

## **Union Congregational Church, Glenwood, Minnesota**

Mrs. W.F. Dougherty in 1907 wrote a history of the congregational church covering the period of its history from 1885 to 1907. This is a soul inspiring epos from the heart of a Christian. It is regretted that space will allow only opportunity to quote a few statistics from this history as prepared by Mrs. Dougherty.

The Union Congregational church was started July 1885. The first meeting for organization was held February 6, 1885, at the home of Rev. G.A. Lathrop. Rev. Lathrop was moderator of this meeting and F.C. Park, clerk. A statement of doctrine, creed and confession of faith was read and discussed, and finally adopted.

On presentation of their letters from the home churches the following persons became charter members: Mr. and Mrs. E.M. Woodward; Mr. and Mrs. F.C. Park; Rev. and Mrs. C.A. Lathrop; Miss Cornelia Lathrop; Rev. and Mrs. C.A. Ruddock; Miss Nellie Ruddock; Mrs. J.G. Whittemore; Mrs. C.P. Reeves; Mrs. W.F. Dougherty; and Mrs. C.W. Jennison. Not until May 2<sup>nd</sup> of the same year, was the church incorporated by the election of the following trustees: W.J. Carson. E.M. Woodward, and C.W. Jennison. Rev. C.A. Ruddock, at this time residing in the village, but pastor of the Villard church, became our first minister, dividing his time between the two churches.

During the first year of its existence services were held in the Town Hall and a little later in the Methodist church. In 1888 the congregation purchased the Baptist church property for \$800. In this building the congregation met until 1906. During this year the building was disposed of and a contract let to J.H. Olson of Willmar to build a new church at a cost of \$12,000, to be built on the site of the old church and to be ready January 1907. November 13, 1906 stands as a red letter day in our history for on that day the people gathered for the exercises in connection with the laying of the corner stone.

During the month of building the free use of the Court House Hall was given for all services. During the years from 1885 to 1930, 520 members of this church were recorded. The membership in 1930 was recorded as 167.

In May 1897, through the efforts of a committee with W.J. Carson as chairman, additional lots were acquired and a large and well arranged parsonage built.

One of the adjuncts of the church, the Ladies' Aid, was organized in 1885, along with the church, and has served the church since its organization except from 1894 when it disbanded until 1897. The records of the early years of its work are not available and its complete history will never be written. Records indicate that from 1908 to 1930 the Ladies' Aid showed total receipts to be \$24,793.70. Based on this information it is estimated that the organization contributed over \$35,000 to the church in its building years.

In addition to the Ladies' Aid, the church had the following organized groups: the Woman's Missionary Society, the Priscilla Club, Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts, the T.H.H. Club and several organized classes and activities such as Mothers and Daughters banquets, Fathers and Sons banquets, the Vacation Bible School and Young People's Training Camps.

In closing this brief resume of the work of the Congregational Church, we again quote from Mrs. Dougherty, "We do not cite these things in boastfulness as to what we have done, but we do boast of what the Lord has been able to do with such poor material at His command, and we do feel greatly honored to think He has counted us worthy to be co-partners with Him in such a project."

This historical update for the homecoming, historical pageant and dedicatory ceremonies to celebrate the completion of the new courthouse in Glenwood, Minnesota written by Daisy Ellen Hughes provided a very brief reference to the *History of the Union Congregational Church* by Mrs. W.F. Dougherty. Dougherty wrote her account for the completion and dedication of the new church building in 1907. It is worth including a bit more of that history here as it presents details of not only the establishment of the Union Congregational church but the arrival of settlers in Pope County and the growth of Glenwood.

The following was taken from *History of the Union Congregational Church* (date):

To rightly interpret or understand the history of an individual or church it would seem necessary that we acquaint ourselves as nearly as possible with the nature surroundings, attractions and needs of the birth place at the time of its inception; realize if we can what were some of the conditions under which it lived and moved and had its being.

Travel back with me then, if you will, four and twenty years, when weary and travel worn from a trip across the plains, through humdrum villages and uninviting scenes, suddenly there burst upon our view a scene of such transcendent beauty a vision that held our eye entranced, as of Paradise to earth let down.

