

Opinion

323-1711

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coin

The Methodist story

The earliest religious organization in DeWitt, the Methodist-Episcopal Church, has its beginning with the circuit riders of the 1830s. The first congregation, organized by Elder Bennett in 1836, included: John and Pamela Gould, Asa and Mary Parker, Lewis and Lucinda Coburn, and Samuel Smith.

In the earliest years, the congregation met in various homes; in later years, it is believed that services were held in the village school house.

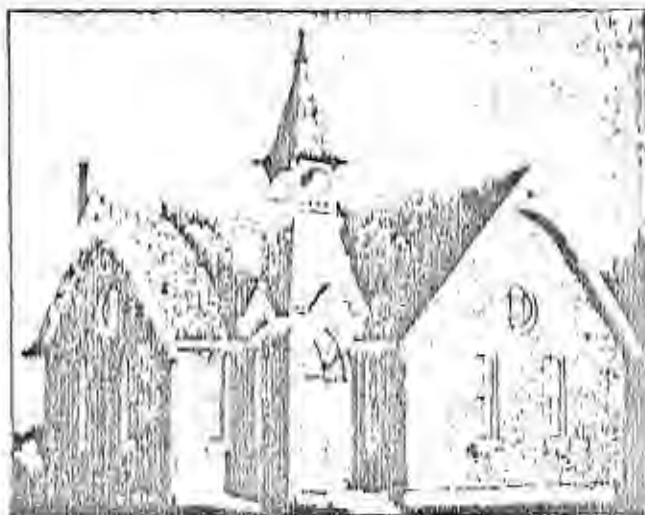
In 1846, a parsonage was built for the circuiting pastor. The exact location of this parsonage is not known, but it seems to have been on the west side of 74 Franklin Street, on the Public Square. Around 1900, a new parsonage was built at 211 W. Main. This served well for many decades, but was replaced by a new one at 501 W. Washington.

About 1865, the first Methodist Church structure was built on the west side of N. Bridge Street. The site had previously been owned by John Edwards, a dealer in stoves and tin ware. His store and dwelling house had occupied the lot. This wood frame church was occupied for only 30 years before being replaced.

An item in the Clinton County Republican issue of 1890 reads: "Red Shaw, the harness maker in DeWitt, has bought the old Methodist Church and is moving it across the street. He will convert it into a dance hall." It was not converted into a dance hall, but was sold to Homer Brazee and Willis McLough who totally rebuilt the structure and began a general store called Brazee & Co. It was the building which still stands on the north east corner of Main and Bridge Streets.

The Greek revival-style building was replaced in 1896 by a more substantial brick structure. This new church was an L-shaped building of a simple Gothic style with a small entrance and bell tower situated in the corner of the L.

On March 10, 1928, this building was destroyed by fire, after which the Baptist congregation, across the street, at once opened their doors to the Methodist membership. As a result, a good many of the later congregation joined with the Baptists and eventually formed an interdenominational church.



DESTROYED BY FIRE — This is the old Methodist Church that burned on March 10, 1928. Much of the congregation then worshipped with the Baptist church which was across the street, later forming an interdenominational church. However, some members of the Methodist Church eventually rebuilt the building on its original site. This structure is now the DeWitt Conservatory at 115 N. Bridge St.

There were, however, a good number of those who chose to hold Methodist services in the study of the parsonage on W. Main Street. With the help of insurance money and membership contributions, a new brick structure was built on the site of the former church in 1931. A large wing was added to this building 30 years later. This building, now housing the DeWitt Conservatory at 115 N. Bridge, was recently placed on the State Register of Historic Sites.

Beginning in 1967, the DeWitt Methodist and Emanuel Methodist (located on the northeast corner of Schavoy and Clark Roads) initiated a practice of sharing ministers. For a long while the two congregations discussed a merger which culminated in 1970 with the two voting to join together and call themselves the Redeemer United Methodist Church.

In 1977, a new office was completed north of the former Emanuel Methodist Church.

This combined congregation is rich in history of meeting the spirited needs of a charming community for nearly 150 years.

DeWitt-- Yesterday and Today

By Faye Hanson

DEWITT BUSINESS DISTRICT PERILED BY \$22,000 BLAZE

First Methodist Church Razed, Grange Hall Damaged Saturday Night

(By The United Press)
DEWITT, March 12.—Losses of more than \$22,000 were estimated Monday to have resulted from a fire which totally destroyed the First Methodist church of DeWitt,

damaged adjacent buildings, and threatened the entire business district early Saturday evening.

The blaze started from an overheated furnace in the basement of the church. It was believed Monday. The fire was discovered shortly after 8 p. m. Saturday and DeWitt fire apparatus responded. Before the department and a volunteer bucket brigade could swing into action a strong south wind had fanned the flames beyond control. Fire trucks from St. Johns and Lansing responded in appeals for aid and succeeded in saving surrounding buildings. About \$1,000 damage to the Grange hall, next door to the church, was estimated while sparks carried by the wind ignited the roof of the home of Carl Van Fleet, a short distance away. Sparks also gutted the roof of a barn belonging to Willis McMaster near the edge of the blaze.

