



# the **CHRONICLE**

The Almost Monthly Publication of  
the Ionia County Historical Society



## THE FIRST (EVANGELICAL) UNITED (BREThEREN) METHODIST (EPISCOPAL) CHURCH OF IONIA

The February Meeting of the ICHS was held in the basement of the First United Methodist Church in Ionia. The long history of this church has been well documented by Marilyn Nash, a document available from the church. Much of the information here is taken from her work, and some from other sources listed at the end of this article.

In 1834, Silas Arnold first held meetings of the Methodist Episcopal Church in his father Oliver's log house south of the Grand River. The congregation was on the circuit of the Michigan Conference, and visited by many preachers through the next several decades. Itinerant preachers rode circuits that spanned many miles and many isolated communities, and Ionia was served first by the Ohio Conference, then the Michigan Conference by 1836. The earliest Methodist congregation in Ionia consisted of only five members of the Yeomans and Arnold families, but as the group grew family-by-family, they began to meet in the local schoolhouse just west of the settlement, and at various halls in town.

Of the long list of notable pastors affiliated with the FUMC, just a few are spotlighted here. One of the earliest was Rev. A.R. Bartlett, a circuit preacher who served the Ionia County area in the 1840s and 1850s.

The Rev. George Bignell, who had been living in the northwest of Ionia County in the 1840s, preached all across central Michigan, including Ionia where he preached his last sermon in 1858.



The new 1873 "Cathedral Church."

A dedicated house of worship was completed in 1855 at the north end of today's Kidd Street which was shared by (and later sold to) the local Congregational Society. Rev. Bignell was credited with growing the congregation to 160 members during his tenure.

Continues on page 2

**NEXT MONTH: Ionia Post Office Celebrates 100 Years of Service!**

"Late one afternoon in 1835, a young man might have been seen running out from the little village along the Indian trail eastward to meet another who was seen coming on an Indian pony with a camp kettle and other accouterments dangling by his side. As he drew near the horseman, he made demonstrations to have him stop, and when the rider drew up, the other cried out, "Are you a Methodist?"

"Certainly," said the man on the horse.

"Then I want you to come to Deacon Yeomans' to preach tonight. They are good people there, but they won't pray for me. Will you come?"

"Certainly," answered the horseman, "and you go to those crowds of men and tell them there is to be a meeting there, and invite them to come, and they will do it."

"But will you be there and help me?" asked the footman.

"Yes, certainly," was the reply.

This was young [Osmand] Monett, the missionary, and the man on horseback was Zebulon C. [a.k.a. "Joseph"] Brown, then of Ann Arbor. The occasion of all this was that there were five or six hundred men here waiting the opening of the United States Land Office, and not being able to find accommodations in the few log houses while they were waiting for the opening of the office (which had been delayed a few days for want of suitable buildings), they had camped around log heaps. Monnett had passed around among them inquiring after a Methodist. One group had sent him to another until they began to feel a little mischievous over it, when one, seeing Brown coming at a distance, directed his attention towards him and remarked to the preacher that "that boy yonder, coming over the bluff on an Indian pony, with his camp kettle dangling at his saddle, is a real live Methodist."

Away he started, with a countenance betokening the last stages of the "blues."

That which was intended as a joke proved to be true in this instance! He was a Methodist, and when the young preacher learned the fact, he said "I am glad of it; you must come down and take holt [sic]."

"Very well," said Brown, "are there no professors about here?"

"Yes," said the preacher, "there are a few Baptists, but they won't pray."

"Never mind," said Brown, "we will hold the meeting."

Brown found that they had criticized the Ohio preacher (Monnett was affiliated with the Ohio Methodist Conference —ed.) in his homespun pretty thoroughly, which he, having endured well, they engaged as a body to go and hear him preach. As Brown was about leaving for tea some two miles distant, Monnett reassured himself by privately saying to Brown, "You will surely be there?"

"Of course," said he.

At dusk, on arriving at the Deacon's, Brown found the house crowded, and many in the yard. "Look here," said the preacher, "I will sing and open the meeting, and you must exhort and close."

