

## Grove Lake Methodist Church, Grove Lake, Minnesota



The history of the church began with the first permanent settlement of Grove Lake in 1865. Those who came at that time were the Emersons, Stephenson, Deckers, Warrens, Velies, Whittemores and Lewis'. These early settlers were not long without religious instruction. Almost as soon as their log houses were erected, they began having services in the different homes. The first sermon was preached by a Methodist minister in the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Decker.



The Rev. Macober from Sauk Centre soon began holding regular services in a little log house also used for a school. When the log school house of District No. 1, was built, it also became the Sunday school and church. A school called the Westfield School was built and the church moved into this building. Rev. Banks was the next pastor, followed by Rev. Lathrop of Glenwood. It is thought Rev. Bowidsh was the first resident minister.



In 1866 and 1867, more settlers came. They were the Falkners, Harmons, Fowlds, Higgins, and a little later the McNutts, Beachs, Maynards, and Hewitts.

In 1869, Rev. C. T. Barkuloo took a homestead on the south side of Grove Lake. He was sent to this charge from Minnesota conference at Farmington and was the regular pastor for three years. Later Mr. Barkuloo sold his homestead and bought land on the north and east shore of Grove Lake.

The next minister was the Rev. Hoover who also was the school teacher and filled both positions. A couple others were pastors before 1880 when Rev. W. C. Brown came. At this time a frame building had taken the place of the log school and services were held in it. Mr. and Mrs. Brown had a family of five children when they came and there was no parsonage or other house for them that October. They spent the winter in the home of Jacob Harmon (Jean Bowen's great-grandparents). In the spring, rooms were fixed up in the old school log house so it could be used as a home. The Brown family moved in and in May 1881 their son William Wesley was born. Rev. Brown's health began to fail and Grove Lake and Lyman Prairie became his home. He died at Lyman Prairie and is buried in Grove Lake Cemetery.

In 1882 Rev. Barkuloo was sent to Grove Lake for the second time. The need for a new church building was beginning to be felt more and more as the school house was becoming overcrowded. Rev. Barkuloo had given land for the Grove Lake Cemetery and now offered the land for the church and parsonage. The congregation built the first part of the parsonage before the church so the pastor had a place to live.

In April 1883, thirteen ladies met and organized the Grove Lake Ladies Aid. They felt they could help build the church. The aid increased in number and activities to such a degree that in the next two years they saved \$300.00 for the building fund. Two years later in 1884, Rev. Bucount came and worked up enough interest that churches were erected in Lyman Prairie and Grove Lake in 1885.

Rev. Thomas McCleary was presiding Elder at the time and the church was dedicated late in fall of 1885 but not completed inside. The seats were planks. The balance was pledged but it took eight years to raise that balance.

In 1886 Rev. C. B. Wyatt came to minister, followed by Rev. Barkuloo who came for the third time. Rev. Tindall came in October 1892 and was there four years. During this time the debt was paid and mortgage burned. The ladies put on many oyster stew suppers and conducted many fundraising events to help raise the money. It took a lot of willing hands and hard work to pay off the debt, but how rewarding for everyone involved. At this time Tindall organized the First Epworth League at Grove Lake, in November of 1892 and had approximately 90 members.

Following Rev. Tindall was Rev. Cathcart from Iowa. He came before his family and when he saw the size of the parsonage he laughed at the idea of moving into it. He said there wasn't room for his furniture to say nothing of his family. Through his management and leadership, the west part of the parsonage was built and completed. He moved in January of 1897 and stayed three years. Several pastors resided over the next years; each contributing to the work of the church. A bell was installed in the belfry but there seems to be no recorded date. The old heating stove was discarded and furnace room made for a new furnace. Rev. Brecount held revival meetings and new members were received into the church by letter and many on probation. Camp meetings were held in the summer during June in the grove northwest of the church. Margaret Sauter notes the changes in transportation to the church in her lifetime. In the earliest days, the ox team and wagon brought the people together. They soon were replaced by horse teams and wagons and many times during the busy harvest seasons, hay racks could be seen among the vehicles lined up along the hitching posts. Then came buggies and now we see motor cars parked around the church during services, Margaret writes in 1935.

The first funeral held in the church was for Mrs. Marcis Hewitt in September of 1885. The first wedding was Nellie Warren and John Cook September 19, 1888. Six brides had their first experience at homemaking in the parsonage. Seven children claim Grove Lake parsonage as their birthplace.

On Sunday, June 18, 1933 the Ladies Aid celebrated their fiftieth anniversary. A children's day pageant was presented called "Gates of God's Love." Eleanor Elwood Dorweiler participated in the program. On Monday a Historical Pageant was performed. The first act was a reenactment of the original 13 organizing the ladies aid. The young people's chorus sang songs from 50 years ago. Scene II they did the 1893 burning of the mortgage on the church property. Scene III was a replica of the Red Cross in 1918. The young people's chorus sang war songs. Scene IV was a present day meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society with roll call of the 64 members in 1933. On the third day of the celebration they held a banquet.