The church, a brick younger structure more than 30 years old, was burned to the ground. Furniture and equipment were totally destroyed.

After the various blazes had been extinguished a small building in the rear of the Grange hall burst into flames. Serious damage from this blaze was prevented by David Halsech, who singlehandedly succeeded in putting out the fire.

The DeWitt fire department, under direction of Frank Tond, kept a vigil over the ruins until late Saturday night to prevent further outbreaks.

No plans for rebuilding the church have been made as yet. Rev. W. E. Coleman, pastor, said Sunday. The loss was partially covered by insurance. Services for the congregation, numbering more than 150, were held in the Baptist church Sunday night. 30 members of the ruined church plan to meet early this week, according to Coleman.

DeWitt Church Burned



Served in The State Journal

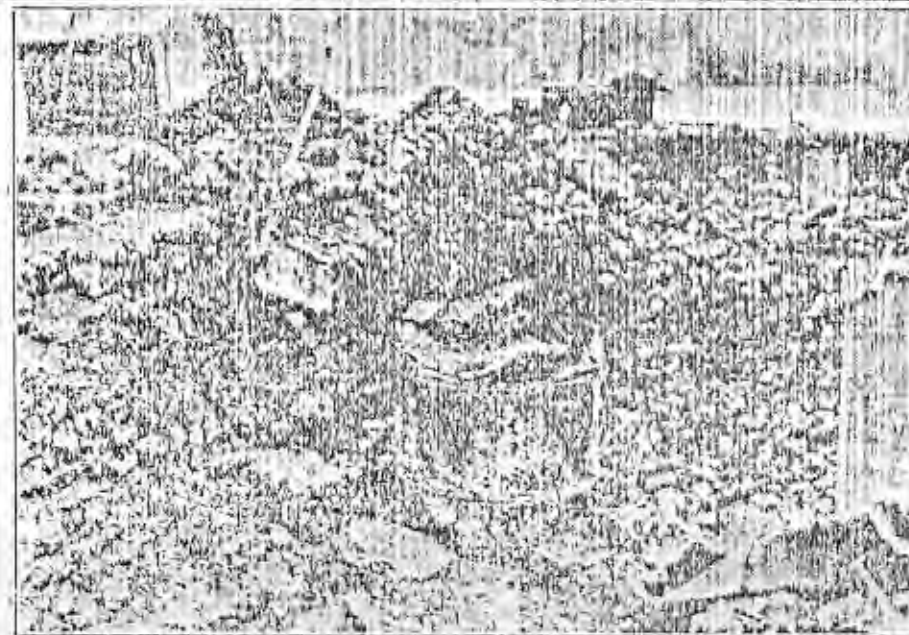
DEWITT, March 12.—The DeWitt Methodist Episcopal church was totally destroyed and the Grange hall was badly damaged by flames which Saturday night threatened the entire village. A blizzard of a wind swept the fire sweeping north from the church into a number of residences and aided the effort in setting part of the Grange hall.

The fire started in an unexpected manner in the church a short time after the pastor of the building had built up a fire to heat the building for choir practice,

scheduled for Saturday night. After starting the fire, he left the building and the blaze was not discovered until it had gained a start that periled the building despite the work of the DeWitt Community Fire Protection association equipment which was on the scene soon after the blaze was discovered.

Thirty tanks of chemicals were used in fighting the church blaze and saving part of the Grange hall. Sunday evening services were held in the Baptist church by the congregation left without a church by the fire.

HOW FIRE LEFT DEWITT METHODIST CHURCH

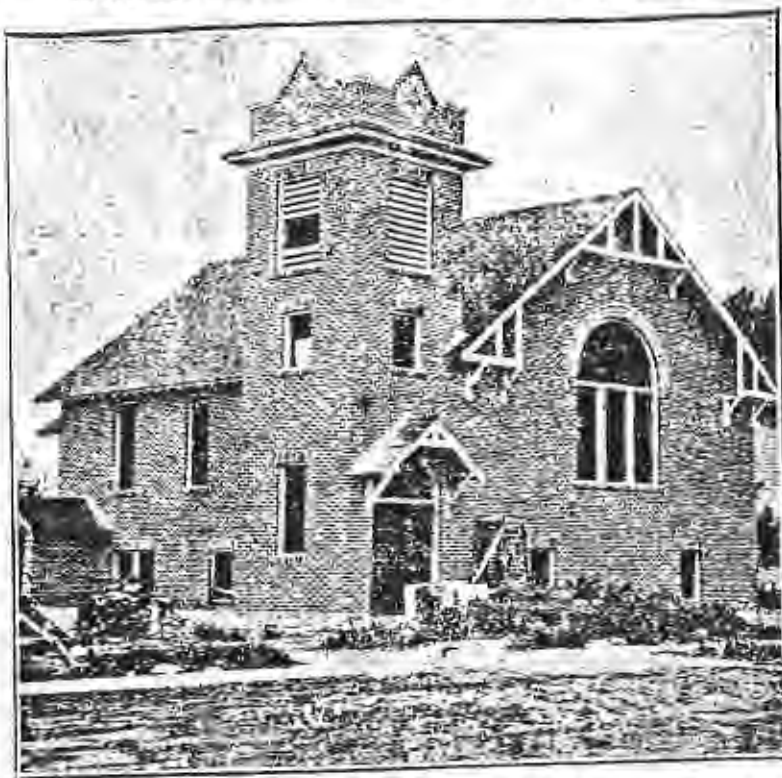


This furnace, thought to be the cause of the \$22,000 blaze, is shown with the debris of the masonry which was all that remained of the First Methodist church of DeWitt after the Saturday evening and threatened the entire business district.

