

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

175TH ANNIVERSARY

MAY

To emphasize youth work and provide facilities for other church organizational activities, the North Indiana Conference in the early 1920's purchased land along Lake Webster in North Webster, IN and constructed an auditorium and a hotel. When in 1923, the North Adams Conference offered lots for sale on the grounds of the newly formed Epworth Forest Institute, First Church saw this as an opportunity for its members, both adult and youth, to participate in a unique time of learning, fellowship and spiritual growth and so purchased a lot. In 1924, members of the church worked together to construct a two story cottage on the highest point overlooking the lake, and appropriately named it "Decatur Heights."

Helen Walters shares its history with us, when she writes the following:

"Being one of the first cottages constructed on the Epworth Forest grounds brought special hardships to be overcome by the builders. No roads had yet to be cut into the area, making it necessary to transfer all building supplies brought from Decatur to the town of North Webster to a wagon, then pull the wagon by hand across rough, unbroken brush, weed and tree covered ground to the building site. A cook tent was set up where meals were prepared by the ladies over an open fire while the men built the cottage. For them it was truly a labor of love."

The total cost for the lot and construction of the cottage is believed to be \$3,000. Some of the families associated with this early construction were: the John Nelsons, Wilson Beerys, Dan Tyndals, Milt Howers, Leigh Bowens, and the Delton Passwaters, to name a few.

In the early years of Epworth Forest, the youth of all districts of the North Indiana Conference met for "Institute" during the same week. Some churches, like Decatur, had their own cottages, others rented a cottage, and still others lived in tents. The Institute became so popular and conditions so over crowded, that after several years, it was arranged for each district to be given a week for an Institute of its own. It should also be noted that women of the church would volunteer to spend the week cooking for the youth.

For many years the cottage, with its rustic open beamed ceilings, was used by the Women's Society while attending the Conference School of Missions, for group retreats and senior high institute, Sunday school weekends and family fun.

Self-supporting throughout the years, expenses have been covered through generous gifts from Church members, friends of the cottage, and money received from cottage rental. The cottage is still owned by First United Methodist Church and is faithfully maintained by cottage committee members.