

# **Bethel Stone Church**

**By Mark R. Putnam**

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# The History of the Bethel Stone Church

**This is a story about the Bethel Stone Church and its neighborhood located about five miles southeast of Caro, MI, and a mile northwest of Easton Dayton, MI.**

**The word Bethel is Hebrew [Bayeet-el] and means "House of God"**

There were once two Methodist Churches in early East Dayton, MI. One was the Bethel Stone Church or the Methodist Protestant Church that was located about a mile northwest of East Dayton in Wells Township while the other church was the Methodist Episcopal Church whose ministers were listed in the various *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directories* for the years between 1863 and 1897 for East Dayton, MI, in Dayton Township.

Four of the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church seem to have been Reverend Matthew McClain who is the pastor of the church in 1863, Reverend Ira H. Camburn who is the minister in 1875, Reverend Allman who is the pastor in 1883, and Reverend George Traver is the minister in 1897.

The *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI*, printed in 1883 says that "A class of the Methodist Episcopal Church held services at the schoolhouse in District No. 2 [Dayton Township] preaching being by Reverend Mr. Allman. Services are also held at the schoolhouse at Hurd's Corners. A church edifice was commenced several years ago near Hurd's Corner, which however has never been completed. The Protestant Methodists also have services at the schoolhouse in District No. 2, Reverend Mr. Robinson officiating. The Free-will Baptists meet for religious services at the Smith Schoolhouse."

The Methodist Episcopal Church served the area mostly south of East Dayton and seems to also be called the Dayton Church.

While once separated, in the USA, the Methodist Protestant and the Methodist Episcopal Church eventually merged to form the United Methodist Church. Source: Wikipedia.

## **The Bethel Stone Church**

### **1852**

Lumberman James Ketchum, who once worked for a railroad company buying wood, purchased considerable tracts of pine land along Sucker Creek beginning in 1852 on which one lot near the high ground near the forks of the creek would later become the site of the Bethel Stone Church and the Bethel School.

Many of the early inhabitants of southern Wells Township worked in the lumber camp of James Ketchum.

**1855**

The *1855 Farmer Map* or Chart shows the primeval region of Indianfields, which is located in Tuscola Co., MI. The local called the “windfall” on the chart to the southeast will be the future home of the Bethel Stone Church and its community.



**1858**

The Township of Wells was originally formed it appears by people who were committed to the Methodist Protestant Church philosophy.

The Methodist Protestant Church was formed in 1828 by former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church and remained Wesleyan in doctrine and worship but adopted congregation as opposed to Bishop governance. A majority of the Methodist Protestants were reunited with the Methodist Episcopal Church in in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

Wells Township was named in honor of its first settler Joseph Wells. The first settlement was made in the south part of the town. The area was covered then with a heavy beech, maple, hemlock, ash, cherry, birch, basswood, and scattering pine of large size on the high ground, and tamarack, cedar, and sapling pine on the low or swampy ground, the latter making up more than half the township. A dense growth of pine stood in the area. From 1860 to 1870 large quantities of cork pine were cut and delivered on Sucker Creek that runs into the Cass River and to Saginaw mills. For a number of years, the cutting and hauling of pine during the winter months afforded the early settlers with profitable employment form which they derived their principal means of support. <sup>2</sup>

Many of the families who arrived early had worked in the lumber woods and rivers for many generations.

The earliest pioneers of the local that will become Bethel were the Chambers, Wells, and Putman families.

It is said by family tradition that the Chambers family built the local Bethel Stone Church while the Putman family built the local Bethel School.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, United Methodist Church.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI.*

The Putman family, whose members or sons of William C. Putman were stone masons, likely laid the stones for the church and certainly did so for the school.

Another later member of the community Zara Spencer, who married a daughter of Susannah Osborne and Robert Chambers, was also a mason.<sup>3</sup>

## **1860**

The Methodist Protestants formed the first religious services in Wells about 1860, and the first preachers were Reverends Smith and Baker [More information a bit later]. Soon after 1860 the Methodist Episcopal denomination formed a class. The United Brethren also by 1883 have a church on Section thirty-three. <sup>4</sup>

The Methodist Protestant congregation would grow and built into the Bethel Stone Church congregation.

