



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The cornerstone of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer was placed in May 1875, making it the oldest house of worship in Pendleton currently in use.

Houses of worship

Old churches share pioneer history

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

As pioneers moved westward across the United States, many brought with them a strong faith in God.

It wasn't long before people began to assemble based on common beliefs. Many early gatherings took place in public buildings or people's homes. Referred to as "circuit riders," traveling ministers would come into town and preach. As their numbers increased, groups of believers set out to construct church buildings to worship in.

In Pendleton, a pair of early churches were being built in the late 1800s within a stone's throw of each other on what is now Southeast Second Street. An informal race was on between the Episcopalians and the Methodists to complete their building first.

Rev. Charlotte Wells, the current pastor of Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, said Episcopalian pioneers focused on the exterior portion of the building, while just down the road, the Methodists concentrated on the interior.

"We finished our building first," Wells said. "But they were able to have their service first."

The Methodists also have a long

and rich history elsewhere in Umatilla County. According to a 1976 booklet created by the West End Ministerial Association, Rev. William Dewese of Echo's Methodist Episcopal Church began holding religious gatherings in the Hermiston home of Col. and Mrs. Horace G. Newport. Beginning in August 1906, they are believed to be the first religious services held in the town.

Episcopal Church of the Redeemer

"It's nice to see our church lasted more than 100 years. It ties us to the people that came before us."

— **Rev. Charlotte Wells**, current pastor of Episcopal Church of the Redeemer

The cornerstone of Pendleton's Episcopal church was laid in May 1875. Nearly 120 years later, the building remains. In addition, it holds the distinction as the oldest church building in Pendleton still being used as a place of worship by its original congregation.

"It's nice to see our church lasted more than 100 years," Wells said. "It ties us to the people that came before us."

Historian Mildred Searcy chronicled the history of the church during its centennial in a booklet called "The Little Brown Jug." The church was called by that name by the husbands of the pioneer women who were instrumental in starting the church.

Wells said if it weren't for the perseverance of the nearly two dozen women, the church might not have been organized. Rev. Lemuel Wells (not related



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The ambry in the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer is used to store sacraments used for communion.

to the current pastor), a circuit riding minister from Walla Walla, came into town. Stopping by the saloons, he invited men to Episcopal services to be held the next day in the courthouse.

Women and children were in attendance but the men were more interested in drinking and gambling on a Sunday horse race.

Wells said he'd hold a special service on Monday for the men. However, as the story goes, the men lost money and didn't want to show up to a church service with empty pockets.

Charlotte Wells said people enjoy the beauty of the church's interior, which features a marble-clad altar, intricate wood carvings, a blue-paneled ceiling over the altar, wood paneling and vivid stained glass windows, including what is believed to be an original Tiffany & Co. A large window just off the main altar commemorates the pioneer women of the church. A highlight, Wells said, is one depicting the "Ascension of Christ" at the back of the chapel.

"Even if there's no light on inside, it still glows," Wells said. "It's stunning."

Regular attendance is 60-70 people, with High Holy Days reaching 100-120, Wells said. The Episcopal church, she said, is very tradition-minded. However, since the human race isn't the same as it was 2,000 years ago, Wells said the church changes with the times.

"We want to honor tradition, but we don't want to be so bound by tradition that we don't change," she said.

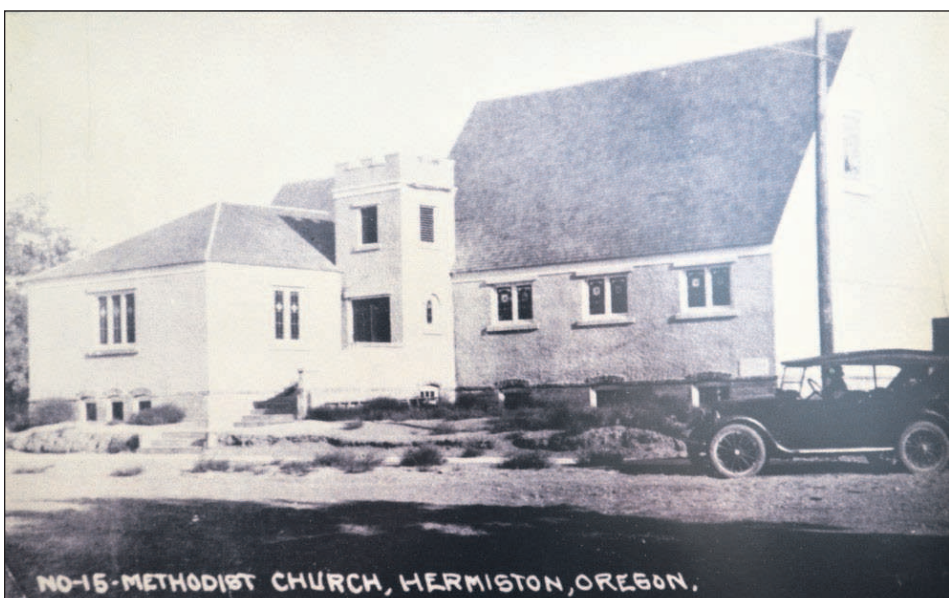
First United Methodist Church

By the summer of 1907, shortly after Hermiston was incorporated, the Methodist church was formally organized in the town.

"During Hermiston's centennial, it also was our centennial," said Judi Mason, a former church secretary. "It was impressive to me that the church has lasted that long."

Referred to as the "Bungalow Church," the first building was constructed in 1908. Located on Northeast Third Street, it was used from 1909-1922, later becoming a parsonage. With

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The First United Methodist Church circa 1922 in Hermiston.

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