

Organ In Baptist Church Served Congregation Well

By ERNEST H. RANKIN
Marquette County
Historical Society
1-14-68

It was once stated by an unknown sage of old that "Every Cloud has a Silver Lining"; however, with the destruction of the First Baptist Church on the Eve of the Epiphany or Twelfth Night, it would appear that the silver coating was unjustly thin and all too quickly consumed by fire.

Fortunately, but of no immediate or tangible value, the excellent pipe organ, which had raised its beautiful voice in praising the Glory of God for at least "Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand," ably assisted by choristers and congregations, had become a matter of recorded history several years before its untimely and regrettable destruction, and a tiny speck of the silver lining was saved.

Voices For Posterity

On April 5, 1961, an American citizen, temporarily employed for two years by the U.S. Army at Kitzingen, Germany, addressed a letter to "The Organist, First Baptist Church, Marquette, Mich. E. A. Boadway, who didn't divulge his army rank, stated in this letter, "In 1886, Hook & Hastings (Boston) installed in your church a two-manual tracker-action organ of about 18 speaking stops (ranks of pipes), listed as Opus 1322." He wanted to know if this organ were still in existence and its specifications, for, although most of his time he was engaged in serving Uncle Sam, he was spending his spare time collecting data on Hook & Hastings, as well as other organs for inclusion in the archives of the Organ Historical Society, York, Pa.

It is to the credit of the Rev. Herschell Martin, pastor, Mrs. Richard Bolz, who was organist at the time, and Al Eriksson, who serviced the organ, keeping it in a good state of repair, that Boadway's request was fulfilled. They not only gave him the data on the organ, which was prepared by Eriksson, but with Mrs. Bolz at the console and John G. Major of Northern Michigan University operating a tape recorder, prepared several stereotape-recordings, preserving its many voices for posterity.

Fine Acoustics

Boadway wrote, "...and the tape was elegant — if Mrs. Bolz is still in Marquette, please extend to her my congratulations for managing on an old tracker some rather intricate music. The Mozart was especially nice, and the tape reveals that the church has good acoustics. The organ has something of a mellowness which does not come from age but rather from the original voicing of the pipes, and after hearing only German organs for many months, it is a joy to listen to your instrument..."

"Your church possesses an organ that will serve for at least another century, and it would easily be the best instrument in the city, simply 'by virtue of' the mechanism. The acoustical qualities of the room make the sound far richer than that of a bigger organ in a poorly-designed room."

Built Over 2,000 Organs

"Your Hook & Hastings was built by the best firm in America in the last century. From 1829 to 1936, Hook & Hastings, known as E. & G. G. Hook until 1872, built more than 2,000 organs, almost all, up to 1905, having tracker-action. The later organs were somewhat mass-produced, and have not lasted, but the early instruments exist in many churches that have wisely kept them."

When first writing to Boadway concerning the organ, it was stated that "our church celebrated its centennial in September, 1960, and the organ was given considerable mention in the newspaper, since it was the first pipe organ to be installed in the State of Michigan."

'One Of The Best'

To this, Boadway replied, in part, as follows:

"I do not know if you informed me correctly about the first organ in Michigan. Many stories grow up around old organs that I have to correct, sometimes to the dismay of the church... perhaps you mean that the organ was either the first in Marquette... or the first in your area of the state, but the Hooks were installing organs in Michigan in the 1860's, to say nothing of earlier builders. So, your organ was not the first, but as of 1961, it's one of the oldest still being played... I'm rather interested in correct organ history... countless churches say something erroneous about their organ and the tradition has no basis. But feel proud of the fact that you have kept your old tracker-action instrument. It is not the first or the oldest in the state, but it is one of the best organs in Michigan."

Cost \$2,900

It has been estimated that this organ had about 1,000 pipes. Even as this grand old Boston-built instrument was being consumed by fire, it was being stated around town, "Isn't it a shame that the wonderful, rare old German (built) organ is being destroyed!"

The lot at the corner of Front and Ridge Sts. was purchased for \$2,500 in 1882 and work on the First Baptist Church was started on April 23, 1884, the corner stone being laid on May 29. It was not until September 1886 that the church was completed, the first service being held on Sunday, the 19th. The organ did not arrive until early in December, the Weekly Mining Journal of the 11th stating, "The pipe organ for the new Baptist Church has arrived, and Mr. O. Marshall of Milwaukee is now setting it up. It will be ready for use a week from Sunday (19th). The organ is from the factory of Hook & Hastings, Boston, and is about the same size as those in the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. It will be provided with a motor, and will cost, complete, about \$2,700." The church records, which have been in the custody of the Marquette County Historical Society for some time, and were therefore not lost in the fire, reveal that the total cost of this organ was almost \$2,900.

