

## History Of The Morland United Methodist Church

The Morland United Methodist Church, one of three churches in the Graham County United Methodist Parish, along with the community of Morland has undergone numerous changes throughout the years.

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Early settlers of western Graham County settled on the north bank of the South Solomon River and named their community Fremont. February 24, 1881, serves as the official date for the formation of Fremont. The railroad followed the river going through the small communities along the way. However, the railroad ran on the south bank of the South Solomon River, at Fremont, instead of the north side. As the train service increased another problem developed when the railroad requested that the town change its name because confusion resulted, from time to time, in the delivery of freight between Fremont, Kansas and Fremont, Nebraska. The name change from Fremont to Morland occurred in 1895.

During the formation years, in the Fremont community, the settlers realized a need for both a church and a school. A community with a church and a school showed permanent settlement and community prosperity. The earliest record of religion in the community appears in June of 1886 with the formation of a Sunday school. The Sunday school class met in the vacated rock home of Ralph Morgan. This home still stands today north of the river. Mr. Snyder Horton served as the first Sunday school superintendent.

Pioneers, during the years 1885 and 1886, who led the way in forming a church in Fremont were: Synder Horton, David Findley, M.G. Findley, D.M. Findley, Elmer Bright, Edward Thomas, Samuel Dearholt, James Stone, Rev. John E. Langley, J.B. Elliot, G.W. Stober, D.C. Kay, and G.W. Northrup. Eva and C.H. Morgan furnished most of the rock for the building from their farm.

By November 1887, the carpentry work on a 26'x36' stone block building with eighteen inch thick and twelve foot high walls neared completion. The construction of this building received financing primarily from the Presbyterians of the community. However, they encountered difficulty financing the entire project themselves, and the Methodists of the community financed the remaining balance. As a result of this action the church became more of a community church with both Presbyterians and Methodists using the building for worship.

Early leaders of the Methodists in Fremont lived and worked in the community. James Stone, a local businessman, served as the first class leader. He also appears in the church records as pulpit supply for the years 1893 and 1894. At the next conference, following his appointment in 1893, James Stone reported sixty-five full members and forty-eight probationers. Reverend John E. Langley also lived in Fremont and served as presiding Elder for the quarterly meeting held in March 1888. Rev. Langley, "Uncle Jack" to the community, served only churches within traveling distance of his home.

The People's Reveille of March 24, 1898, provided the following article about Rev. "Jack" Langley who was considered a colorful minister and, it is believed, the first ordained Methodist preacher in Fremont.

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"Uncle Jack" Langley is one of the most picturesque and original personages in the west. His fame as a forceable speaker has been achieved largely by his ready and pointed wit. For years he has not attended conference, being satisfied to fill such appointments as he was able to reach in the vicinity of his home near Morland. To hear him preach once is to never forget his individuality. A few days ago we heard an anecdote that was accredited to him for its origin which will illustrate his keen sarcasm and his tenacious faith. He was one of a group of ministers who were discussing the subject of Jonah and the whale. About all of them had expressed their views when it came "Uncle Jack's" turn, and this is about the way he expressed his ideas: "Well, my brethren, I believe the story is true for two reasons. First: 'The New Testament makes reference to the subject, and second, Jonah was a back-slidden preacher. I don't believe that God could create a fish with a stomach strong enough to hold down a back-slidden preacher.'"

The ladies of the community contributed to the church as well as the men. On August 15, 1887, the ladies organized "The Union Mite Society of Fremont. In the beginning, the society formed to raise money for finishing the church. In March 1888 they purchase chairs and lamps for the building.

On June 19, 1891, William Higgins, Secretary of the State of Kansas, issued a Charter to the First Methodist Church of Fremont, Kansas. Those who signed the Charter as Trustees were: Snyder Horton, James Stone, and George Stober.

The Methodists in the community existed for only short periods of time by themselves. As stated previously, they shared the use of the church building with the Presbyterians. Then in 1896 Morland and Hoxie Methodist Churches formed a circuit with W.E. Cox serving as the spiritual leader. The circuit lasted until 1899.