## **About 1860-75**

Reverend Baker preached at the Bethel Stone Church at an early date likely starting about 1860.

He expectedly was the itinerate Methodist Episcopal lay preacher with the name of Reverend John Baker who served Tuscola Co, MI.

John Baker was born in England in 1822. Reverend Baker emigrated to America in 1836 and with his father and sister settled in Genesee Co.

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<sup>3</sup> *1880 Tuscola Co., MI, Census.*

<sup>4</sup> *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI.*

where in 1844 he married Almira Van Steenburgh. After a series of moves, the Baker family settled in Denmark, Tuscola Co.

Three or four years after the settlement of the eastern part of Denmark, Elder Lewis Mitchell made visits to Watrousville. Reverend Mitchell was a Methodist Episcopal circuit rider. In 1852 the Methodists had no appointments east of Saginaw. But in the fall of 1853, with the increase in settlement in the eastern part of the Saginaw Valley, the conference set up the Tuscola Circuit. In 1855 the Tuscola Circuit reported ninety members. Reverend Mitchell was appointed for the year 1856-57 to the Tuscola Circuit.

In 1856 hearing of his preaching at Watrousville, John and Almira Baker walked over to the meeting that was 3- 1/2 miles east of their Denmark Township home. After the meeting, they invited Reverend Mitchell to come to their house and also hold a meeting. Like a true circuit rider, Mitchell went home with them. He stayed overnight and made an appointment to return and preach two weeks later. This was the first public worship in that community.

About this time, Mrs. Baker began to conduct a Sunday School in their home. The children from the whole neighborhood assembled for that purpose. It was said that she performed the duties of superintendent, chorister, and teacher. At the end of the 1857 church year, Reverend Mitchell reported three local preachers on the circuit: one expectedly was John Baker. He also reported a parsonage and three Sunday Schools with 110 students but no libraries. By 1858 the Tuscola Circuit had grown greatly probably due in part to the growth in the incoming population. It reported 185 members and 132 probationers! There were also 6 Sunday Schools with 128 pupils and 285 books in the Sunday School libraries! The Methodists made a strenuous endeavor to



buy cheap and worthwhile books from their Book Concern and established regular lending libraries in the Sunday Schools.<sup>5</sup>

The Bakers lived and worked in Denmark Township until 1880, when they moved into the town of Vassar. Perhaps John felt the need to retire. He was then active in the Tuscola County Pioneer Society. In 1888 he was the treasurer.

The first religious services in the Elkland Township, Tuscola Co., were held by Reverend John Baker of the Tuscola Circuit, Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1860, at the log house of Andrew Walmsley on a Sunday evening. Notice had been sent by Mr. Baker that the service would be held, and the fact was made known to the settlers who came in from seven miles around. The house was filled. Arrangements were made by Mr. Baker to preach at the same place once a month with Reverend McKenney of Ellington coming once a month. From that time on services were held every two weeks.<sup>6</sup>

This schedule and thoughtful labor of Reverend John Baker may also have been applied to the early congregation of south Wells that afterward established the Bethel Stone Church.

## **About 1860-1875**

Methodist Protestant Church in Tuscola County: About the year 1858 a class of the Methodist Protestant Church was organized in Ellington Township, Tuscola Co., at the house of Simeon Botsford under Rev. A. M. Warren with four members: Simeon Botsford and wife and William R. Robinson and wife. To this class Mr. Warren preached about three

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<sup>5</sup> *January, 1988 - Detroit Conference United Methodist Archives.*

<sup>6</sup> *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI.*

years. Services were held at school-houses. He was succeeded by Rev. C. D. Covill.

The first quarterly conference, embracing nearly all of Tuscola County was organized as the Cass River circuit at a meeting held at the Bourne school-house in what is now Ellington in 1862: Rev. X. O. Smith was chosen pastor and Simeon Botsford, secretary.

From this circuit as originally organized, new circuits were from time to time formed: the Fair Grove, Cass City, Prairie, and Tuscola.