Clifton Hotel Fire

The Journal of Dec. 20, 1886, states: "Mr. O. Marshall, who has been engaged the past week setting up the organ in the Baptist church, has the job about completed..."

A careful scanning of both the Weekly and Daily Mining Journals has unfortunately failed to reveal when the organ was first used; however, it might be safe to assume that the happy event occurred at Christmas time, 1886. The Clifton Hotel, then located at the present site of the Harlow Block, had gone up in flames early Christmas morning, and the next issue of the Journal,

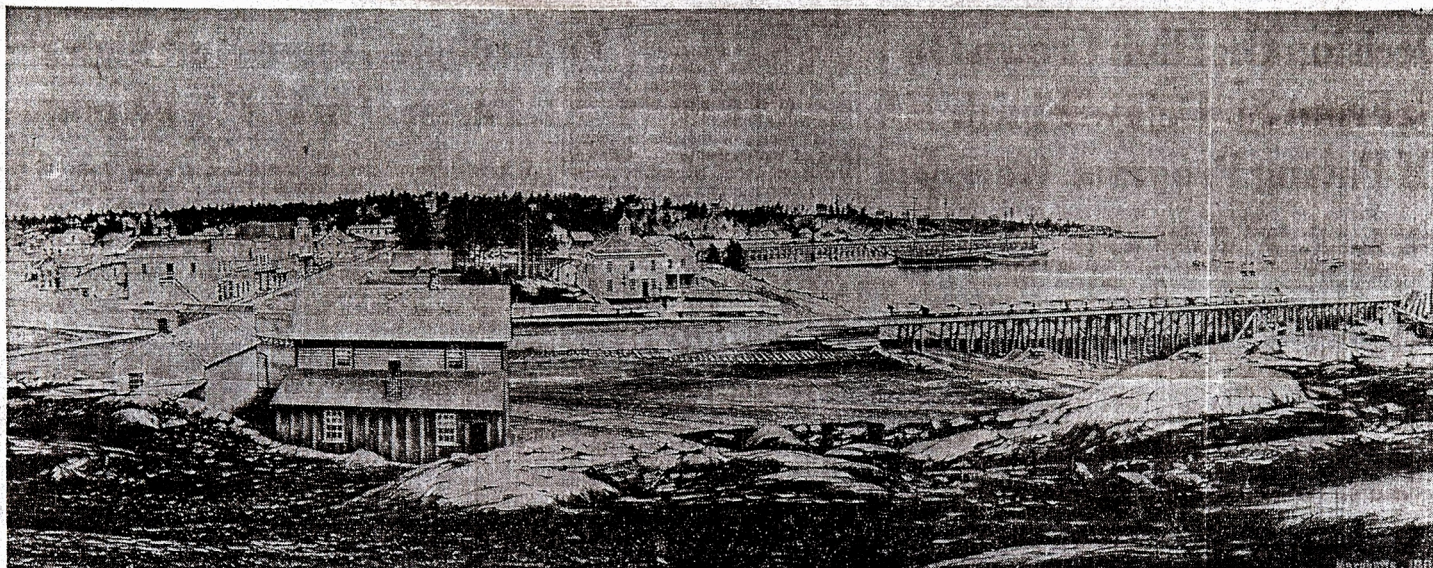
Monday, Dec. 27, as well as the next several issues, had no space in its columns for such an ordinary event as a new pipe organ.

Served For 78 Years

In those days, organs were pumped by hand, or by a motor powered by water. Meters had not as yet come into use and the water users were charged a flat, yearly rate, no matter how much water was consumed. Most of Marquette's churches took advantage of this as these motors required considerable water to keep them going, particularly under the stress of "full organ." By 1908 or 1910, the motor in the basement of the Baptist church was failing at its task, its worn-out parts permitting the escaping water to flood the basement without delivering sufficient power to pump the bellows, causing the organ to conk out. It has been stated by an eminent citizen of Marquette, who has been a "pillar of the church" for untold years, that upon the failure of the organ due to the lack of wind, which always occurred when the choir and congregation were singing a hymn, leaving them to flounder through it as best they could, a deacon of the church would rush from his pew to the basement and tinker with the motor, hoping to restore it to service. While not a matter of record (such things never are), it is presumed that this deacon used, especially upon skinning his knuckles while using a wrench, many of the same words which were likewise flowing from the lips of the preacher upstairs and to much greater advantage. The time came when the motor rotated for the last time and the now worthy citizen, who was then in his mid-teens, was assigned to the task of pumping the bellows by hand.

