

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

On February 24, 1836, twenty-seven pioneers met in a log cabin. They organized a Church of Christ, the "First Presbyterian Church of Bean Creek". Though a majority were Congregationalist, Rev. Mr. Wolcott was influenced by a prevailing belief that Congregationalism was not a religion for pioneer country. This historic meeting was held at the home of Alpheus Pratt. A year later the name changed to the "First Presbyterian Church of Hudson and Pittsford". Two years later, in May 1838, both the name and government were changed. It became the "First Congregational Church of Hudson and Pittsford". After another two years a final change resulted in the present name, "First Congregational Church of Hudson". Beriah Lane was the first church clerk; he served eighteen years. Religious services were first held in the Lanesville schoolhouse, a log house which burned, and was replaced by a long, low frame building. This stood on the east side of Church Street. The first pastor was Reverend David Pratt but after two years he was killed in the felling of a tree. At first, members were often disciplined or dismissed for what seem today minor offenses. In 1844 the church voted that to travel on Sunday or to harvest hay or grain violated the Fourth Commandment. One member was actually dismissed for gathering up maple sap on the Sabbath.

With financial aid from the National Home Missionary Society and hard labor by men of the through two years a church building was completed in June 1848. This stood on the North side of West Main Street in the middle of the block between Church and Lane Streets. In 1849 the first bell in Hudson was brought in on the new railroad and hung in the church tower. The same one still hangs in the present church tower. During the pastorate of Rev. Robert L. Smith Hobart, the Civil War began. He raised a Union flag on the steeple, said to be the first flag on any church building during the war. In 1871 our present building was completed and dedicated under the leadership of the Rev. Olney Place. Three anniversaries of the founding have since been observed – the Fiftieth in December of 1886 with Rev. William Woodmansee as pastor; the Seventy-fifth in May of 1911 under leadership of Rev. Milo J Sweet; and 100th in July 1936, Rev. A.W. Kauffman, D.D. being pastor. The Rev. H.A. Putnam had the longest pastorate – twelve years. In his time, in 1900, the pipe organ was installed. The parsonage was on Lafayette Street. In 1921 the present parsonage just West of the church building was purchased, the first occupant being Rev. Frederick Brink. In 1938, at the request of the State Superintendent, it was voted to form a larger parish, including Hudson and three neighboring churches. Dr. Kauffman was minister and a new director Christian Education was employed. This plan was continued during the pastorate of the Rev. Serg Hummon, D. D. In 1949, while Rev. Thomas Toy was pastor, an extensive building program was completed. A reorganization of the Women's Fellowship, according to an approved Congregational pattern, was brought about by the Rev. Myron

R. Bunnell. Rev. C Raymond Probst was ordained here in June 1958, with the service being one of the finest events in our history.

At a meeting for the election of officers for the church in 1852, pending the elections for deacons, the question of eligibility of females to vote was raised and the Pastor took occasion to state his views on the subject showing that such a course would be contrary not only to the usual manner of doing such business in this church heretofore, but also at variance with the usage of Congregational Churches in both Old England and New England' that it would be contrary to order and might lead to disorder and especially that it was directly contrary to the teaching of the Word of God as contained in Cor. XIV, Chapter 34-35 verses. It says "Let your women keep silent in church. For it is not permitted unto them to speak but they are to ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for a woman to speak in Church". Notwithstanding the expressed views of the pastor, the church decided by a vote of 8 to 5 to allow females to vote. The decision was protested by the preacher and Mr. Jesse Smith.

The congregation soon outgrew this original structure, and the present church was built in 1871 at a cost of about \$18,000, being one of the most commodious and tasteful edifices in the city of Hudson. Its location is a very happy one, near the center of the city, yet in a quiet neighborhood, at the head of Howard Street. Upon completion of the new structure, the enthusiastic congregation, led by their Pastor, marched from the familiar church on Main Street to the beautiful brick building that was to be their new place worship. Here, dedication services were observed.

The mellow tones of the Congregational bell have called thousands to prayer since its sensational arrival in 1849. This was the first bell in Hudson and was brought in on the new railroad. The whole town helped to defray the cost; it was used to call meetings and was tolled for fires, etc. Placed originally in the steeple of the old church, it was moved to the new church tower on Seward Street where it hangs today.

When the present church was completed, the older structure was sold to the Free Will Baptist. In 1880, it was purchased Godfrey Fowle who turned it around to face Lane Street and converted it into an opera house. For many years public gatherings of various kinds were held in the auditorium, it being the only place in town suitable. Here, graduation services were held, as well as high school plays, etc. and traveling vaudeville acts, one even including the famous George M Cohen.