The church was closed in November, 1966. The property was sold for \$500.00 to Howard Elwood. The money went to the conference. John Woodhall Sr. decided he wanted to buy the property and furnishing and build a chapel. The chapel furnishings are from the original church building. They consist of the pulpit, altar railing and the pews. There is a Bible on the pulpit that probably came from the church also. There is also a "structural" item in that the bell and bell cupola on the peak of the roof were saved from the church and installed on the chapel. The bell continues to be operational and, in addition to formal use, such as on Memorial Day, an occasional visitor has been known to listen to its peal. The pine tree just outside the entrance has been in place since before the church was removed. It is showing a lot of character and that is appropriate. It has observed many events over the years. John A. Woodhall Sr. wrote the words for the exterior bronze tablet. "The Memorial Chapel erected on the site of the original First Methodist Church of Grove Lake. Dedicated to the memory of the founders and congregation and to the loved ones who rest here. 1884-1966." The architect was Charles Frost of Frost & Lofstrom, of Willmar and the mason was I.G. Schriener. The stone came from a quarry at Kasota, Minnesota.

The funeral of Mrs. George Saylor (Leona Elwood) was the last funeral held in the church in June 1966. Eleanor Eckert Dorweiler was the janitor at the time of closing in November 1966. She felt like it was a funeral that day after services when she pulled the shades and shut the doors. A very sad day.

## **MEMORIES**

**By Eleanor Elwood Eckert Dorweiler**

When I joined the Grove Lake Methodist ladies aid, it was in 1935 and at that time the church congregation was made up of many faiths until other churches were built. There were 50 members. They did fun things to raise money like dividing the group in half and calling a group "Gold Diggers" and "Dumbbells". They put on a skit called "The Wedding". The bride was a tall big man dressed in all white including a veil and the groom was a short small lady and it was hilarious when it came time to kiss the bride and she was fixed up as a colored man.

The ladies met once a month on Thursday in one of the ladies' homes. They had a bible lesson. The dues cost 25 cents. On St. Patrick's Day, Ellen Sundin made huge amounts of delicious Mulligan stew and invited all the men. There was always a big crowd and after the men had eaten their fill of stew, homemade buns and pie all for 25 cents each. They left to go back to work while the ladies ate and had their meeting.

It wasn't all play, as one day we all came dressed in our overalls, equipped with hot sudsy water and rags and we washed the entire front of the church. Elsie Woodhall demanded that we leave a 12 x 12 unwashed space to show what we really had done. Ha! ha!

My most memorable memory was when my husband Lester and I painted the outside of the church. It was our last day and I put the finishing touches on the bell tower. The bell had not been used for a long time as they figured the lumber holding it was too old. Before I climbed down temptation got the best of me and I straddled the bell. I gave the rope a pull. Oh! What a beautiful sound. It was heard for miles around. Hearing that old bell meant more to me than the \$101.00 check we got for painting it.

The church held picnics at the lake. Young and old took part in the soft ball games and races. There was food galore and always plenty of fried chicken. Each fall the church held its fall supper. Most of the ladies were asked to bring 3 or 4 dressed young chickens. They met at Leonard Grindy's house and spent the day frying chicken. Then it was put in a big roaster and carried over to the town hall where the ladies prepared the chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy and vegetable, pickles, home made buns, cranberries and variety of pies all for \$1.50. Bear in mind the water had to be carried in big eight gallon cream cans. One for drinking and hot water for dishes and coffee. Ellen Sundin was the official coffee maker. NASHES COFFEE MADE WITH EGG. We had huge crowds and everyone seemed to like it. It was served family style. Plenty for second helpings.

The young people had what we called Epworth League and we named ourselves "Upstreamers". We met on Sunday evenings with one of the young people being the leader. We sang for awhile, had a short meeting with scriptures than off to the skating party or taffy pull. Lunch was served at someone's home. It was a great bunch of young people. Some were newly married couples, and all good sports. A men's quartet was formed from the group. The men were Orville Berguson, Clayton Thompson, Lester Eckert, and Joe Dean. Grove Lake Church didn't approve of card playing, drinking, or smoking.

I guess my part of the church started when I was very young. Mother died when I was six months old so I was raised by my dad's parents; my grandparents. I was very young and remember it was Sunday school every Sunday and I remember tying one or two pennies in the corner of my handkerchief for collection for Sunday school. Eventually I taught Sunday School, and was superintendent. The church put on some great Christmas programs. We spent hours making angel and shepherd costumes. Our church was packed and a fun night for everyone. The children were dressed in new dresses and the boys in new attire. The program lasted about an hour and then sacks of candy to all children and apples for the adults. Finally I was the janitor going real early to build a fire in the wood furnace. Get it burning real good then adjust the dampers and it would be nice and warm for 9:30 church services. I was only 17 years when Vera Thompson and I joined the ladies aid to make 50 members for their 50th anniversary. I continued to be janitor until it closed. A very sad day when I pulled the shades and locked the door.