"Very well," said Brown, "but you just open, read a long hymn, and line it (as we have no books); then read a long chapter, and make some remarks upon it; pay it on to these land sharks - it will do them good."

The meeting proceeded according to programme. The hymn was lined, and the Grand River Woods sang with the chorus from six hundred voices. After listening to a very fine exhortation of half an hour, the services were appropriately closed. Brown's part consisted simply of reading the closing hymn.

What a change has come over this country and over the people! This was the beginning." (*From Protestantism in Michigan: being a special history of the Methodist Episcopal Church By Elijah Holmes Pilcher, 1878.*)

Some years later Rev. R. Sapp was in the pulpit, and the growing Methodist population began to consider the need for a new church building. In September of 1860, the Michigan Methodist Conference held their annual meeting in Ionia. Rev. Sapp moved on to Grand Rapids after several years, and by 1862 the position was held by Rev. R.C. Crawford.

Many large Methodist tent meetings were held in Ionia during the post-war years, attended by notable preachers and believers from hundreds of miles distant. The resolve of the local congregation grew considerably, leading inevitably to discussions of building a grand new church building on the property just south of the town square on Main Street.

In 1871, the building of the new church was begun. The construction of this edifice was supervised by the Hon. Hampton Rich, one of Ionia's most prominent citizens on the late 19th century. The first worship service was held in the new basement, before the sanctuary was completed. It wasn't until May of 1873 that the new edifice was completed and dedicated. The church's spire became a major feature of the Ionia skyline - its most prominent spire until the construction of the courthouse a dozen years later.



According to the Minutes of the Michigan Conference for 1876:

"The Methodist Society [in Ionia] has a church building valued at \$10,000. They have also given due attention to the Sunday School work, and in this department they are successful and prosperous. The Annual Conference held its session here in September, 1873, and was satisfactorily entertained. Thirty-seven years have now elapsed since the "five" were organized into a Church, and that Church has grown to number 358, besides those who have gone over the river to their glorious reward. Verily, God has been with this

people, and has crowned their labors with success."

By 1880, Rev. Washington Gardner led the congregation as pastor, (R.C. Crawford now listed as "Presiding Elder"). The average attendance was 201, with 25 in the Sunday School, and in August of that year, the debt for the new church was paid in full. At this time, the membership included the families of John C. Blanchard, Hampton Rich, J.L. Hudson, D.T. Fargo, W.C. Page, T.L. Amphlett, Geo. Stevenson, and many other prominent folk in Ionia.

The impressive 1873 church building served the congregation well for a generation.

Sadly a fire completely destroyed this structure in October of 1930. The origins of the fire are not known, but by the time the flames were discovered it was too late to save. The church's website (at <http://www.ioniafirst.com/History.html>) actually has a short video of the 1930 fire. Pastor Kendrick conducted church services in the Ionia County Courthouse while plans were drawn up to rebuild.

Despite the depression, a new church was built and dedicated in 1932, and many additions and improvements have been made since then. Today, 75 years later, the Ionia First United Methodist Church is still growing to meet the needs of its congregation and community, enthusiastically involved in Ionia's vitality.

Thanks again to Pastor Larry Brown and the FUMC congregation for their hospitality.

Additional Bibliography:

Protestantism in Michigan: being a special history of the Methodist Episcopal Church By Elijah Holmes Pilcher, 1878

History of the Free Methodist church of North America, Volume 2 By Wilson Thomas Hogue, 1915

Michigan state gazetteer and business directory for 1863, Volume 1 By R.L. Polk & Co, Charles F. Clark, ed., 1863

Minutes of the Michigan Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church By Methodist Episcopal Church. Michigan Conference, 1900

History of Ionia and Montcalm Counties By John S. Schenck, 1891



*The First Methodist Church has been built twice using the same bricks. First built in 1871-1873, using VanderHeyden brick and Ionia Variegated Sandstone, it was destroyed by fire in 1930. After the fire, many of these bricks were salvaged, cleaned and used to build the walls of the new church. The quarry was reopened and enough stone gotten out to completely face the brick with sandstone. The bricks can still be seen exposed at the south gable end of the main structure.*

## Minutes from the January Meeting

The members of the ICHS gathered at the First United Methodist Church for the February, 2012 meeting.

