

175th Anniversary

January

In 1836, Adams County was established by the Act of Indiana General Assembly. By 1838, there were five families living in what had been selected as the site for the county seat. Of these five families, two were Methodists; the Samuel Rugg family and the James Crabb family. Other early members living near the vicinity of Decatur were John Reynolds, Thomas Johnson, William Pillars, Sampson Rice, Jacob Cline, Thomas Archbold and Vochall Ball.

These early Methodists met in the various homes of the members during those early years, but with their numbers increasing, they needed a larger place to meet.

The answer for the group came when the first log school house was built on 2nd Street in 1839, a little south of Jackson Street. It was a log building 30 ft. x 20 ft., with a puncheon floor (a split-log or heavy slab of timber with one face smoothed), stick chimney, fireplace, puncheon benches and greased paper windows. It was essentially the community center for the town, as it was used not only for educational purposes, but religious services and town meetings as well. When the school became too small for the worship services, the church moved to the newly constructed court house, which was built in 1839 and stood on the corner of 3rd Street and Madison, where the Collier Insurance building now stands.

Circuit, or traveling, preachers from Allen County occasionally came to Decatur to preach, but it wasn't until October 13, 1841 that Jesse Sparks was appointed as resident pastor of the newly organized Decatur circuit and thus became the first in a long line of Decatur pastors. It was while the Methodists members were still part of a circuit, that they built their first meeting house in 1851 on the corner of First Street (Front Street) and Jackson Street, at a cost of \$650.00. This was one of four lots given to the early Decatur churches by Thomas Johnson. Four years later, in 1855, the first Methodist parsonage was built on the west part of the lot. The Moose Lodge now stands on this corner.

In 1860, Decatur was made a station with a pastor serving only the Decatur church. This meant that the church was now responsible for the entire support of its pastor. This marked the beginning of a very crucial time for the Decatur church. Not only did the members have to raise the entire support of their pastor, but difficult times were brought on by the Civil War, which broke out in 1861. Loyalties were divided and politics were hotly debated. The darkest period of the church took place in the year 1863, when the church doors were threatened to be closed and the congregation almost stopped coming together for worship. Civil unrest and war threatened to divide not only the nation, but families and the church as well.

An attempt was made during this peak of distress by the pastor to quiet dissent and rid the church of the discussion of politics. Though his intentions were good, the pastor only worsened the situation. His efforts failed and the church tittered on the edge of abandonment. Fortunately, 1864 brought new administration and the church eventually grew stronger, not only in membership, but in faith as well.

“In fact, so well did the church recoup from the Civil War era troubles, that by the late 1870’s it became evident that something better and larger must be provided for a place of worship. “ The cornerstone ledger reads “During the administration of Rev. J. B. Carnes, this class, feeling the want of a new church, owing to the fact that the old church was far from a central location by reason of the late rapid development of the town, and the further fact that neither the location of the building or the building was in keeping with the town or the social influence of the Society, it was determined to procure property and erect a new church edifice providing the aid could be secured.”(Democrat 1897)

Pictures:

Sketch from History program booklet printed in 1984

Single sketch of interior of the first church building on Front St.

Photo of Bosse Opera House

Picture of first Courthouse