The Cass River circuit embraced Almer, Columbia, Elmwood and Ellington. The Pastors from the time of its original organization were Rev. X. O. Smith, A. Omans, John F. Witherell and wife, Father Bradshaw, John Robertson, Mrs. N. J. Remington and E. B. Sutton.<sup>7</sup>

Sunday School Services were likely held in Wells Township as it was elsewhere in Tuscola County beginning at the homes of early settlers first, then at the local school house, and finally at the Bethel Stone Church.

Ministers such as Reverend John Baker and Reverend X. O. Smith perhaps provided services once or twice a month with Sunday School occurring four times a month.

## **1875**

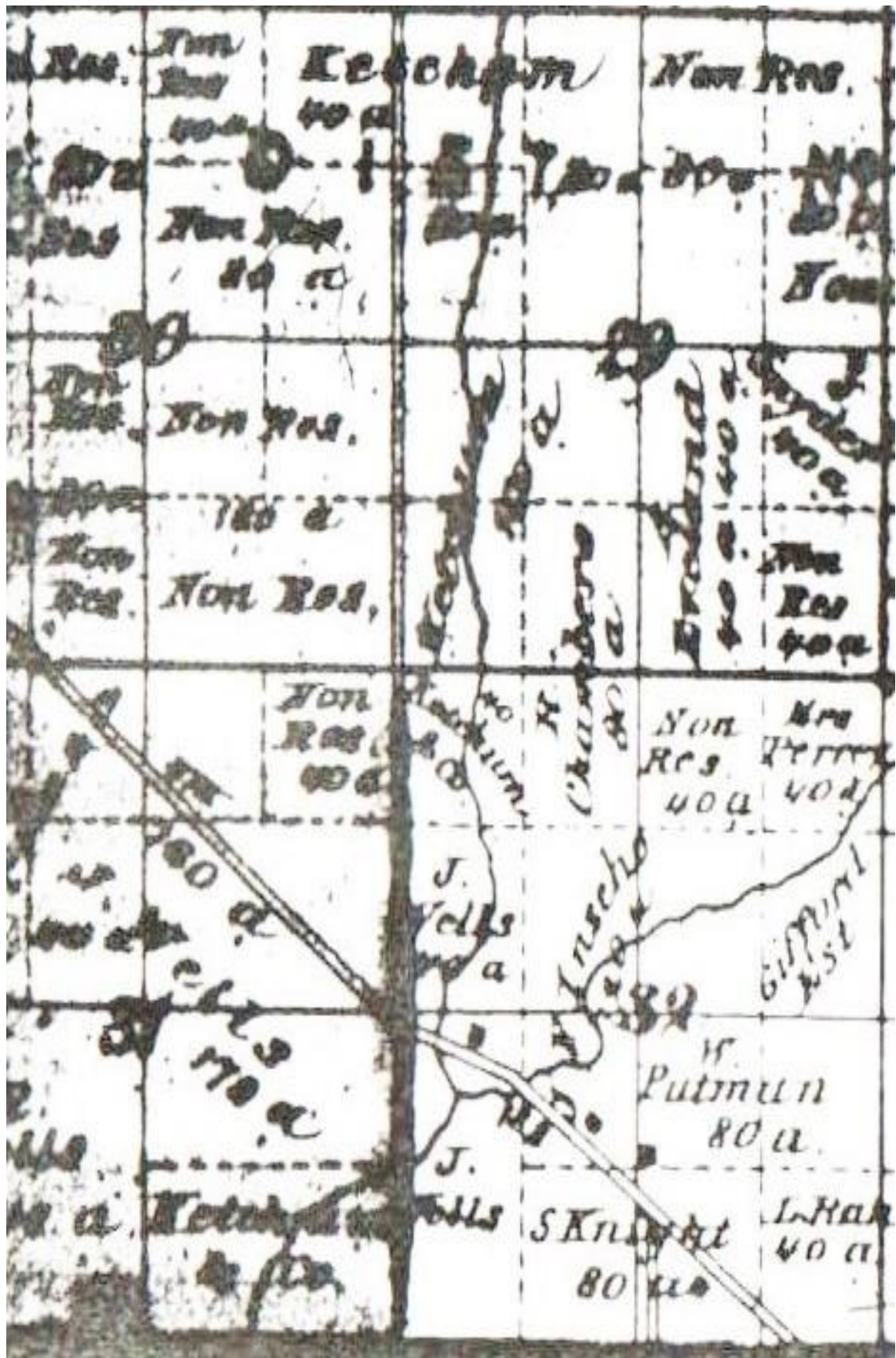
In 1875 Lee Hill and Rossman Rd. then were not made or graded. The eighty acres, part of which would later be separated to create the Bethel Stone Church lot, was then owned by Robert Chambers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI.*

<sup>8</sup> *1875 Map of Tuscola County.*

In 1875 there was neither a church or schoolhouse at the Bethel Corners.