## **REMEMBRANCES OF GROVE LAKE METHODIST** by **Donna Jean Thompson Hahn**

Aah, Grove Lake, the stomping grounds of my childhood where I attended grade school, bought penny candy at the store, visited Uncle Leonard at the creamery for bits of fresh butter, wondered at the mysteries of the blacksmith shop, enjoyed events at the hall and on Sundays attended the Methodist church.

I liked the Sunday morning preparations--getting my hair curled, putting on a pretty dress and my good shoes which I had labored over to clean and polish.

Sunday school was held in the room alongside the sanctuary. I know now it was not the huge space my child's eye saw but rather a long, narrow room. We sat our bottoms on the ubiquitous little red chairs and heard Bible stories and most often had some coloring or paper cutting to occupy our time. Church was something else altogether. It was difficult to sit still and not fall asleep while the minister droned on and on. One Sunday my brother, who was maybe four at the time, just couldn't sit still or keep his mouth shut. After several warnings from Mom, she gave him a little pinch to make him pay attentions to her admonitions. He continued to misbehave and ignore her so she gave him a harder pinch. He would have none of it and said in a very loud voice "Stop pinching me!" Everyone could hear him and a chuckle rippled through the congregation. I'm sure Mom was glad we were sitting in the back pew so others couldn't see the red blush that crept over her face. As I recall, after church he got quite a talking to from Dad reminding him to "listen to what your mother says."

When Mom was in her young teens her family lived in the parsonage near the church. It was their duty to be the janitors for the church building and keep the grounds of the parsonage, the church and the cemetery. Pushing a reel mower through the cemetery gave Mom and her brother time to learn the names on all the markers and they could guide any visitor to the correct gravesite. Mom told of a man who died with no known family. After his funeral, some of the men decided he deserved the respect of a marker. They spelled out his name with little pieces of wood nailed onto the bottom of a box and filled the box with cement. When the block was cured and tipped out the men realized their mistake in that the man's name read backwards. Nevertheless the marker was placed and is there to this day.

Mom's Saturday chore was cleaning and dusting the sanctuary. When her job was finished she would sit down at the piano, open a hymnal and figure out the notes for the treble clef. By ear she also taught herself to cord the tenor/bass part. Her mother always knew when the cleaning was done when she heard Mom plinking on the piano.

There was a very active youth group known as Epworth League. They had devotions, played games and enjoyed a snack. It was a great way for community's young people to get together. I think it was especially enjoyable for Dad since he had his eye on the pretty redheaded Woodhall girl.

The Methodist Episcopal church also served many community events. There was always a big Memorial Day celebration with a program in the sanctuary or on the front steps. We heard speeches, readings and sang patriotic songs. Then the children would be lined up in pairs, given a sprig of lilacs and led on a march through the cemetery. As we came to a grave marked with a small flag, each child in turn laid their flowers by the marker. I always got a lump in my throat as I placed my lilacs and felt so privileged to be a part of so important a ceremony.

Our family moved from Grove Lake as I entered my fifth grade. Instead of seven classmates, I was now one of over one hundred classmates. That was quite overwhelming for a country girl especially since classes had begun two weeks earlier and friendships had already been formed. It wasn't long before I discovered there were some nice kids I could befriend even in a big school.

Our family joined the Methodist church in Glenwood but old ties with Grove Lake remained strong and we found many occasions to attend the Methodist church and visit family and friends in that area.

After a drop in membership, the Grove Lake people transferred their membership elsewhere and the building became derelict and was torn down. The grounds become additional cemetery. Great-uncle John Woodhall had a small brick chapel built on the site of the old church. My parents are buried in the new cemetery and so will I be one day. When I visit their gravesites, Grove Lake memories come flooding back like old friends and once again I am home .

**MEMORIES**  
**by Lester Meyer**

Aljena (Woodhall) Meyer, sister of Mildred Thompson, also helped with the maintenance of the church and building the fire early Sunday morning in the furnace. Aljena was not feeling well and Lester said he would go start it. He did just that and went back to the house. Aljena asked if he had shut the damper and he said “No, was I supposed to?” She said “Yes, go back and shut it”. He thought ok I will go and do it. He did not hurry, just took his time. When he opened the door to the church, the heat hit him. The furnace was RED HOT. He quickly closed the damper. He shoveled in some snow on the floor grate and got it cooled down. The congregation thought it was so wonderful to have such a warm church and complimented Aljena for having it so warm. Not a word was said about how close we were to not having a church.

Gas lights were another fire hazard the church narrowly escaped on many occasions. When the gas was turned on and the match was held to the lamp, the fire would go “Whoosh” shooting a couple feet of fire toward the ceiling.

Eleanor Dorweiler  
Donna Hahn  
John Woodhall Jr.  
Lester Meyer  
Pope County Historical Society files