There in the valley below us, nestled a little village, threaded and dotted here and there with winding stream and lakes shimmering hue, while stretching far as human eye could see, lay Minnewaska, with her crystal waters sparkling in the sunshine, vying only with the arching heavens above in ethereal blue. Protected on either side by wooded hill, from whose sides gushed forth the streams of living waters, murmuring brooks and whispering trees, songs of birds afloat the breeze, these were thy charms,

'O Glenwood, loveliest village of the plain  
There health and beauty cheer the laboring swain;  
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid  
And parting summer's lingering bloom delayed.'

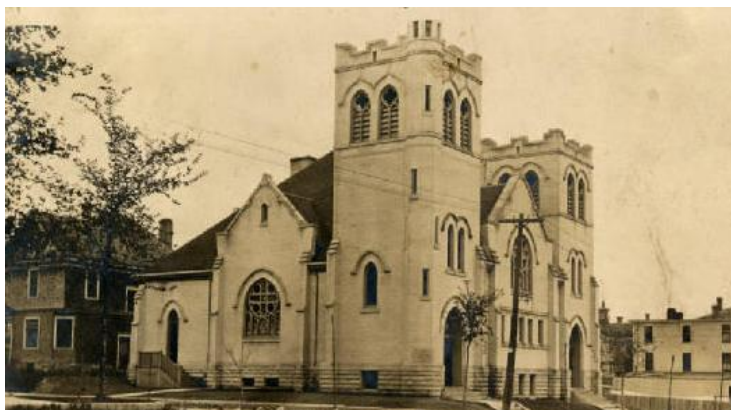
No wonder then, that in the early day the pioneer in search of home and fortune, chose this spot where nature had been so prodigal in her gifts.

The growth of the little village had been slow, numbering only 400 at the time of which we write, most of whom were representatives of the hardy races of the European Peninsula, and actuated by principles of loyalty to home, religion, had already staked out the territory for Christ and built their church, which tops the neighboring hill.

Among these was a sprinkling of Americans, young, ambitious people from the east, drawn higher as others had been by allurements of home and fortune, had built for themselves modest little homes, living in simple fashion as their humble means would admit. Educational advantages the best that time and means could afford, were offered to the young in the public school of several grades. The only church existing at the time was the Methodist, where services were held occasionally. In 1882 the prospects of the village were placed on a firmer basis when the Northern Pacific Railroad was built, from which time Glenwood grew more rapidly and it was soon apparent that we must have a church home although previous to this a Sunday School had been organized and maintained with a goodly attendance and occasionally one was sent to preach for us. Especially do we remember Rev. Robert Herrick, who at the time was General Missionary for the Home Missionary Society of Minnesota, and oft times preached to us, encouraging and finally advising the organization of the church, the result of which was a council called to consider the advisability of such a step.

We cannot speak of this endeavor with our reckoning with, and recognizing the C. H. M. S. whose aim in life is to establish and aid in the maintenance of Congregational churches in the younger and growing parts of the country.

With the aid then of this Society it seemed possible to organize a church provided it was a Congregational church. "To be or not to be" was the question and upon this hinged the discussion that followed. Here were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists that might unite, if a common platform could be found on which to meet. Each undoubtedly in his heart, was committed to the church of his bringing up. It must be borne in mind that away back in early years, there had been a Congregational organization here over which old Elder Lathrop, as he was called, had been the pastor, and was still residing in the area, as well as a number of others, who had been members also.



Naturally, they were interested in seeing a revival of this church, and this fact was possibly the impetus of the new organization. Tri-unions are never accomplished without discussion and argument, and this was no exception; though we do say to the credit of all participants, no unpleasant words were indulged in. It was argued that the Congregational form of local government and doctrine would adapt itself much more rapidly to the needs of western people than while Presbyterians, with a little loosening up of the joints would make splendid Congregationalists, yet their doctrine was a little too straight-laced for the people of a country that breathed of freedom in thought and action. No amount of argument however would induce the Baptists to be anything but loyal and true to the traditions of their fathers. And indeed it would seem like flying in the face of providence or at least ignoring His gifts in face of Lake Minnewaska for a good Baptist to ever be anything other than a Baptist. Therefore they withdrew, and organized, building a little later the church that has stood like a sentinel on the hill, suggestive indeed of the straight and narrow way which leads unto life eternal.

Left to them, it was an easy matter for the Presbyterians, although in the majority, to fall in line with the Congregationalists, believing that the good of the cause was paramount to every other consideration.

“Thus the child was born, July 1885, and was christened ‘The Union Congregational Church’.”