## 1880

Reverend Daniel Dean was a clergyman who resided in Wells according to the Wells, Tuscola Co., MI, Census. It is unknown whether he was the preacher for the congregation that would later become the Bethel Stone Church congregation. Reverend Dean was born in 1829 in NY, and was a Methodist Minister.

## 1883

The *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI*, printed in 1883 says that in Dayton Township, which is just south of Wells Township that the Methodist Episcopal Church held services at the schoolhouse in District No. 2 with preaching being done by Reverend Mr. Allman. Services were also held at the schoolhouse at Hurd's Corners.

The Protestant Methodists also had services at the schoolhouse in District no. 2, with Reverend Mr. Robinson officiating. [This was likely what became the Bethel Stone Church congregation.]

The Free-will Baptists were meeting for religious services at the Smith Schoolhouse.

It appears the Bethel Stone Church was not yet built at this time.

The *History of Tuscola and Bay Counties, MI*, also says that in Arbella Township, "Religious services under the direction of the Methodist Episcopal Church and classes had been kept up since the first sermon was preached in the town . . . [In 1883] there are two classes, one

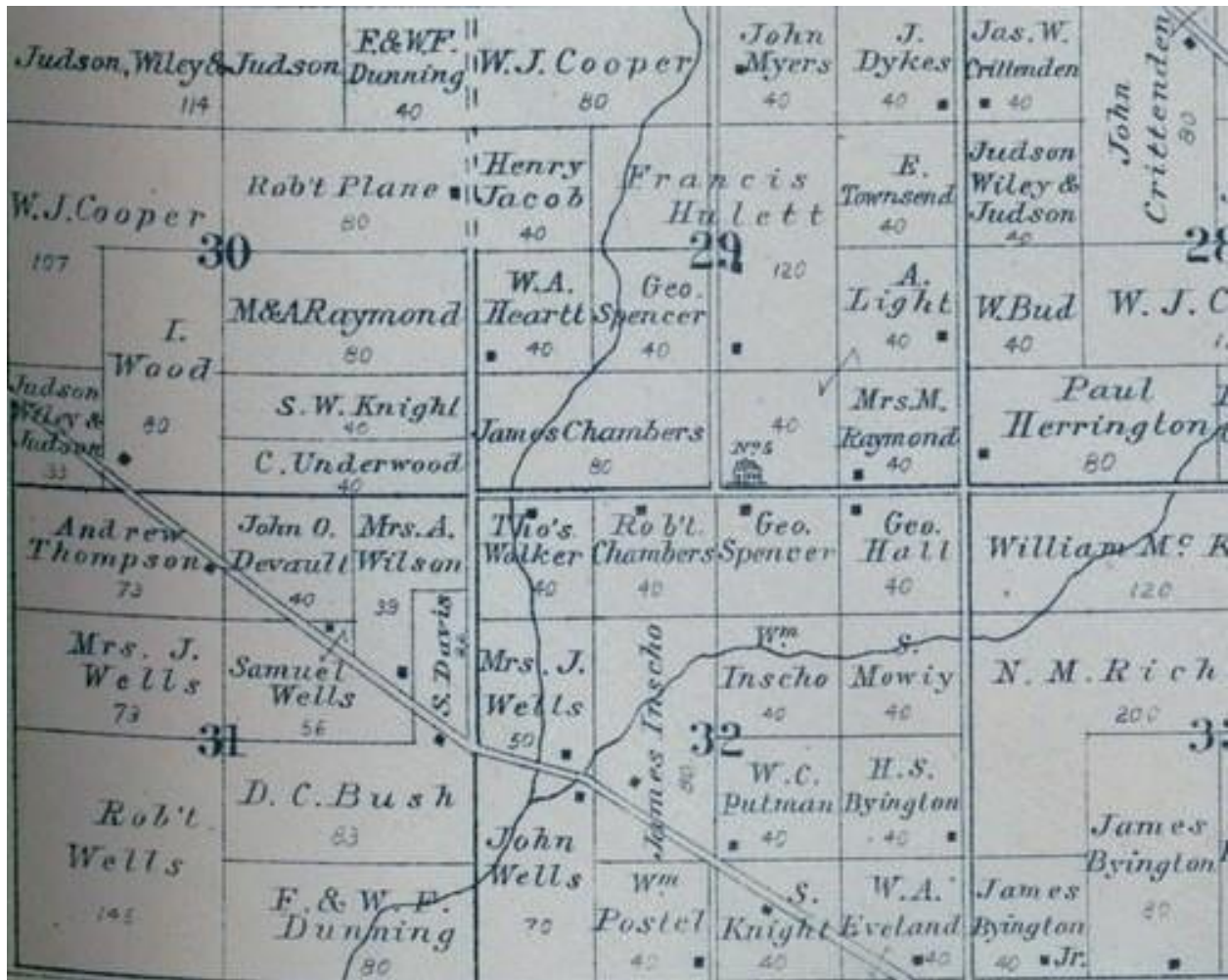
meeting in the schoolhouse in Section Twenty and under the pastoral charge of Reverend Mr. Robinson of Tuscola and the other in the schoolhouse in Section Thirty-two and under the charge of Reverend Mr. Barnum of Pine Run.