The clerk's book throughout these yearly years is a record of many meetings. Four religious services were held every Sunday, preaching services both morning and afternoon, Sunday School in between and an evening session for prayer and conference.

A ten-scene pageant "Glimpse of Yesterday", depicting the 125-year existence of the First Congregational Church in Hudson was directed by Barney Crittenden; the sermon given by the Rev. C Raymond Probst for the Anniversary Worship and Communion Service; the dinner and informal program with Mr. Clarence Brown as toastmaster; and

in charge of music: Mrs. Evelyn Bade, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Goll, Mrs. Melvin Evenson, and Mrs. Charles Stuckey. These were the highlights of the Anniversary Celebration on October 7-8, 1961.

On July 4, 1892, a storm destroyed the church steeple. This made quite a change in the appearance of the church as only the lower part of the steeple was restored.

It is fitting to pay tribute to Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Stowell who were most generous in their gifts which included the first parsonage, the beautiful frescoing of the church walls, the pipe organ which was installed and dedicated in 1900, and other welcome improvements. Their personal services in the work of the church extended to the state and national level.

Mr. and Mrs. Stowell attended an organ showing, which was "By Invitation Only", at the St. Louis Exposition. They fell in love with the organ which they bought and donated to the church. They inquired how long it would take to disassemble, pack, ship, and re-assemble and have the special organ ready to play. The two years it would take allowed time to extend the South wall of the church outward to accommodate the organ. It was re-assembled in the Hudson Congregational Church by the man that understood it and had played it at the Exposition.

The paneling on either side of the towering gold-gilded green pipes has two doors that lead to the concealed workings of the organ. Originally, the bellows were pumped by hand to furnish air for the pipes. When city water became available, water was used to power the pump to make the organ functional. Eventually, with the advent of electricity, the mode of power was brought up to date, and the organ was electrified.

The fine quality of the organ became known, and people from all around came to hear and enjoy the fine tones. Few organs could match its sound. The love of this special organ is manifested by the years of loyal service the organists have given to the church. A 1927 recording pays tribute to Mrs. Bessie Brown who for thirty years filled this important position of the church. Mrs. Evelyn Bade, the present organist, has given of her talents for forty-two years. In earlier days, while teaching in Detroit, she faithfully returned to our hometown on Thursday nights for choir practice and again on Sundays for the weekly services; this she did for ten or twelve years. A plaque honors her faithful service.

In February 1976, electric chimes were added to the organ for still greater listening pleasure.

In 1978, after more than three-quarters of a century of use, and with the help of a generous gift from the Herrick Foundation and additional gifts from church members, the organ has been restored and rebuilt. However, all working parts of the old organ were used.

A new console was placed next to the choir rail. We now have a three-manual organ; the original was two-manual. Also added were the Liebeck pedal and the trumpets, which constitute a complete range.

The restoration and additions were the work of Mr. Charles Bentschneider.

Mr. Stowell, who owned a lucrative shipping business on the Great Lakes, suffered great losses when a severe storm destroyed some of his ships. Nevertheless, a man of means, his support of the church was ongoing and substantial.

The impressive stained glass window depicting Christ with out-stretched arms was blown out in a severe windstorm in the early 1950's and was replaced with the present window. This window in the front of the church bears the inscription, "In loving memory Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Stowell".

"Mrs. Grace Winckles, of Elyria, Ohio, legatee of Mrs. C. B. Stowell, had presented to the Michigan Congregational Conference the Stowell home and \$10,000. Through the mediation of the Reverend N. C. Woon, Congregational pastor, the Conference at their meeting in 1932 agreed within five years to equip the place as a home for the aged. It is fitting that this home should belong to the church and community in which Mr. and Mrs. Stowell were so actively interested."

After Mrs. Stowell's death the house stood vacant until April of 1932. At that time Walter and Wayna Hutchings moved back from Iowa, along with Robert and Veda Johnson from Detroit, and took up residence, rent free. This being the height of the depression, it was a God-send. They lived there until the summer of 1933 when the home was sold by the church to Mrs. Grace Montgomery Banes of Chicago, who in turn started a school for special girls. It was known as Mount Stowell Manor. She also owned the home on Beecher Road, called Montgomery Manor; this home was for the younger children who needed special care.

Today, this home, one of the town's loveliest residences, is a haven and home for these women and is known as the Coleman Foundation, named for the family of Bruce Coleman, who are continuing the work of their parents who so unselfishly dedicated their lives to the care and concentrated education of these residents who need the added attention. Weather permitting, usually about twelve of these profound believers occupy our pews on Sunday mornings for religious services.

