Brow's pastorate the congregation decided to build a church of their own. They had been holding services in the court house every other Sabbath. The Methodist congregation, which had been previously established to the U.P.'s, holding services on the other Sabbaths. There were only two congregations in the county of five or six thousand; Mt. Ayr having between five and six hundred inhabitants at that time. Rev. Brown came to Mt. Ayr in 1868 and was installed as the first minister in June 1869.

The new building was built at a cost of approximately \$3500. Much of the lumber was hauled from Afton, a distance of 25 miles. Joshua Millikin was the contractor. Since

money was scarce in those days in a country which had not been settled long, Rev. Brown's mother raised most of the money in Illinois and sent it to him. During the six years Rev. Brown was pastor, the membership grew to 100.

By 1902, the church was too small, so it was decided to build a new one where the old one stood. The cost of this building was \$12,320. All this amount had been provided for by the day of dedication in April 1903, except \$413. Before the meeting closed that day, \$575 had been pledged to pay off the deficit. How happy the congregation was. They had worked hard to realize the money. Even the Young People had a part in paying for the new building by taking over ME Cassidy's store for one week receiving 10% of all cash and produce. The seats in this sanctuary were sold for \$2 each to members and others, even the names of Gov. Cummings and Col. Hepburn appearing as buyers. The beautiful windows included the names of the purchasers. At the time it was built, it was the largest and most beautiful church building in town. There was no other church with as large a membership. This was the church building that was last used by the Presbyterians of UBPC.