It appears that Reverend Robinson may have taught at two separate locations on different days of the month perhaps preaching both in Arbella and later in Wells Township.

## **1888**

The Bethel Schoolhouse of Schoolhouse No. five is in its place in south Wells Township as seen by the *1888 Atlas of Tuscola Co., MI.*

James Chambers owns the property that will soon be sectioned to form the lot for the Bethel Stone Parsonage and Church.



## About 1892

James Chambers of Wells donates land on which is built the Bethel Stone Parsonage and Church. The church also is called the Methodist Protestant Church. James Chambers was a son of Susannah Osborne and Robert Chambers.

## About 1893

The *Tuscola County Advertiser* indicates about this time that people in the Wells community were going about the fields collecting stones for the construction of a new church.

## **1900**

In 1900 Reverend David Newton Earl was most likely the Methodist minister of the Bethel Stone Church in Wells, Tuscola Co., MI. Reverend Earl was born in 1854 in Dundas, Ontario, CAN. He and his wife Alice were listed near James Chambers, William Inscho, and Frank Raymond in the census, which would place Reverend Earl in the Bethel neighborhood. David and Alice Earl were likely then living in the parsonage of the Bethel Stone Church.

In 1910 Reverend David Earl was a clergyman in Akron, MI.

In 1940 Reverend Earl was a resident of Caro, MI.

The Methodist Conference Cane was started in 1904 to celebrate 100 years of Methodism in Michigan. The Cane was presented to the oldest member of the Conference who had “served in the Detroit Conference under the appointment of the Bishop for thirty-five or more years.” David N. Earl was the holder in 1953.<sup>9</sup>

Reverend Earl died in Bay City, MI, in 1953.

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<sup>9</sup> *Historical Messenger*, Winter 2015.