President Kris Haskins called the meeting to order shortly after 7:00 p.m. with the announcement that he was resigning the position, and his position on the Board of Directors, effective immediately for personal reasons. With comments of support and thanks from the members for his dedication and service, he turned over the meeting to Vice President Stephanie VanderMolen, and took his leave.

After some moments of shock as a result of Kris's departure, the meeting commenced without a planned agenda, but with plenty of business to address.

Treasurer Hank Knoop began with his official report (available as usual on request), followed by the Secretary's report (your truly) which was an apology for dropping the ball on delivery of the January Chronicles. (They had been printed and ready to mail, but I failed to notify Patty S. to get them mailed on time.)

Current topics of discussion follow:

- March 10 will be the Community Expo at the High School, and once again we will have a booth there, where raffle tickets will be sold and the quilt (prize) on display. This booth costs \$95, and it was moved by Stephanie and supported by Kathleen Cook to pay that fee. The motion passed.

- Speaking of the Quilt Raffle, Doni Knoop reported that sales are slow but steady, and encouraged members to sell tickets, which can be acquired from her directly. She asked that the raffle and a photo of the quilt be added to the website, too. Joni McCord will take tickets and a photo to the next Tri-River meeting. The quilt is presently on display at the Ionia Theatre lobby.

- David McCord noted that the members of the Board may have received a rather cryptic email this past week from Yahoo to confirm the email address. This was due to the establishment of a "Flickr" account on behalf of the ICHS - a place on the Internet where we can host our collection of historic images. There are several reasons for using Flickr, including ease of use and access, but also the "findability" of these historic photos and documents to a wider Internet audience, and thereby leading them to our own website and ultimate to visit our community and the Blanchard House. The process of uploading photos has barely begun, and will take several weeks to build "a respectable album."

- Stephanie V. reported that a fundraiser at Boyce Elementary would be on March 3rd, and the ICHS would have a table there for \$10.00. The \$10 has been donated anonymously, and several members have volunteered to help with the event. (If you would like to help, contact Stephanie.)

- Ed Bentley is curator of an Art Show at Olivet College which features Michigan artist, including some pieces

from Ionia. He's invited any interested Ionians to visit the event (see details elsewhere in this issue).

- Joni McCord noted that the annual Appraisal Roadshow event is tentatively set for March 31 - but VERY tentative, as our appraiser is awaiting arrangements for a possible television deal and may not be available. Until otherwise noted, March 31 will be the event, and the Commission on Aging has been reserved. (And thanks to Nixons for volunteering once again to staff the registration table.)

- The Tri-River Museums Group did not meet in January due to weather, but the next meeting will be in Cedar Springs in Feb. The first weekend in May (the 5th and 6th) will be the Tri-River "Spring Into The Past" event, and a chairperson is needed for this event.

- Stephanie reported that the Upstairs-Downtown Tour will be May 19th, and volunteers are being sought now to staff the buildings and help with the event that day. It was suggested that the ICHS also set up a table at the Theatre lobby for promotion and souvenir sales.

- The date for the annual ICHS Yard Sale has been set for June 1st.

- A message was received from the Civil War Reenactors of the 21st Michigan. September 4th will mark the 150th anniversary of that regiment being "mustered in" at Ionia, where they had their basic training at Camp Sigel near Prairie Creek. The group would like to celebrate that anniversary here, and is seeking help from

the ICHS and any other interested parties. The information was passed along to Pastor Larry Brown, who had expressed interest in such an event (and has some plans under way already). More on this as plans progress.

- The program schedule for 2012 still has some open dates to fill. If anyone has suggestions for programs, please contact a Board Member, or bring your suggestion to the membership at the next meeting.