This is, in general, the history of a church pipe organ which faithfully served its congregation for 78 full years, a notable record and seldom obtained and a tribute to the master organ builders of a long past era

Marquette Regional History Center
J. M. Longyear Research Library



This is the way Marquette looked in 1863, the year the First Baptist congregation dedicated its first church, a small white edifice complete with tower, which stood on what is now the site of the Historical Society museum on N. Front St. (The church can be distinguished among the trees at what looks like the northern terminus of the street, while at the extreme left in the picture, facing on S. Front, is T. T. Hurley's livery stable.) Note the two ore docks and the sailing vessels in the harbor. Mar-

quette had been founded only 14 years before this picture, made from a glass negative, was taken, but in the brief span from its beginnings in 1849 to 1863, it was already a thriving town and was attracting increasing numbers of settlers lured by its timber and mining resources. It was the establishment of a forge by a group of easterners headed by A. R. Harlow of Worcester, Mass., and including Peter White (after whom the public library is named), that resulted in Marquette's found-

ing. During the early years, the Marquette First Baptist Church, first Baptist organization in the Upper Peninsula, was a part of the Detroit Baptist Assn., 450 miles away and reached only by boat. First pastor of the church was the Rev. J. C. Armstrong, who came from Lansing to assist in the dedication of the new building in July, 1863, and stayed on. He served for two years and left a membership of 35 when he resigned. — (Photo courtesy of the Marquette County Historical Society)

First Baptist Church To Be Built In Marquette Was Dedicated At Height Of Civil War In July 1863

BY HELEN McLAUGHLIN
Journal Women's Editor

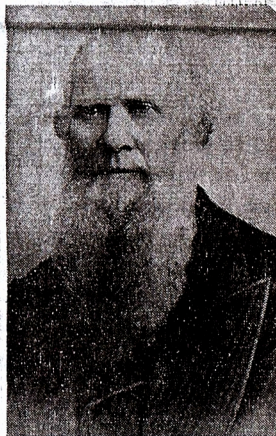
It was on a September night in 1860 at the home of a man named Walter Finney, on what is now Bluff St., that the congregation of Marquette's First Baptist Church was formally organized.

Baptists who had settled in Marquette since its founding 11 years before had been worshipping together for some time, holding their meetings in the schoolhouse, the courthouse or in the homes of members. Although there was only a handful of them — eight men and women — at the Finney house that night a century ago, they decided that the time had come for organization of the congregation and the building of a church.

John Burt, a pioneer resident who had already made a fortune in this area when Marquette was only a sprawling settlement of less than 1,000 souls, gave the Baptists their first church, a white wooden building located on N. Front St., on the present site of the Marquette County Historical Society's museum. Early records describe the church, complete with tower, as "an edifice of respectable proportions and a fine addition to that part of town."

War At Height

The Civil War was at its height on dedication day — July 5, 1863



John Burt, one of five sons of

them, but some of course, could not be replaced.

In Detroit Assn.

For years, the Marquette Baptist Church — first Baptist organization in the Upper Peninsula — was a member of the Detroit Baptist Assn., for the simple reason that Detroit was easily accessible by boat, the most common mode of transportation of the day.

The Rev. Mr. Armstrong was succeeded by the Revs. A. S. Anderson, John Matthews, A. A. Randall, Jonathan Rowley, Charles E. Hulbert, Charles Button and Kerr Boyce Tupper. Of the Rev. Mr. Matthews, who served from 1866-1869, the files mentioning his departure record that "the Rev. J. Matthews preached his last sermon to a large and appreciative audience on last Sabbath morning. Mr. Matthews has been in our midst for nearly three years, and Marquette will lose one of the best ministers that ever had the misfortune to step on these shores. He leaves on Wednesday evening for San Francisco, having accepted a call from First Baptist Church of that place."

New Plans

Twenty years after the wooden church was built, the growing congregation recognized the need for a larger one. In March of 1882, a building committee of which Frank B. Spear was treasurer started a campaign to raise \$25,000 for a new church. Other members of the committee were S-

igig of time, things come topsyturvy. Many who contributed large amounts then could not give five dollars now, and some who came with their widow's mite then are now immensely wealthy." Said F. B. Spear: "Many gave their all."