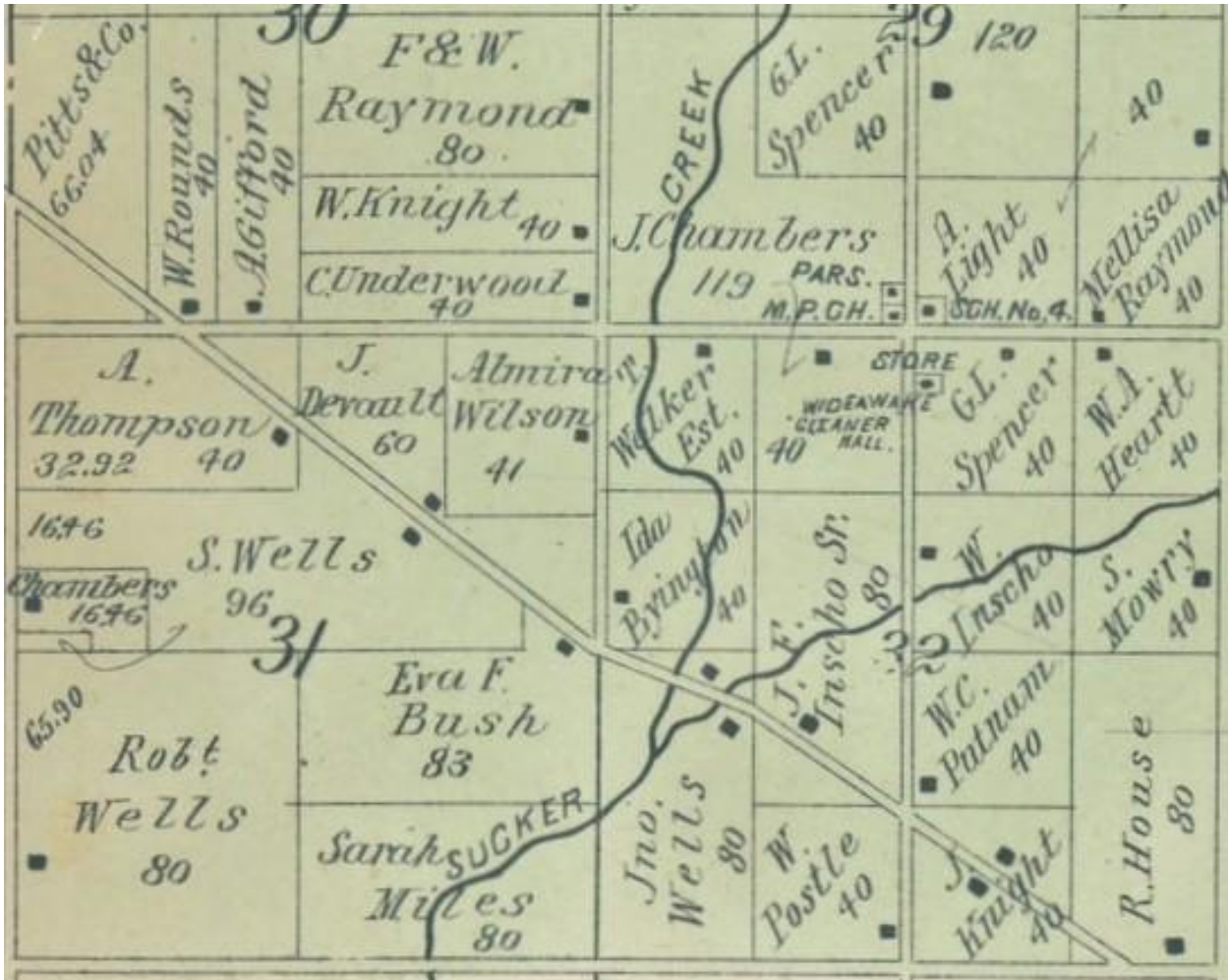
**Reverend David and Alice Earl**

**1902**

The 1902 Chart of Wells Township physically shows the church . . .

locally known as the Bethel Stone Church . . . as the "M. P. CH.", which is an abbreviation for Methodist Protestant Church.<sup>10</sup>

As seen by the chart below, Schoolhouse No. Four is in place, and there is a store just south of the Bethel Corners.



**1908**

<sup>10</sup> Atlas of Tuscola County, 1902.

In April 1908, Elba Raymond, wife of Raymond, died at her home in East Dayton. . . at the age of nineteen. She was married a year before and left an infant daughter. The funeral services were conducted by Reverend Gary of Bethel Church at her home.<sup>11</sup>

## **1910**

Wesley Crittenden is a missionary who resides in Wells, Tuscola Co., MI, according to the Wells, Tuscola Co., MI, Census. Wesley was born in 1849 in MI. Whether he is a missionary for the Bethel Stone Church is unknown.

He may have lived in north Wells Township and was not associated with the Bethel Stone Church.

## **1922**

The funeral services for Mary Chambers Putman are held at the Bethel Stone Church according to the *Tuscola County Advertiser* February 11, 1922. Mary Chambers Putman is a daughter of Robert Chambers.