- Speaking of programs, David McCord noted that he would be presenting to the Lowell Historical Society at their March 20th meeting with his "Ionia County in 1861" presentation. Everyone's invited!

- The next Cemetery Tour is scheduled for October 21st, and will again be held at Highland Park with a new cast of characters.

- The Board of Directors has approved the expense of \$450.00 for a new computer, and David McCord is ready to place the order. The suggestion was made to go to the members with the expense to see if we could solicit a donation to cover it. This was not an arbitrary expense, but was prompted by the failure of the existing desktop computer. The new one will be an up-to-date laptop, which will allow our inventory plans to continue as well as open up many more possibilities in the future. Being portable, it can be "taken to the work" rather than stationery, which will save lots of time and hassle.

- The Accessions Committee will

gather briefly on Tuesday, February 6, to review some items from the collection and process some paperwork, as well as discussion of the initial set-up for the new computer and software, making progress towards a workable system of registration for the ICHS collections. There will also be a quick review of the proposed budget for the Accessions Committee.

- Alice Whorley passed around a sign-up sheet for monthly refreshments. There are still a few dates available for members who would like to help supply some repast for our members and guests at this year's meetings.

- The next Business Meeting of the ICHS will be February 15th at the Blanchard House. The first order of business will be to appoint a Director to fill Kris Haskins' position, and to elect a new President and Vice President to complete his term (thru September). Second on the agenda is a review of the Financial Audit for 2011, and to establish a Finance Committee to review and advise on matter of budget. Any interested members are encouraged to attend!

- The March meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on the 7th at the Ionia Post Office.

Our thanks to Pastor Brown and the congregation at the First United Methodist Church for hosting our February meeting, and for the fascinating display of photos, albums, and artifacts of the church's history. (See story - page one.)

**Michigan Connection**  
Curated by Edward P. Bentley Exhibition

A collection of late 19th century and early 20th century paintings by Michigan artists George Ames Aldrich, Dana Bartlett, Robert Grafton, Carl Hoerman and Alfred Jaergens, among others.

Jan. 19 - Feb. 14, 2012  
Opening Reception: Jan. 21, 2 - 4 p.m.  
Riethmiller Blackman Art Building, Kresge Foundation Art Gallery

**OLIVET**  
COLLEGE

Gallery hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. For more information call (269) 749-7627

**OLIVET**  
COLLEGE

Visual Arts Department  
320 S. Main St., Olivet, MI 49076

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or by appointment

For more information,  
call (269) 749-7627



## NEWS OF THE REBELLION

### 150 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH:

February 1st: Confederate generals became aware that Union forces were massing along a line from the Mississippi River to the harbors of Virginia and planned to expect a major Union offensive with the targets thought to be either Fort Henry or Fort Donelson.

February 2nd: Confederate intelligence indicated that the Union's ability to move its men along river systems was not good. However, the Confederates were unaware of Lincoln's order - to attack regardless.

February 3rd: Lincoln again asked McClellan to make a major move for Richmond using the Army of the Potomac. McClellan again showed his usual reluctance to do anything without having it precisely mapped out first. He told Lincoln that he wanted to move troops by sea to the Virginia Peninsula and then push the 40 miles inland from there.

February 5th: General Grant concentrated his forces for an attack on Fort Henry. He had 15,000 men under his command while the Confederate defenders at the fort numbered 3,200.

February 6th: Union gunboats on the Tennessee River bombarded Fort Henry. The fort commander, General Tilghman withdrew as many men as he could to Fort Donelson but ensured that gunners remained in Fort Henry. By mid-afternoon the walls of Fort Henry were broken and Tilghman decided to surrender. Only 63 men were left in the fort. Over 3,000 made it to the relative safety of Fort Donelson, which prepared itself for an attack. However, the control of the Tennessee River at that point was very important to the Unionists as it allowed them to make river patrols up to northern Alabama.

February 7th: Grant prepared for an attack on Fort Donelson, which was a far tougher proposition than Fort Henry. Fort Henry was by the river's edge while Fort Donelson was 100 feet above the Cumberland River.