Sitting in the sanctuary in one of the 112-year-old pews, one is aware of the old-fashioned wainscoting of beautiful wood that was so plentiful in the days when the church was built, the wooden beams that adorn the ceiling, the old chandeliers that were a gift from Dr. and Mrs. I. L. Spalding, and the lately installed fans that provide comfort in the sweltering days of summer and help distribute heat in the wintertime.

The plaque hanging on the West wall is but a small tribute to the loving service given by Miss Manie Havens who served many years as a Sunday School teacher, youth leader, and spiritual counselor to young and old who sought her advice.

The “Book of Remembrance” lists all gifts made to the Memorial Fund in memory of their loved ones. It is placed on a pedestal in the back of the sanctuary and is available to the public.

In the Fellowship Room on the lower level, walls were papered, carpeting was installed, and draperies were hung in 1975.

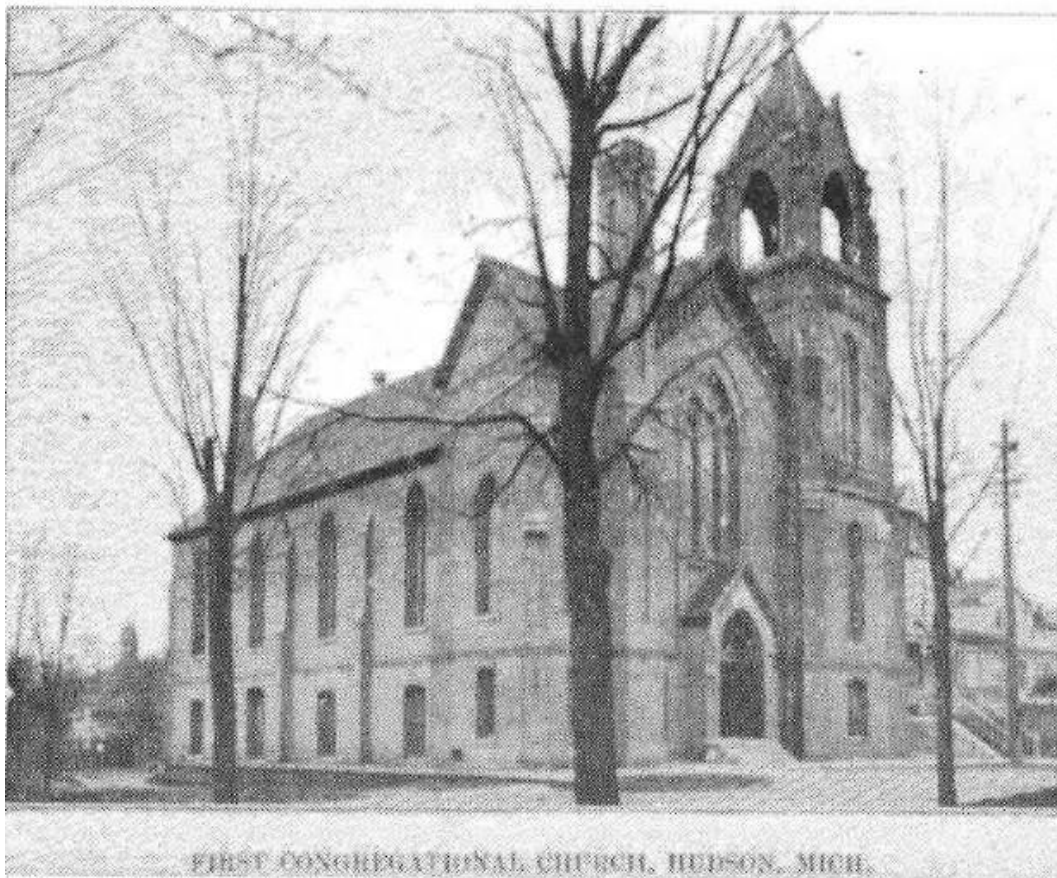
In 1976, for the vital older and handicapped citizens of the congregation, a chair-ride was installed to enable these members easier access to the upper floor sanctuary.

In 1977 the beautiful stained-glass windows, whose cost would be prohibitive today, were protected by plexiglass. Also, a new furnace was installed.

For greater ease in hearing, a loudspeaker system was installed in November of 1980.

In 1982, the ceiling in the kitchen was dropped, and the kitchen was completely refurbished. In December of the same year, a parcel of land, consisting of approximately one acre, at the end of Hemlock Street, was donated to the church by Rollin and Jean Clark, former resident of the street.

The present minister in Hudson’s Sesquicentennial Year is the Rev. Maurice O. Dirette.





This was printed in 1983 "Reflections on the Bean" by Verdie A Yager