## **1924**

The Putnam's of south Wells Township early on were lumbermen [The family first worked for James Ketchum who owned considerable pine timberland along Sucker Creek.] The 1924 obituary of William H.

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<sup>11</sup> *Tuscola County Advertiser* April 10, 1908.

Putman gains us an insight into the lives of two elder sons in the Putman family: William H. Putman early in life was a resident of Wells Township and was known to many an old lumberman. He died in Detroit October 10, 1924, and was a brother of R. J. Putman then of Caro, Claude Putman and Lloyd Putman of Wells Township, Mrs. Philo Harmon of Wahjamega, and Mrs. Edward Wiederhold of Mayville, MI.

William H. Putman was born in Wells in June 1861 and was one of the first white children born in Wells Township. His father William C. Putman was an early settler, and it was in his home that the meeting was held in which it was decided to name the township "Wells". For years, William H. Putman and his younger brother R. J. Putman worked together in the timber woods both in Tuscola County and along the Tittabawassee and Kawkawlin River. When lumbering in this vicinity began to wane, William H. Putman set out for Northern Michigan. About 1901, he began lumbering in Ogemaw County, and he lived there until the spring of 1923 when he moved of Detroit because of ill health.<sup>12</sup>

## **1930**

Reverend Alva Stevens is living in Wells and was a Methodist minister according to the 1930 Wells, Tuscola Co., MI, Census. Reverend Stevens born in 1909 in Toledo, OH, so he was 21 in 1930 and a young man.

## **1939**

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<sup>12</sup> *Tuscola County Advertiser, October 12, 1924.*

Bethel Methodist Church—Church School begins at 11:00 AM. Worship services are at 12:00 PM with the sermon by Reverend H. G. Bushong. Everyone was invited.<sup>13</sup>

Henry G. Bushong who was born in OH lived in Sandusky in 1930 and in Cass City in 1940 where he was the pastor of the Cass City Methodist Church.

He possessed a four-year college degree.

Reverend Henry Gustavus Bushong died in Royal Oak, MI, in 1981.

### **About 1937 to 1940**

A reception that honored Dr. and Mrs. E. Ray Willson was held at the First Methodist Church, Caro, in observance of the Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary of the couple in November 1964.

Dr. Willson was born in 1892 in Cedar Springs, Ontario, and Mrs. Willson the former Nellie Marie Burse was born in 1898 in Tuscola county.

They were married by the late Reverend Conger Hathaway in Caro, MI.

Reverend Willson was ordained a Methodist Protestant Clergyman in 1917 and served the following churches in Tuscola and Huron counties: Wells, Gagetown-Brookfield and Sutton-Remington-Sunshine before being elected president of the Methodist Protestant Church of Michigan.

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<sup>13</sup> *Cass City Chronicle* September 22, 1939.

[In 1920, 1930, and 1940, Reverend and Mrs. Willson were residents of Elmwood, Tuscola Co., MI, it appears that the Willson may have taken Hurd's Corner Rd. south to Wells Township to preach on Sunday at the Bethel Stone Church.]

Adrian College conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity on Reverend Willson in 1936.

Nationally in 1939, the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Churches reunited to form one church.

Dr. Willson was appointed pastor of the First Methodist Church, Caro, in 1941 and remained in Caro for five years.

During that time, the Sherman Street Methodist Protestant Church and the First Methodist Episcopal Church united to form the present First Methodist Church.

After leaving Caro, he served as pastor of the Madison Avenue Methodist Church, Bay City, MI, and then for six years was superintendent of the Port Huron District of the Detroit Conference.

His last pastorate was at Mount Hope Methodist, Detroit.

Retirement found them at their home where they have lived on N. Hurds Corner Road, Cass City, MI, and at Port Richey, FL, in the winter.<sup>14</sup>

Reverend Dr. Ray Willson as we see started this ministry at the humble Bethel Stone Church.

Dr. Willson died in Caro, MI, in 1973.

## 1940

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<sup>14</sup> *Cass City Chronical*, December 2, 1964.

Mrs. Catherine Quinn Putman, wife of Lloyd Putman [a son of Mary Chambers Putman Inscho] of Watrousville, died in February 1940 after an illness of ten days. A short service was held at the home, and the funeral occurred at Bethel Stone Church in Well Township.