Mrs. Dougherty describes times of desperation without a minister or direction beyond their faith. “A request was made to headquarters for immediate help and a vigorous student pastor was sent. In an interesting note Mrs. Dougherty indicates that at about that same time Edward Ristine and wife, people of sterling worth and character a power for good in the church and community. According to his statement at the time of his arrival, he was the only male member of the church and filled the various offices of Sunday School Superintendent, Clerk, Deacon, Janitor, and general roustabout, and to my certain knowledge, held them all with distinction.”

### **Contributed by Jayne (Dalager) Nyhammer:**

While there are many references and announcements in the local papers of anniversary celebrations, dinners, and activities at the Union Congregational Church after the brief description in Builders of Pope County very little documentation of the history indicating the struggles and successes of the congregation.

As both the Methodist and Congregational churches struggled in the 1960 it became apparent that it was necessary to join forces to increase membership and maintain the goals and desires of the church communities. Meetings were held with the councils of the two churches. Bob Robards was the chairman for the UCC. Very little progress was made and much posturing in an attempt to maintain the identity of each church at the same time joining forces as a unified whole. Robards described the process as slow and most participants on both sides were reluctant to express their feelings and concerns. At one meeting, Wendell Schaub began to speak and clearly related the reluctance, challenges and hopes for the merger of the two churches. Robards indicated that at that point the majority of the participants began to discuss the merger more openly and the process moved forward to unite the two congregations. The United Parish was established in 1967.

As a small child and a member of the Methodist church, located across the street from the UCC, I only remember my grandmother referring to the "Congo, across the street" and hearing about missionaries to the Congo and wondering exactly what went on at the church across the street. After the two churches became one, Glenwood United Parish, to the children it was just a much bigger group of kids so more fun for all. Sunday school was a new adventure with larger classes and new teachers. We were very proud to be members of the first confirmation class of the new church family.

### **FROM THE RECORDS:**

George and Emma Cheeseman joined the UCC Church January 7, 1923. A son Ralph Edward was born September 11, 1914.

Axel E. and Helen Sherlin were also very early members and a daughter Eleanor Genevieve was born to them November 30, 1916.

Ralph and Eleanor were received as members of the church on the same day, April 15, 1928. On October 5, 1940 Ralph and Eleanor were married by Rev. Winn. They had three children baptized and confirmed in the church. JoAnn, and twins, Carol and Robert. During their lifetime the Cheesemans participated in all areas of the church structure (deacons, teachers, woman's group and men's group). Eleanor passed away January 25, 1997 and Ralph March 11, 2002.

Congregational Church, Glenwood Minnesota Early 50's

**Contributed by Carol Cheeseman:**

Not an easy thing, searching memory, when you are asked to go back this far. One thing always comes to mind, my favorite and funny event that happened, during a Sunday mornings church service.

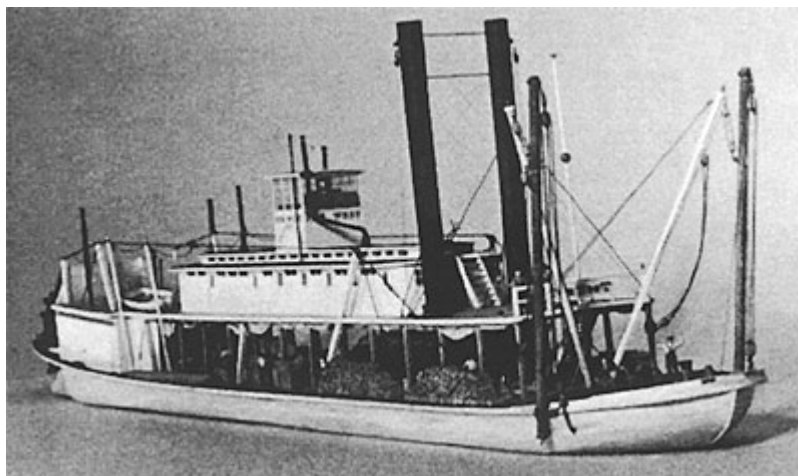
My age was young and I don't have a clue who the pastor was that morning. Most Sundays I sat between Ralph and Eleanor, and all I can think of, was I the fidgety one or the noisy one in church? I am glad I don't remember.

For me during the sermon, it was a very quiet time in that pew. I remember resting against Dad's shoulder and when I looked down at my father's shoes. Yep, there were two, which was good, but they were two different shoes. The giggling ensued, for quite some time. I guess I was used to the two different colored socks, but the two different shoes, that was a new twist.