The Kansas State Historical Society in "Kansas History-A Journal of The Central Plains" (Spring-1978 issue) published the following writing of Catharine Emma Wiggins who lived in Fremont with her family from September 1889 to 1892. The following provides description of church life at that time.

Neither cars, nor golf, nor movies, nor even baseball as a Sunday amusement, were extant in those days, so both saint and sinner went to church. Two denominations, the M.E. and the Presbyterian, used the same building on alternate Sundays, but there was far less of "brethren dwelling together in unity" than now. There seemed always to be some little thing to jangle about, so small that none of them remain in my memory, but the lack of harmony was evident. The Sunday School was on a union basis. The informality of the meeting may be gauged by a unique election of Sunday School officers. Mr. Jim Stone's term as superintendent had expired. Someone volunteered the information that we must elect a superintendent, but no one took charge. Then Mrs. C., a rather old, and determined lady, rose to her feet and announced, "I move that Jim Stone be the superintendent of this here Sunday School." Dead silence. "Then Jim Stone is the superintendent." Some one remonstrated, "But the motion hasn't been seconded." "I second the motion," said Mrs. C. Then: "It has been moved and seconded that Jim Stone be the superintendent of this here Sunday School. All in favor say 'I' 'I' said Mrs. C., and no one else. All opposed. 'No'. Dead silence again. "Then, said Mrs. C., 'Jim Stone is superintendent of this here Sunday School.'

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The Presbyterian minister, Mr. Atkinson lived in Hill City and came to Fremont on alternate Sundays. The Presbyterian meetings, always quiet, reserved, conventional were not so interesting as the Methodist, which were rather unpredictable. Uncle Jack Langley, as he was familiarly called, was the preacher, -tall, well over six feet, large rawboned, bald-headed, with a red smooth face and prominent veins on temple and forehead. He literally "gave little thought to his raiment." Coat, vest and collar were often thrown aside as he warmed up to his message. During a sermon he could run the full gamut of emotion - crack a joke, tell a funny story and the next moment pound on the pulpit with his big fist or with tears running down his cheeks exhort his hearers to better living. Dancing, card-playing, and drinking were the trio of iniquities and were accounted to be about on the same level.

The preaching service in the evening was usually preceded by a testimony meeting. Converts Joined on six months' probation, after fulfilling which they were baptized by whatever method they preferred. For those who desired immersion, a date was set when the weather was likely to be suitable. One such event took place on a very warm day after a big rain which had filled the buffalo wallows. A particularly large and deep wallow about a mile north of town, was the baptismal font. The water was pretty turbid, but one by one the applicants, each clothed in a white robe of some sort, as was also the minister, walked in and were baptized. Immediately after the ceremony a large dog plunged in and swam gallantly across. The rite ended with prayer and singing, "Shall we gather at the river."

The Methodists of Morland decided to build their own church, apparently as a result of a lack of unity between themselves and the Presbyterians. George Stober donated the land and the new Methodist Church except for the cost of the foundation and the furniture. Dedication of the new church occurred on August 21, 1904. Mr. Stober likewise paid for the construction of the parsonage. In 1930 Mr. Stober donated the land for the site of the Assembly Of God Church in the community.

From 1904 until 1930 the church encountered a variety of changes. In 1913 the Morland Methodist Church changed its name to the Morland Methodist Episcopal Church. The following year the Gradan and Penokee churches joined the Morland Circuit. Gradan and Penokee continued, until each church closed, to be in and out of the Morland Circuit. During World War I, members of the congregation supported the war efforts. Even though the church experienced hardships during the years of World War I it continued to meet or exceeded the quota set for the War Emergency Methodist Drive. One hardship, crop failures for more than two consecutive years, caused the church to suffer financial problems in 1918.

The 1920's brought growth to the church at Morland. Attendance at Sunday school would reach 160 with attendance at worship even higher. Evangelistic meetings during this period would last from one to three weeks in length with preaching each day. Vacation Bible School, like the evangelistic meetings, lasted for many weeks. In 1920 Vacation Bible School ran for four weeks. Rev. Gambriell, in his 1929 pastor's report, reported that 55 individuals joined the church with 45 of them uniting during a three week long revival held in February of that year.

