

The
OLD Sharon Church
and
Cemetery

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by

Fred South
Prophetstown Area Historical Society
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Introduction

Those who traveled the Spring Hill blacktop for many years drove by the Sharon Church, which sat next to the Sharon Cemetery. A few years ago it was demolished due to its deteriorated condition. To satisfy my own curiosity I decided to find out more about the church and cemetery. This is a record of what was found.



The first Sharon church.

History of Whiteside County

Author: Bent, Charles, 1844-

Publisher: Morrison, Ill. [Clinton, Ia., L. P. Allen, printer]

History of Portland Township page 348

The Presbyterian Church and society in Portland, was organized at Sharon, in 1839, by Rev. Mr. Wilcox, of Geneseo, Henry County. The first members were: Deacon Kemmis, Mrs. Kimmis, his mother, Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah H. Johnson, Mrs. Nathan Norton, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Getty, Mrs. Durfee, Reuben Hurd and Horace Hurd. The society was organized in the school house near James Rowe's place and in which the little church, held their first meeting. It was not long before they were blessed by addition of twenty members, mostly by confession of faith. The old log school house became too small for the requirements of the church, and steps were taken to build a meeting house. Such was the energy with which the work was prosecuted that on Christmas Day 1841, it was finished and dedicated, Nathaniel Norton was the largest contributor towards the erection of the church, but all contributed according to their limited means. Mr. Norton soon afterwards donated ten acres of land to the church, and assisted largely in erecting a comfortable parsonage at the cost of \$400.

Rev. Daniel Rockwell was the first settled pastor, and he ministered to their spiritual wants for two years, some twelve members being added to the church during the time. Rev. Mr. Bliss, a returned missionary, then took charge and remained for seven years. Following him was Rev. Amasa C. Lord, who remained a year and a half. Rev. E. R. Martin then became pastor, and continued his labors for seven years. Under his pastorate the church obtained its greatest prosperity, having fifty-one members. Unfortunately, the parsonage, with all the church records, was burned at this time. A new one was however, soon erected. At the close of Mr. Martin's term, Rev. Joseph Baldwin became pastor, remaining only six months, and was succeeded by Rev. Wm. Kenricks, who continued in charge for three years. The next settled clergyman was Rev. J. P. Chambers, who continued his labors for three years, after which the church was without stated pastoral supply for six years. Rev. Mr. Corbett is the present pastor, and during his ministry twenty-five have been added to the church. It now has a membership of forty. There is a fine cemetery adjoining the church, and in it sleep a large number of the oldest settlers. There is also a cemetery adjoining the school house on section 14, in which there is a handsome monument erected by the citizens of the town in honor of her brave and noble sons who fell in the war for the preservation of the Union.

History of Whiteside County by Wayne Bastian 1968

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The Presbyterians were active in organizing as early as 1839 when they established a church at Sharon. The meetings were held in a log- schoolhouse until the society built a church on the northwest corner of section 29 in Congressional Township 19 north, range four east, in 1841. Dedication services were held on Christmas Day. A parsonage was built soon after. It

burned at a later date and was replaced. Nathaniel Norton contributed largely to the project, donating both money and a ten-acre tract of land. Part of the ground was laid out as a cemetery.

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Sharon Church changed greatly with the passing of years. Presbyterians became fewer; members of other faiths attended and the name was changed to People's church. It was outgrown and replaced with a new church which was dedicated on July 7, 1907. Henry Kempster, Richard Thompson and J. P. Fuller, who attended the dedication on December 25, 1841, were present at the second ceremony. The new edifice had an auditorium 48 feet by 30 feet in size and an annex 18 feet by 30 feet. The ceilings, floors and woodwork were hard pine. Seating was furnished by Opera chairs and there were gas lights. The basement had a furnace room and kitchen. The last regular service was held in Sharon Church on December 7, 1941, but a Ladies' Aid society remained active and took on the care of the unused building.

In 1967, there were 18 members left. They have explored the possibility of razing the church and making the handsome pulpit-furniture and woodwork available to needy churches. The "cathedral windows of chipped glass" are generally in good repair although there have been a few replacements of panes. The glass has a Jack Frost pattern that tempers the light gently. Outwardly the church presents a well-kept appearance, but the inside is sadly dilapidated because of the leakage where the belfry was removed. A swarm of bees has moved into the vestibule. There is a divergence of opinion on the fate of the white church. Some of the Ladies Aid believe it should be preserved as a landmark while others take a realistic view on the cost of maintenance and the dwindling of workers caused by the passing of time. The cemetery is maintained by taxes levied by the township. It presents a pleasant sight in its well-groomed condition. The old fence was removed, but the wrought and cast-iron arch was left with the name Sharon and the date 1841, where the entrance used to be. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Arnett presented a large tablet of concrete which was installed in front of the arch. It lies against a gentle slope and carried a single word, Memories.