**Contributed by Robert Cheeseman:**

All agree that the Great Commission is still Christ's mission for the church; however many times people are enlisted into that mission and don't know they are being used of God to fulfill that mission. Back when the United Congregational Church closed its doors my parents, Eleanor and Ralph Cheeseman, informed me of that sad fact. I was living and teaching in one of oldest railroad towns, Rosebud, in Montana along the Yellowstone River in eastern Montana. My family and I were attending the oldest (still) operating log cabin church in Montana.

The pews had been freighted up the Missouri to the Yellowstone to Rosebud by the same paddle wheeler, the Far West, ( <http://modelplans.steamboats.org/p2-far-west.html> ) that transported General Custer and his men to the Rosebud River just a mile west where Rosebud is (more than coincidence?) where they disembarked on that last fateful mission to the Little Big Horn.



As these pews dating from the mid 1800s were in bad condition we obtained some of the pews from the UCC and my pastor came back with a cattle truck and hauled them out to Rosebud where they are still used today in the many services still being held over 100 years after the church opened for people to hear the Good News. The church is on the roster of national historical places.

So my folks were indeed involved with a mission's project and am sure there is a reward in heaven for their helping to further God's Kingdom. I will always hold in blessed memory the fish fry my mother held to raise money for the foreign exchange student from Africa- it was a great lesson for us kids in learning service. My passion for singing hymns and worship songs has its start from singing in the choir. There is a scripture on attending church and am grateful my parents put that scripture into practice.

**Contributed by Bob Robards:**

Family membership goes back to great aunt Mary Ward about 1900, the record book indicates Mary as a Charter Member, joining before the church building was complete. My Grandmother, Sue Holtermann, and my Mother, Gale Holtermann and her two sisters were also early members of the church. Gale left when she was 16 and moved to Minneapolis. Bennett and Cecil followed the family to Belgrade and my Aunt, Lu Robard's family, moved from Douglas County about 1900. She was a very active member the rest of her life. She was involved in Sunday school, choir, writing and directing Christmas plays. I started in 1921 (born) and participated through high school. Then Flo and I were active when we moved here in 1952. Both sons attended also. We have not been involved since the merger and the boys left.

I was head of Deacons when the merger came about and took a part in that start of the United Parish. That was a great experience with all the talk, major planning and cooperation between the two parishes.

Church suppers with Marv Vollrath, R. Tupper, Bob Shepherd and other young men were bus boys and had a system of playing catch with the cups etc. as they went to be washed. The ladies were not happy with us. Rueben Wilson and I were on the trustees later on and did a lot of work on the building. A lady put a letter in the suggestion box that two parishioners should not be involved in church work. The minister did a sermon about that with the theme being there were more friendships downtown in the beer gardens than at the church. It was not too well received but Rueben and I kept on anyway.

One Wednesday afternoon during choir practice we had a bat flying around the balcony. Was fun as the volume increased when the bat came closer to the group, I tried to hit it with a broom but no good. It finally parked some place.

We hired a gentleman for a pastor who was not an ordained minister but active in a Christian organization in Pennsylvania. It was decided to release him after 11 months. His contract called for 30 day vacation after one year. By action of the persons we refused to give him pay for the vacation. It created quite a Sunday meeting and we wound up paying him, called it GOOD RIDANCE! My words only, of course.

Jesse Clark organized the first Easter Sunrise service which took in singers from all congregations, then a breakfast afterward. It was fun and very successful. I guess too good, so it got split up between the two services and we did not have enough singers left to keep it up.

The story behind Rev. Zemek's hiring --He and Beth were city people. He was hired as a Presbyterian minister for three small church congregations. Brooten - Sedan - Forada, they moved to a small farm home near Dean Schluter's farm on Pope County highway 29, near Sedan. They had four very young children and needed a washing machine. That's when I got to know them as I visited quite often to keep the machine going. The ultimate result was that he came to the Congregational Church. Sedan joined Glenwood, Brooten became independent and Forada closed and the Zemek's stayed in Glenwood for five years until the merger. He commented that he had made all the enemies he needed by that time and he was called to the Presbyterian Church at 6<sup>th</sup> and Nicolet in Minneapolis as assistant pastor.

I'll finish with my system of being a Sunday greeter. I would greet everyone and when service would start I would go home---That's the not so good story. You can tell I'm not the most Religious person around!!

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