As the 1930's drew near, numerous people visualized the need for a new and larger church. This vision may have received help when, on a Sunday in January 1930, a spark settled in the

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eave of the roof and started a fire. Even though members of the congregation quickly controlled the fire, considerable damage occurred to the structure. Damage to the church forced the movement of worship services to the local Masonic Hall.

As September 14, 1930, arrived there had been more than \$5,000.00 subscribed. The following individuals served on the building committee: D.C. Kay, O.A. Hunsicker, B.W. St. John, A.R. Collins, Ross Brooks, Joseph Nichols, M.G. Findley, Mrs. Appa Stober, Cecil A. Smith, C.O. Morgan, W.D. Rath, and Charles E. McFadden. The following day, the 15th, the committee met and elected as Chairman, D.C. Kay; Secretary-treasurer, O.A. Hunsicker; and Construction Committee, B. W. St. John, A.R. Collins, and C.A. Smith. By October 1930, the church had been razed. The project started on September 8th and soon a 40'x80' basement was completed. Dedication services for the newly completed brick church were held on April 19, 1931. The Methodists of Morland continue to gather for worship in this building today.

During the 1940's membership in the church stabilized with little fluctuation. The church served the needs of the community with little attention drawn to itself. Youth groups, Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and women's organizations went about their routines with little out of the ordinary happening. However, by 1949 the Gradan church had arrived at the point where a decision whether to close the church had to be made.

The District Superintendent announced plans to sell the Gradan Church building at auction and give the money to the Morland church with the understanding Morland use the money to update their parsonage. This created controversy between the two communities. The Gradan church sold in 1952, allowing the controversy to continue approximately three years.

Morland received \$500.00 from the sale of the Gradan Church and made a decision to raze the parsonage and construct a new parsonage on the same site. The project started early in November 1952 and arrived at completion in March 1953.

Throughout the 1950's and the 1960's church attendance continued to decrease. As attendance began to decrease the financial stability of the church began to change. With a change in attendance and financial strength the church began to receive student pastors. The concept of a student pastor leading the congregation required considerable adjustment for the people.

For a time discussions centered on whether to maintain a church in Morland or to close the doors. In 1971 the five United Methodist Churches in Graham County met at Morland to discuss the formation of a parish. Financial obligations and declining attendance in the other churches helped the congregations to understand the value of uniting into a cooperative parish. The churches of Morland, Bogue, Studley, and Hill City agreed to form the Graham County United Methodist Parish. The fifth church, Prairie Home, chose to Join a circuit with Wakeeney.

In visiting with members of the congregation memories of a proud past dominate the discussion. In times past the church served the needs of the community and in the area of missions. People still recall when the pews on both sides of the sanctuary held those who attended worship. Today, everyone sits on one side of the sanctuary filling about one third of the

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seats. The need for pews in the overflow area and the balcony have long since disappeared. Finances receive considerable discussion, too. A concern always exists in the area of finances. However, the Lord's Acre Auction, which averages over two or three thousand dollars no longer can totally "make" the budget at the end of the year. Also, the Cattle Fund has declined over the last twenty years. In days past, farmers raised a cow and calf for the church. The calf would be sold and the money given to the church. With the decline in the number of farmers who have cow-calf operations this program has also failed to support the expenses of the church.

In reality the congregation continues to grow older. Still the desire to help others in need, both in the community and in other places, exists. Today resources and energy levels do not measure up to pre-existing levels. Attendance has decreased since the 1960's at a steady rate. The church no longer serves as the social center of the community. Sporting events and other activities within the community and county have increased a demand on the time of the people.

One area of growth can be found in the children and youth. Efforts to attract young people to the church include the starting of both senior and Junior high U.M.Y.F. groups and a "Kids Klub" for grades one through five.

Even though a variety of changes have occurred in the community and in the church during the past one hundred years, a faithful remnant exists at the Morland United Methodist Church. They, as the community, continue to "hang on" hoping for better days and working to the best of their ability to improve themselves and to serve their God.