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Ladies' Aid societies in those days were organized to provide necessities and comforts for the men in service. They served much the same purpose as the local chapters of the Red Cross did in later wars. They made bandages and dressings, collected small luxuries and utilities such as needles and thread, paper and writing materials, dried fruits and bedding. The tall monument rest on a base of native stone. There is a plinth of white marble which supports a tapering, square column. At the top, an eagle with raised wings watches from his lofty perch. Even though his beak was dulled by the destructive fingers of time, his claws still curve fiercely on the globe. The monument shows the erosion of 100 years, but it carries legibly the testimonial: "To Their Sons Who Died for Their Country in Grateful Remembrance, Ladies Aid Society, Portland, Illinois, 1867." Listed in fading letters are the names of 12

soldiers who lost their lives during the Civil War. They are Eugene L. Besse, Lyman D. Chase, William R. Norcott, Dennis Mendall, Bark Bisby, Robert Emit Adams, Seth E. Langdon, Daniel McNaughton, George Ocoboch (?), Jonathan H. Brown, Carlos W. Martin and J. Delos Timmerman.

From the Prophetstown Echo, October 1, 1941:

Program To Mark 100th Birthday of Sharon Church

The hundredth anniversary of the building of the first Sharon church will be celebrated Sunday with an appropriate program which will start at one o'clock. The program is as follows:

Opening address, the Rev. Curtis Price, pastor of Loraine church.

Music, Alpha Quartette.

Church history, George Crosier of Geneseo.

Vocal solo, Cecil Olinger.

Address, the Rev. E. L. Fahnestock of Hillsdale.

Music, Erie Quartette.

Reading, "The Old Sharon Church," R. R. Kiner of Prophetstown.

Report on work done on the church, president of Sharon Aid.

Music, Clark Lanphere and Mrs. Eiker.

Reminiscences by audience.

Closing song, "God Bless America."

The present Sharon church, located two miles west of Spring Hill, was built about 30 years ago and stands about 30 feet from the site of the old original building on land sold to the society by Ed Row of Prophetstown, a small plat from the farm which Mr. Row still owns and on which Charles DeRoo is tenant. The original building erected 100 years ago was moved across the road when the new church was built and is now used as a barn on the old Brooks farm now owned by Guthrie & Scott of Erie and on which Tom Carpenter is the tenant. This building was sturdily constructed, with heavy hewn oak timbers, and is in a good state of preservation. It bore the sign "Sharon Church, Erected 1841" and a portion of the sign bearing the date still clings to the front over the door.

The church was built by the people of the west end of Portland township in 1841 at a cost of \$800 and was known as the "Sharon Church." Nathaniel Norton donated half the amount. Robert Getty, J. S. Logan and others aided in its construction. The Rev. Daniel Rockwell was the first pastor. The old building occupied a corner of the Sharon cemetery, but the present building stands adjoining the cemetery. Services were discontinued some time since, but the building is used frequently for religious services and programs and the cemetery is in regular use.

Mr. Row has an excellent picture of the old church 4½x12 inches which he took about 40 years ago with a revolving panoramic camera and which shows Mr. Row himself standing in the road before the church.

Time Stands Still

by Lee Roberts

Sharon Church today stands on the site of the first church in the county. Sitting atop a beautiful rolling hill overlooking the surrounding area, it has a view that is most magnificent and peaceful.

The original Presbyterian Church which stood directly behind the existing iron arch was dedicated Christmas, 1841. The Presbyterian Church and society was organized by Reverend Wilcox of Geneseo. Original members were Deacon and Mrs. Kemnis, the mother, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Getty, Reuben and Horace Hurd, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Nathaniel Norton and Mrs. Durfee. Mr. Norton gave ten acres of land. This was afterwards burned, but another was soon in its place. As Presbyterians grew less

numerous and other denominations increased, the old building became known as the "Peoples Church" on account of its various membership and liberal service. There is also a fine cemetery adjoining the church and in it sleep a large number of the oldest settlers of our area. The oldest recorded burial is 1841.

When the early structure became too small for the increasing attendance, it was decided to erect a new building which was dedicated Sunday, July 7, 1907. This is the present day structure. The Reverend Smith was the pastor in charge of the day's exercise. It was a grand day and hundreds gathered for the occasion. The handsome new church was very well built and modern throughout, and even today is still in remark-

able condition.

Around 1920 the church dissolved, members scattered to other places of worship. From 1920 until approximately 1960 the structure was used only occasionally for meetings and funerals. It has stood stately and quiet since.

Today, standing in the edifice, one can only imagine the voices and memories it holds.

Mrs. Fern (Robert) Fuller, of Erie, member of the Ladies Aid Society of Sharon actively sees to its upkeep. Mr. Blair Redell of Spring Hill has been guardian for approximately 40 years, manicuring the beautiful grounds and seeing after the structure. The church is a mile and a half west of Spring Hill.

The next photos are by Ruth Ellis.