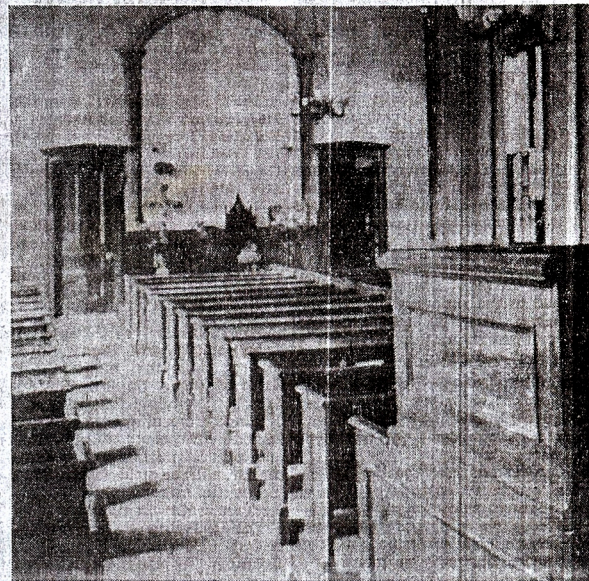
Built at a total cost of \$30,000, the church was described in September 1886 as "one of the chief ornaments in the city." Constructed of brownstone from local quarries, its interior is finished in red oak obtained in Kalamazoo County. The pews, also of red oak, came from the factory of George Faulhaber in Cleveland.

It is to the everlasting credit of the congregation of the 1880's that there was no stinting—they wanted the best for their church and they got it, even through the added expense was also an added burden. Given the choice between pine or red oak for the interior finish, for instance, they chose the more costly red oak. On top of the cost of the building, the congregation went "all out" for the best organ, too, buying a Hook and Hastings instrument, said to be the first pipe organ in Michigan, at a whopping price of \$2,500. (The organ is still in use.)

Groups Active

The Sunday School, young people's societies, women's groups and the choirs have been an integral part of the Baptists' church life in all the 100 years since the congregation was organized. Serving as Sunday School superintendents in the early years were J. E. Bridges,

A fund of information about the early history of the First Baptist Church here and of Marquette itself will be presented tonight in a special Historical Night program at 8 p. m. which is part of the Centennial Week observance of the First Baptist congregation.



This is the interior of the wooden church which John Burt, a pioneer resident who amassed a fortune in mining operations in this area, gave to the First Baptist congregation in the early 1860's. The church became a gathering place called Fraternity Hall when the new church was built in 1886.

Rev. Mr. Martin's wife, who founded it.

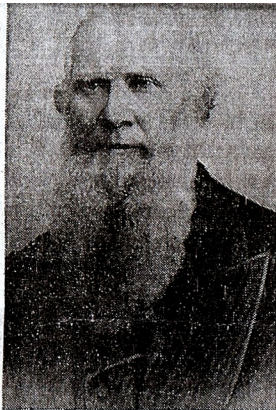
The congregation has grown to a total of 125 baptized members. (The Baptists do not count children among their church membership because only adults are baptized.) Three of the present congregation have been members for more than 60 years. They are Miss Norma Ross, Mrs. Earle White and Miss Alice McMartin. Members for more than 50 years are Sarah Ellen Morrison, Mrs. William G. Woodbridge, Mrs. Arthur Baragwanath, Mrs. Charles Mehrman and Mrs. Leonard C. Smith.

Final Meeting Of Twilight League's Golfers Monday

Women golfers who have been playing in the twilight league at the Marquette Golf and Country Club this summer will have their final supper meeting of the year Monday evening.

The affair has been planned as a costume party and will begin with a social hour at 6. The pasty supper will be served by Mrs. Carl Vickstrom at 7.

Prizes will be awarded during the evening to the winners of the



John Burt, one of five sons of a Macomb County pioneer, Hiram Burt, came to this area in 1844 to survey mining properties and stayed to become a wealthy pillar of early Marquette. He figured prominently in activities of the Baptist congregation here.

— and the bloody battlefield of Gettysburg had been strewn with dead for four days. No one who gathered in the little church for the ceremonies knew anything about it, however, and the occasion was a happy one. There were distinguished visitors here from as far away as New York City, and the Rev. Samuel Haskell, a leading clergyman of Kalamazoo, preached the dedication sermon.

First pastor of the church was the Rev. J. C. Armstrong, who came to Marquette from Lansing to take part in the dedication and stayed on. He served for two years, and when he resigned to take another pastorate left a congregation of 35 members.

There is actually little known about the size of the church or its seating capacity because the church records were destroyed in the Great Fire of June 11, 1863, a catastrophe which virtually leveled Marquette's business section.

