

“Senachwine Writings” by William Downey

The Putnam Methodist Church

At the last meeting of the Putnam County Historical Society we heard Mrs. George (Amy) Mathis in a review of the history of the Methodist Church in Putnam County. She stated that the Methodists were notoriously poor keepers of their church records. I have certainly found this to be true in trying to assemble a history of the Putnam Methodist Church. Some of the dates that I give you will be approximate, as I have not been able to find anywhere the older records of the Putnam Church.

In 1839 we find that a Reverend Mr. Kemper, a Methodist, came into the community and assembled a group and started preaching services. The Methodists had held their first class meetings in 1838.

By the year 1857 the congregation had increased in numbers so that no private house would hold them. They then built a rather substantial brick church. This church was a rectangular building rather beautifully decorated in the inside. It served the congregation for a period of 35 years.

I wish that it were possible for us to evaluate the life of a small country church in the 1860's, 70's, and 80's. The population of our Township was much larger than it is today, and one might say that the life of the community very much centered around the small churches. In addition to the Methodist Church there was the Christian Church in our village and in the northern edge of the Township the Swedish Lutheran Church. The Christian Church is still quite active and is serving the community in a fine way.

In 1892 the Methodists built a new frame church directly in front of the older brick church. The trustees of the church at the time were George Sparling, James Giltner, A. B. Henkins, V.H. Wheeler, S. L. Case, H. W. Downey and S. G. Bacon. The Rev. William Wooley served as pastor at the time of the building of the new church.

The old brick church was not torn down immediately, however. For many years it was used as a meeting place for the community. Sometimes a wandering medicine show was held there, and meetings of various sorts. The ladies of the church used it as a place to hold dinners and entertainments. Fish chowder suppers were held there. At the time, fish chowder was quite a treat, and some of the ladies really knew how to prepare it from the plentiful supply of the fish nearby Lake Senachwine. About 1914, however, the old brick church was entirely torn down and removed.

The Putnam Methodist Church continued in a rather prosperous condition until 1915 or so, when the decline in membership made it difficult for the congregation to support a resident minister. As I remember, a Rev. Mr. Seble was the last minister who lived in the parsonage on the church grounds. The minister also had a barn for his horses. To help out with his income, Mr. Seble ran a blacksmith shop and also did carpenter work.

In some of the earlier years of the 1900's the Putnam minister also preached Sunday afternoons at a Methodist Church in Arispie Township in Bureau County.

After the Rev. Seble's pastorate, the church was served partly by a minister from Henry, and supply ministers on week-ends. In the middle and late 1920's the church ceased to be used for services. An occasional funeral was held there.

Then in 1934 the church and grounds were sold to the Senachwine Grade School, whose grounds adjoined the church. The parsonage was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Johnson, who lived there for many years. The Grade School used the church building as a gymnasium for some time, until later years when it was sold and torn down. Proceeds of the 1934 sale of the church were absorbed by the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church, and the membership of the church was transferred to the Henry Methodist Church.