February 8th: Union forces took 2,527 Confederate troops prisoner at Roanoke Island.

February 10th: Grant told his men that they would move on Fort Donelson within 24 hours. The fort was 12 miles from Fort Henry. Grant's large land force was bolstered by a large river force as more Union gunboats joined the attack.

February 12th: 20,000 Union troops moved on Fort Donelson. By the time

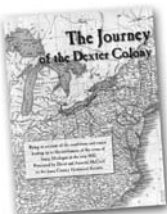
# SOUVENIRS

MEMORIES & MOMENTOS



HERITAGE & HISTORY

Just a few of the many things available at the Blanchard House / Ionia Museum Gift Shop.



The Journey of the Dexter Colony, 1833, by David & Annette McCord. A detailed history of the settling of Ionia.

\$12 each (\$15 with postage)

A History of Bertha Brock Park on its 80th "Birthday" by David McCord. \$6 each



## DVD VIDEO SOUVENIRS!

These movies have proven to be our most popular offerings to date, and recent discoveries have added several popular new titles to the list:

- 1939 "We're In The Movies" This promotional film was produced by Ionia businesses and organizations to promote the town. The soundtrack has been lost, but the images present a wonderful look into our town over 70 years ago.
- 1950s Home Show and Free Fair Movies
- 1976 - The U.S. Bicentennial in Ionia
- 1937 Ionia Airport Inaugural plus Bertha Brock Park's 1940 "Winter Festival"
- 1973 Ionia Centennial Documentary
- "Ionia's First 150 Years" and "Ionia - A Look Back" - Documentaries by Monroe MacPherson

**DVDs are available for \$10 each!**

### ALSO AVAILABLE:

Reproductions of historic Ionia publications —

- 1887 "Headlight Flashes" Special Edition
- 1907 Ionia Souvenir Book
- 1973 Ionia City Centennial Program Book

PLUS reproduction and new POSTCARDS of Ionia's Landmarks and Architecture!

Thanks and well wishes  
to Kris Haskins, outgoing  
President, ICHS Director,  
and respected member.



Grant's men arrived at the fort, it is thought that there were about 18,000 Confederate troops in it.

February 13th: The attack on Fort Donelson began, but the gunboats were late in arriving. Artillery fire continued throughout the day and into the night.

February 14th: Six Union gunboats arrived at Fort Donelson. They accompanied ten transport ships that brought an extra 10,000 Union troops to the fight. The gunboats added an extra 70 guns to the Union's artillery capability. As well as being pounded from the land, the fort was attacked from the river. During the night, the fort's commander, General Floyd, decided that the Confederate force in the fort had to fight its way out and push into open land. Floyd assumed that they had no chance of holding Fort Donelson.

February 15th: One hour before day-break the Confederates in Fort Donelson attempted their breakout. They had surprise on their side and attacked on just one front but after initial success had to face Union troops sent to reinforce that front. By the afternoon, the Confederates had to return to Fort Donelson. By the end of the day, Fort Donelson was totally surrounded. Union troops surrounded it on three sides on land and the Union gunboats dominated the Cumberland River.

February 16th: At dawn Fort Donelson surrendered. The Confederates had hoped to negotiate terms but Grant told them that "unconditional and immediate surrender can (only) be accepted". The loss of Fort Donelson resulted in the Confederates losing control of Tennessee and Kentucky. Over 14,000 Confederates were taken prisoner.

February 18th: There was much celebration in Washington DC when news reached the capital of the surrender of Fort Donelson. The First Congress of the Confederate States of America met in Richmond.

February 21st: The Battle of Fort Craig in New Mexico was fought. This saw a Confederate victory against a larger Union force. The Confederates captured six artillery guns from the Unionists.

February 22nd: Jefferson Davis was inaugurated as the first President of the Confederate States of America.

February 25th: General Halleck, commander of the Army of the Southwest, sent a series of telegraph messages stating how well the Unionist forces were doing in Missouri - a state seen as a thorn in the side to Federal aspirations. However, these telegraph messages were misleading in that Halleck had yet to achieve anything decisive.