Church Undamaged

At the time of the fire, the church was being redecorated and services were scheduled temporarily in a hall located over the Bronson and Westlake store on S. Front St. The store was in the path of the blaze, so two quick-thinking parishioners — W. S. Westlake and A. J. Burt — dashed into the building, wrapped the organ in a blanket, carried it down two flights of stairs and buried it in the sand at the foot of Washington St. The organ is intact to this day as is the blanket, which is the property of the Historical Society.

Because the fire was contained at a point midway on Front St. north of Washington, the church escaped damage, but the office of the church clerk on Washington was completely destroyed and his records along with it. Later, an attempt was made to reconstruct

the first pipe organ in Michigan, at a whopping price of \$2,500. (The organ is still in use.)

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New Plans

Twenty years after the wooden church was built, the growing congregation recognized the need for a larger one. In March of 1882, a building committee of which Frank B. Spear was treasurer started a campaign to raise \$25,000 for a new church. Other members of the committee were S. Peck, H. A. Burt, L. C. Palmer, James Lawrence, George Burtis, H. A. Lobdell and A. S. Westlake. At their first meeting, a total of \$6,000 was pledged.

Many non-Baptists in the community contributed to the fund, some giving cash, others donating material or labor. Business associates of some of the committee members from other localities were also among the donors, among them a rising young tycoon named Robert Dollar (his gift \$100), a lumberman in the eastern end of the Upper Peninsula who later left these parts for the Pacific Northwest and who became known the world over as the immensely wealthy founder of the Dollar Steamship Co.

Lot \$2,500

By April 1882, subscriptions to the building fund totaled \$12,000, and the lot where the First Baptist Church now stands, corner of Front and Ridge Sts., had been purchased for \$2,500. Plans were approved in the spring of 1884, the cornerstone was laid on May 29 of that year and construction was started.

Soon available funds were exhausted, however, and work on the structure stopped. The Kalamazoo contractor gave the congregation two years from the beginning of construction to raise the required amount for continuing, and in the meantime, he turned out the woodwork for the church in his Kalamazoo shop.

In March of 1886, another \$10,000 had been secured and the next month building operations got under way again. The building was completed in September of that year and turned over to the congregation. Because of a debt of \$6,000 still owing, however, the dedication was delayed until the building was clear, and the church was not formally dedicated until July 10, 1889. In the language of the times, the building project was described as "a long pull, a hearty pull and a pull together."

'Many Gave All'

Years after, in remarking about individual contributions, A. S. Westlake remarked, "In the whirl-

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J. W. Wyckoff, A. S. Westlake, George Burtis and F. B. Spear, the latter heading the Sunday School during his lifetime for a total of 40 years. Of George Burtis, Spear once said: "Burtis was the best superintendent this church ever had, both in attracting pupils to our school and getting them to study the lesson."

Records show that the Young Ladies Society contributed \$212.60 to the building fund and were "an aggressive force in church life. In 1897, there was a Senior Young People's Society and later there was another organization for young ladies called the World Wide Guild. Young people of the First Baptist Church are now working together in the Baptist Youth Fellowship, under the leadership of the Rev. Herschell G. Martin, pastor, with Molly Hillier as president.

New Organist

Mrs. H. I. Sharp recently resigned as organist at the church after serving for several years, and has been succeeded by Mrs. Richard Bolz. Some of the earlier organists were Mrs. A. E. Brown, Miss Daisy Cavis, Miss Mabel Wilkinson, Miss Helen (Nellie) Walker and A. S. Westlake. Later Miss Ruth Sinclair was organist and choir director for many years. From time to time, there have been several youth as well as adult choirs at the First Baptist Church.

Back in 1880, the women of the church were known as the Baptist Home Mission Society and worked in cooperation with the State Mission Board. Throughout the history of the local church they have been active in missionary and charitable activities at home. The women raised more than \$1,500 when the new church was built, and have since bought kitchen equipment, dishes, donated to the decorating fund, and carried other financial responsibility for the church program.

Circle Organized

Young married women with and without children have recently been organized into a group called the Lucille Martin Circle after the

a total of 125 baptized members. (The Baptists do not count children among their church membership because only adults are baptized.) Three of the present congregation have been members for more than 60 years. They are Miss Norma Ross, Mrs. Earle White and Miss Alice McMartin. Members for more than 50 years are Sarah Ellen Morrison, Mrs. William G. Woodbridge, Mrs. Arthur Baragwanath, Mrs. Charles Mehrman and Mrs. Leonard C. Smith.

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