Dr. E. Ray Willson was the presiding official.

Burial was in East Dayton Cemetery.<sup>15</sup>

By 1941 Dr. Ray Willson was the pastor of the Caro First Methodist Church.

## **About 1945**

Peter Putnam the son of Claude and Jenny Brady Putnam tells the story that Ms. Abke the teacher at the Bethel School would take the school children across the road to the Bethel Stone Church for the Christmas Presentation.

## **1951**

According to the *Cass City Chronicle*, November 2, 1951, Reverend Boilieu at this time was a guest speaker at the Bethel Stone Church.

## **1955**

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<sup>15</sup> *Tuscola County Advertiser*, February 29, 1940.

Claude A. Putman died February 17, 1955, and the *Tuscola Advertiser* printed his obituary that stated that this funeral services were held the following Sunday at 2 PM at the Bethel Stone Church with Reverend Davis of Garden City, MI, being the presiding official.

## 1955

A meeting was slated at Bethel Stone Church: The Huron-Tuscola Holiness Group met at the Bethel Stone Church in Tuscola County May 13, 1955, and was announce by Rev. M. S. Krake.

Reverend K. Roy Johnson of Spencerville, OH, was to speak at 10:30 AM.

Reverend C. E. Morgan of St. Louis, MI, spoke at 2 PM.

There was a potluck dinner at noon.<sup>16</sup>

## 1956

On October 19, 1956, the *Tuscola County Advertiser* provided the obituary of Samuel "Sampy" Wells who was the son of the first family to settle in Wells Township. His parents were Joseph and Jane Wells: "One of Tuscola County's oldest citizens, Sampy Wells, ninety, died . . . at his home in Wells Township after a long period of failing health. Funeral services were held at the Bethel Stone Church . . .

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<sup>16</sup> *Cass City Chronicle* May 13, 1955.



under the direction of the Huston Funeral Home with Reverend C. S. Edgerton of Port Sanilac [officiated] . . . Mr. Wells was born May 1, 1866, at Wahjamega the youngest son of thirteen children of Joseph and Jane Wells. With such a large family, Mr. Wells used to say, "There was a dearth of available names, and he chose his own name". His parents were natives of New York State and first came to Michigan in 1856 to live at Saline. The trip from that town to Tuscola County was made by ox team . . . May 15, 1890, Mr. Wells married Jane Green and except for sixteen years when they operated a store at East Dayton they lived on the same Wells Township farm in Section Thirty-one. For forty-eight years, Mr. Wells was a school officer of the Four-town's School and the East Dayton School and was a member of the Bethel Stone Church, the Gleaners, and the Wells-Dayton Farmer's Club. His span of life included the old lumbering days, and he . . . told of watching the log drives on Sucker Creek when boats were tied to the front porch of his home . . ."

### **1964 to 1968**

The *Kingston Enterprise*, June 5, 1964, indicates that Reverend John Gross was the pastor of the Bethel Stone Church.

Reverend John Gross was born in Millington, MI, May 10, 1900, and was a resident of Millington most of his life. He lived at 7112 Washburn Rd. and was the minister of the Bethel Lower Light Church. He died at the age of sixty-eight in October 1968.

Reverend John Gross was a minister and farmer.

Funeral services were held at the Bethel Lower Light Church.

Reverend W. O. Kenal performed the service.<sup>17</sup>

## **1975**

Jennie Brady Putman wife of Claude A. Putman died September 28, 1975.

Her obituary in the Tuscola County Advertiser indicates her funeral services were conducted at the "Bethel Lower Light Church" [formerly called the Bethel Stone Church].

Reverend David Shofer of the Bible Baptist Church, Mayville, MI, was the official.

## **1977**

Passing away January 15, 1977, at the age of 78 years, Ethel E. Gulliver Kratz was born July 28, 1898 near Reese, was a lifelong resident of Tuscola County, and was a member of the Bethel Lower Light Church.

## **1983**

Philip and Sue Arnold became ministers of the Bethel Lower Light Church on Lee Hill Rd. south of Caro, MI.

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<sup>17</sup> *Tuscola County Advertiser, October 3, 1968.*

**The Bethel Stone Church is now privately owned and not open.**