

THE OLD BETHEL CONGREGATION.

This congregation is an off shoot from the first Covenanter congregation organized in Southern Illinois, now known as the Bethel congregation. The parent congregation was organized by the Rev. Samuel Wylie in June 1821.

In 1832 the Hill Prairie branch of the congregation separated from their brethren and received a new organization. One of the causes of the separation was a difference of opinion as to the location of a new church building. Other causes were the distance to the place of worship and the followings of the division that took place in 1833. There are no congregational records extant prior to 1840, at which time the Rev. James Wallace became pastor.

The original elders of the congregation were Samuel Little, Alexander Edgar, Thomas Armour and Jas. Finley.

Within a year after Mr. Wallace's coming, the congregation numbered over one hundred members.

Previous to this time they had worshipped in private houses, school houses, barns and some times in the open air. Shortly after Mr. Wallace's settlement, probably in the same year, the first church building was erected on what was then known as the Wylie hill, near the residence at the present time of Mr. J. R. Finley. This building was occupied until it was destroyed by fire eight years later. For four or five years the congregation occupied other places of worship, some-times in groves.

In 1853 the present building was erected by great sacrifice on the part of the people, for those were strenuous times. While putting in place the heavy timbers of the roof the scaffolding gave way and Sam'l J. Rodgers, a member of the congregation, was severely injured. This building which has been in use for more than fifty years, is located about a mile and one-fourth east of the village of Houston. Four pastors have proclaimed the gospel from its sacred desk. Within its walls the people have gathered a hundred times or more around the communion table. Here the children for half a century have been dedicated in baptism.

After a pastorate of nearly 27 years, Mr. Wallace was released from the congregation in May 1867. Faithful in labors and fearless in proclamation of the truths he is held in loving remembrance by the older members of the congregation. Although he has long since gone to his heavenly reward, the seed sown by him is still bringing forth fruit.

In October 1869 the Rev. Wm. J. Gillespie was ordained and installed pastor. He severed his connection with the congregation by withdrawing from the communion of the church the following year. To Mr. Gillespie is given the honor of organizing the first Sabbath school in the congregation.

In July 1874 the Rev. P. P. Boyd was installed pastor. After such earnest and faithful labor he was released in December 1887. His

vigorous preaching is frequently referred to by his former parishoners.

The Rev. R. C. Reed was called to the pastorate December 16, 1889 and was ordained and installed the following May. He resigned, to accept a call to his present charge at Walton, N. Y., October 12, 1896. His earnest preaching and his wise and judicious management of affairs are still fresh in the memory of every one. During Mr. Reed's pastorate the first young people's society was organized. It has been a great pleasure to the people and to the present pastor to have his assistance at the recent communion services.

E. A. Crooks was ordained and installed pastor August 10, 1898 and is the present incumbent.

In its almost three quarters of a century of history the congregation has passed through some trying experiences, but has been preserved. By emigration it has contributed generously to the membership of many of our western congregations.

A noble generation of fathers and mothers have passed away. Their place has been taken by worthy sons and daughters. The banner given us "to be displayed because of the truth," is still unfurled.

Among the names of those who are, or have been prominently connected with this congregation are the Weirs, Houstons, Rogers, Matthews, Finleys, Donleys, Cathcarts, Hays, Lyons, Reids, Wilsons and

At present the board of deacons is composed of J. S. Finley, J. W. U. Cathcart, R. A. Matthews, R. G. Lyons and W. C. Finley.

The members of session are Thos. Finley, Hugh Matthews, W. S. Wilson, John Marshall and L. M. Patterson. The last named is the efficient clerk of the session to whom we are indebted for much of the material employed in this sketch.

The Old Bethel congregation of which Rev. E. A. Crooks is pastor, had the pleasure of the presence with them on Sabbath, May 29, quite a number of ministers, elders and other friends. At the morning service the psalm was explained by Rev. P. P. Boyd and the sermon preached by Rev. J. B. Gilmore. In the afternoon the sermon was by Rev. B. M. Sharp, the pastor of the congregation where Mr. Crooks spent a large part of his youth and early manhood. In the evening the hour ordinarily occupied by the Young People's meeting was occupied by Rev. A. I. Robb of our mission in China in a most instructive and inspiring talk on the work in China. Mr. Robb gave opportunity to ask questions, and in answer to these gave some very valuable additional information. The very full service of the day ended with a sermon by Rev. Louis Meyer of Hopkinton, Iowa.

Licentiate Harvey G. Patterson and Miss Christina Linnenbrink of Zellenople, Pa., were united in marriage at the bride's home by the Rev. Bedzie at noon May 18, 1904. The newly married couple left that evening for the home of the groom's father, Elder T. N. Patterson near Baldwin, Illinois. They were in attendance at the communion services at the Old Bethel congregation the following Sabbath. A reception was given Mr. Patterson and wife by the home family on the following Tuesday evening. Mr. Patterson is the pastor elect of the congregation at both Field, Mich.