—Photo by Post Photo Service
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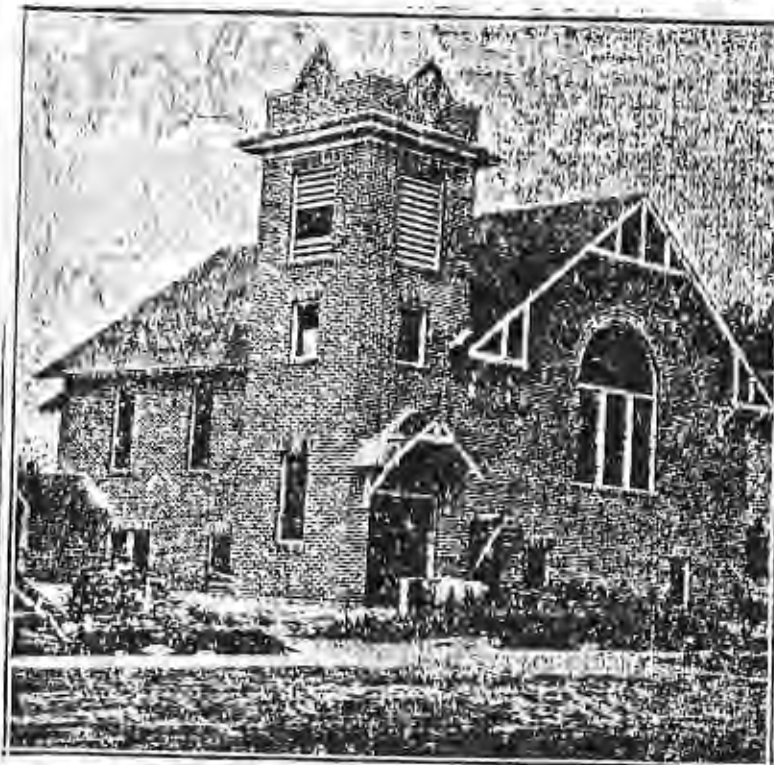
Johns, Michigan— August 13, 1931

DeWitt Methodists To Worship Here



Work on this new \$7,000 church plant is being rushed to permit early dedication which is expected to be held during September. The edifice will seat 300 and contains a full basement which will be used for Sunday School rooms. It replaces the old church destroyed by fire three years ago. Rev. M. E. Bowen is the church pastor.

Dedicate Dewitt M. E. Church Sunday



Bishop Nicholson, the district superintendent and several other visiting church notables were present Sunday when dedication services were conducted at the new Methodist church in Dewitt, with the Bishop in charge. Subscriptions were given in the amount of nearly \$600 to raise the indebtedness. The picture of the new building, shown above, was taken in August before the construction was entirely completed. The church will seat 300 and has a full basement which is used for Sunday school rooms. It was erected at a cost of about \$7,000 and replaces the old church destroyed by fire three years ago. 2-16-1931

Mr and Mrs Donald Fletcher
have purchased the Methodist
parsonage on Main Street. The
church has purchased the Farr
home on Washington Street to
serve as a parsonage.



REV. PAUL E. KREIDER



REV. RICHARD BARKER

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To Honor Minister

**Rev. Paul E. Kreider
To Be Greeted by
Parishioners**

A reception honoring Rev. Paul E. Kreider, new pastor of the DeWitt Methodist church, and his family will be held at the church at 8 p. m. Tuesday.

The minister, a former army chaplain, assumed his duties on June 18, succeeding Rev. Richard Barker who was transferred to the Oakdale Methodist church in Grand Rapids. Mr. Barker had served the DeWitt congregation for five years.

A native of Detroit, and son of a minister, Mr. Kreider has lived most of his life in Michigan. He was graduated from Owosso col-



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The minister, a former army chaplain, assumed his duties on June 14, succeeding Rev. Richard Barker who was transferred to the Oakdale Methodist church in Grand Rapids. Mr. Barker had served the DeWitt congregation for five years.

A native of Detroit, and son of a minister, Mr. Kreider has lived most of his life in Michigan. He was graduated from Owens college and received his bachelor of divinity degree from the theological seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and his master of arts degree from Butler university in Indianapolis, Ind.

Although he was not ordained until the recent Michigan Methodist conference at Albion, Mr. Kreider served as student pastor of Methodist churches in Itayville, Mo., and Burlington, Ind., from 1935 to 1937.

He entered active duty as a chaplain in June of 1937, serving in Fort Riley, Kans., until 1938, and in Munich, Germany from December, 1938, until May, 1941.

Mr. Kreider is married and has a 4-year-old son, Kevin.