

## A Church That Refused to Die

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# A Church That Refused to Die

By WALLACE E. SHERLOCK<sup>1</sup>

Lancaster township, Keokuk county, was one of the very first townships settled in Iowa, west of the west line of the second "Black Hawk Purchase." We believe the reason God saw to it that it was one of the very first, lay in the fact Almighty God wanted to use it as a model for other communities in the remainder of Iowa, to follow.

Before May 1, 1843, the land in Iowa west of that purchase belonged to the Indians. The dividing line crossed the southeastern corner of Keokuk county and included practically all of Richland, much of Jackson, the larger part of Clear Creek and parts of Lafayette and Liberty townships.

The lands lying west of that line were thrown open to settlers on May 1, 1843. At 1 minute after 12 o'clock midnight of that morning, Obediah Tharp, Presley Doggett, James Robinson, Amos Holloway, Sam Hardseday, George Wimer, J. B. Whistler, William Trueblood and their families crossed the line near where Ollie now stands.

By noon of that day these hardy pioneers forded their "River Jordan"—the South Skunk river—into the promised land of their dreams, now East Lancaster township. Doggett, Robinson and Holloway located east and southeast of where the Doggett schoolhouse now stands. Tharp and Trueblood settled east of what later

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sherlock is a veteran Iowa newsman, who has served a number of important Hawkeye newspapers in editorial and reportorial capacities, more recently for ten years past the editor of the *Fairfield Daily Ledger*, from which he retired on his eightieth birthday, September 25, 1953, but still resides there. Included among the papers he served were the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, *Kansas City Journal*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press-Dispatch*, *Iowa Homestead* and the *St. Louis Journal of Agriculture*. He was born near Sigourney, Iowa, but his youth was spent in Aurora, Nebraska. For a time he taught school and was superintendent of the Keswick High school and in 1896 became Keokuk county treasurer. Being a man of culture and wide experience, his retirement from daily newspaper work opens new fields of literary endeavor much less exacting, but equally valuable.

became the town of Lancaster. Tharp staked his claim on 60 acres which is said to have lain south of the gravel road now running immediately east of the old town-site. Hardsday, Wimer and Whistler settled in West Lancaster township.

During the next two or three years came such hardy pioneers as Jacob Goodhart, Jacob Wimer, Cris Broliar, John W. Snelson, George Clingen, James and John Vitetoe, Corbin Utterback (Sr.), B. F. Chastain, William H. Brunt, Austin Jacobs (Sr.), Daniel Connor and others whose names we have forgotten.

#### FOLLOWERS OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

A large majority of these hardy pioneers were followers of Alexander Campbell, who called themselves the Disciples of Christ or Christians. One of their very first concerns was to build a house in which to worship God and bring up their children in the Sunday school and church in the way they should go.

Practically all of them lived in log houses, but they decided that God should have a better dwelling place. They built a brick church in Lancaster—the very first brick church and the first church in the county to cost \$1,000 or more. One thousand dollars was a “king’s ransom” in those days; but they “set their jaws,” raised the money and built the church!

Many times they could not afford a full-time minister. Times were when they could afford preaching only once each four weeks. The minister preached on Saturday evening, Sunday morning and Sunday evening. They held Sunday school and communion services every Sunday forenoon. The monthly Sunday evening services usually over-filled the church.

#### ABLE MEN FILLED PULPITS

Some of these early preachers were very able men. Later, in the late 1880’s, came such able men as Elder Guthrie and such student ministers as Frank Snider, Loren Howe, Bruce Brown and others. They were all usually greeted with more people than the church would accommodate. Elder Guthrie was one of the most able pulpit orators we have ever heard before or

since. Snider, Howe and Brown gave good accounts of themselves after their graduations.

It is needless to say there were no child delinquencies, no problem children, very few disagreements between neighbors. When we left Keokuk county in 1907 to assume charge of the *Journal of Agriculture* in St. Louis, there never had been a suit in the district court in which one or both of the parties had come from Lancaster township. We have not heard of any such litigation since then.

As the years came and went, as years have an unceasing way of doing, the older members of the church passed to their eternal rewards, others moved to Sigourney, to other parts of the state, to other states even as far as the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

Other farmers moved in from other parts of the county, from other counties if not from other states. As is the attitude of all new comers, these fine new additions to East Lancaster were usually somewhat slow in taking an active part in church work. But as is always the case, these newcomers saw the need of a sanctuary in their midst.

Of course, God dwells in all parts of the earth, but He knew that Man and his Wife must have a tangible object that stands for God's presence in any and every community. It must be some form of a house—a dwelling place. It may have been a log church in an eastern state; a sod church on the plains; or a brick church in Lancaster township.

God made this fact very plain in a recapitulation of His Laws, in the Book of Leviticus. He ordered Moses in Exodus to "let them (the Children of Israel) make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." In Leviticus He says: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary." Again: "And I will walk among you and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."

The time came when Lancaster outgrew the old brick church. God intends that man and woman shall advance. With other advancements, God has a right

to have a better and more up-to-date sanctuary. These Lancaster people saw to it that God got a better sanctuary. They have built one of the most modern country churches in the state of Iowa. It has practically all the modern conveniences that most city and town churches have.

#### WEAKENED BY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

There was a period of time several years ago when the changes of the times brought changes in the church. There were several deaths, some families moved out of the township over a period of a few years. The church closed its doors for a time. The future of the church appeared dark for a time. As one citizen of the township explained: "We had our ups and downs, but now we are having our ups again."

The Rev. Jasper Smith, a farmer, who lives 12 miles southwest of Lancaster, was called as pastor. He preaches every Sunday morning. Remembering what the old brick church used to accommodate, we satisfied ourself there were more people at the services than were at Sunday morning services when the brick church served the township needs.

The church that has refused to die is well on the way to a permanent future. The principal reason it has refused to die lies in the fact that Lancaster people are not quitters. They can take a lot of punishment in life's battles, but the word "quit" has never found a place in their dictionaries. It is this writer's guess it never will.

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#### Safety and Silence

Nothing can ruin a country if the people themselves undertake its safety; nothing can save it if they leave that safety in any hands but their own.—Daniel Webster.

To sin by silence when they should protest, makes cowards of men.—Abraham Lincoln.

They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.—Benjamin Franklin.

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