February 27th: Davis was given permission by the Confederate Congress to suspend habeas corpus if he felt it was necessary to do so. Davis asked for martial law to be introduced at Norfolk and Portsmouth - both important naval bases in Virginia.

February 28th: Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued a proclamation calling for a "day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer" as the war was engaged between armored gunboats on the Mississippi near New Madrid, Missouri.



## Upcoming Programs and Events

Wednesday, February 19th, 7:00 p.m.  
Board of Directors / Business Meeting  
at the Blanchard House - All members invited!

Saturday, March 3 - Boyce School Bazaar

Wednesday, March 6th, 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting will be held at the  
**IONIA POST OFFICE**

Saturday, March 10  
Ionia Expo - at the Ionia High School



Wednesday, March 20th, 7:00 p.m.  
Board of Directors / Business Meeting  
at the Blanchard House - All members invited!

**ANNUAL APPRAISAL ROADSHOW**  
Tentatively scheduled for March 31  
at the Ionia County Commission on Aging

Wednesday, April 4th, 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting at the Blanchard House includes  
Drawing for the Quilt Raffle!  
(Program to be announced.)

Wednesday, May 2nd, 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting at the Blanchard House  
Program: **The Music of Stephen Foster**  
presented by David McCord

Saturday / Sunday - May 5 & 6  
"Spring Into The Past" Museum Tours

Saturday, May 19th  
**UPSTAIRS - DOWNTOWN TOURS**  
in Downtown Ionia!

Friday, June 1st  
The Annual Historical Society Yard Sale!

Wednesday, June 6, 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting at the Blanchard House

For other upcoming events - visit the ICHS  
website at [ioniahistory.org](http://ioniahistory.org).

### **A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN of the Accessions Committee —**

Efforts are being redoubled this season to sort through our vast collection of artifacts, photos, and documents at the Blanchard House. With the advent of the new computer, volunteers will soon be in demand to perform the inventory. Anyone interested in helping to catalog the thousands of historic items in our care, please come forward to offer your help. The procedures and policies are being established now to ensure that the process goes as effectively as possible. It will take time, great care, and a degree of innovative thinking - but above all, a desire to fulfill our Historical Society mission: To preserve our past for our future. Please come forward at a future meeting, or contact me via email if you'd like to help: [david@mrwcreative.com](mailto:david@mrwcreative.com) or [info@ioniahistory.org](mailto:info@ioniahistory.org).



# the [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org) **CHRONICLE**

The Chronicle is the official publication of the Ionia County Historical Society. It is written, edited, and published by David McCord, Secretary. Any comments, corrections (of course), or contributions should be directed to the editor c/o the ICHS at P.O. Box 176, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org).

Ionia County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 176  
Ionia, MI 48846



## JOIN TODAY!

If you'd like to help us preserve the area's heritage, please fill in the form below and send it, with check or money order, to the ICHS Treasurer, care of Box 176, Ionia, MI 48846.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, St., Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please Check Your Membership Type:

- Regular = \$20
- Sustaining = \$35
- Business Buddy = \$40
- Corporate = \$250
- Life = \$1000
- Free to Students under 18
- Gift = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Please Share a Little Information:

- Renewing Member
- New Member

If you're a new member, how did you hear about us?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Thanks!

## Join Us at the Ionia Theatre at 9:30 a.m. every Thursday for **FREE ICHS Travelogues!**

February 16 — Mount Vernon

February 23 — Blue Mountains of Oregon

March 1 — Big Bend National Park

March 8 — Sea to Sea by Model T

March 15 — Something Irish

**SAVE THE DATE: JULY 14, 2012**

Art in the Park at Bertha Brock Park, Ionia

### Ionia County Historical Society 2010-11 Board of Directors & Officers

???, President — ???

Stephanie VanderMolen, Vice Pres. — 616-755-0731

Kathleen Cook, Director — 527-2626

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