

EMILIE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HISTORY

(THE CHAPEL) 1842-current



The Presbyterian Church at Centerville, in Bristol Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was formed by a tight-knit community in 1842. A year and 1 month earlier, a Presbyterian Minister planted the standard of the Gospel in this area. The community was determined to have a place to worship together. They rallied together to raise funding to build the Chapel that is still here today.

On June 22, 1842, the work of building the church, now known as our Chapel, began. Quarry instruments were sharpened at a cost of 31 cents. Powder and “cakes for the digging cellar” were acquired, and two days later the first quarry wages of 54 cents were paid. Samuel L Booz purchased many of the initial supplies to get this project started. The lumber came from Wetherill & Brothers. Stone for the building was donated by Jesse Lovett. Mr. Lovett also lodged the quarry workers at the time. Many people in the community worked together to try to raise \$1000.00, for additional funding for the project. 106 subscribers are named along with the amount each had pledged. This came in many forms. Some gave \$.50- \$100, others donated nails, sill stones, trees, etc. Not everyone who pledged actually gave, and they only ended up raising about half of their goal. To the left of the little country church building, horse sheds were also built to house the congregation’s horses and wagons they brought to church in the morning. The community never gave up on their dream of having a place to worship. They believed in the saying, “Ask, ask it will be given to you.” Everyone worked together and their faith was rewarded.

The building of the Chapel began on June 22, 1842 and was completed May of 1843. On June 13, 1843 it is recorded, “Collection at dedication of church.” Two years later, in 1845, the land the Chapel sits on was purchased and officially deeded to “David Brown for J.B. Brown for one acre of land on which Centerville Ch. Stands.” This is the date that is still marked on the Chapel to this day. In 1846, the new treasure, Garret Vansant was determined to pay off the church debt. Later that year they took up another subscription to raise money to close in the chapel basement, add a privy(restroom), and fence the graveyard. After this offering, the ledger showed a positive balance of 90 and ½ cents.

For several decades the church struggled financially. They held fairs, dinners and events to raise money, but these all came with costs. It struggled well into the 1900s with the deed being transferred to several local churches, until we could raise money to buy the deed back.

Sometime between 1854 and 1858 the community had become known as “Emilie”, under circumstances which are still undetermined. Legends certainly abound, with some crediting a much beloved school teacher, and others the first person who walked by the group charged with renaming the area, as sources for the new designation. The reason for the change, however, seems to have had something to do with a confusion in postal districts, there already being another Centerville in Pennsylvania.

From 1911-1919 many members worked together to sustain the church. The church was redecorated around this time. The high pulpit was lowered, stained glass (contributed by individual church members) replacing the plain glass windows, and the vestibule was added to the front of the building in 1914. At the time the vestibule cost \$500.00 and was donated by financier Effingham B. Morris.

Shortly after this time, automobiles became more common and new people came to the area, growing the congregation to approx. 90 members. In 1930 electricity was added, the horse sheds to the left of the chapel were turned into storage areas, a wood stove was supplied by the Men's Club in the Social hall to reduce the need for coal. Through WW 1, the Civil War, the great influenza out-break and all the changes going on Emilie, a small country church with a modest membership, survived and prospered.

In 1939 repairs had already begun on the church basement, and plans were made for work to be done on the inside of the building as well. Included in the renovations were re-pointing and re-plastering, graining of woodwork, the installation of an inside oil-heater, and, at the suggestion of the new minister, Rev. Gaskell, the building of a new pulpit. The last was made by church member Harry Chapman from lumber donated by the ladies Aid Society.

It was also in 1939 that the public schoolhouse on the property adjacent to the church was put up for sale at public auction. The Official Board voted to try and obtain the building, and board members led the way in donating funds to do so. The building was purchased, with additional funds secured from Farmers National Bank. The one room school house was used for many years as the meeting place for the Men's Bible class. Another landmark for our church and denomination occurred that year as well (1939). The Methodist Protestant Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South merged to form the Methodist Church.

1951 marked the end of an era for the area then known as Emilie. The rural farming community became the site of a vast urban residential development undertaken by Levitt & Sons. The little country church, which in 1953 had a membership of 130, found itself literally in the middle of a rapidly growing suburb, which would soon number in the thousands. Not only was the Emilie church in the apparent geographic center of Levittown, it was at that time the only church in Levittown. With every day seeming to bring in new members, it began to look as if the Lord's purpose in preserving the church through times of adversity for 110 years was being made clear.

In January of 1953, toward the end of his pastorate, Rev. Gaskell discussed with the members of the Official Board "a new drive on in the Methodist Conference asking members to contribute ½ a cent a day toward church advancement." This was for the establishment of the Quadrennial Fund, a program established to meet the growing need for new churches. The idea behind this fund was that, instead of parceling money out in small amounts, new projects could be given a large sum to get them on their feet.

At Annual Conference in Philadelphia that year, Emilie presented that not only did we need a new church to accommodate an expanding congregation, we need a new parsonage to house our minister. They found that the 'open' living plan of the Levittown houses was unsuitable to the requirements of a minister's family, the congregation built the parsonage themselves, some 50 men, women and even children volunteering their time and effort in the task. Only two or three trades were completed by contractors, with the result that for about \$18,000 a beautiful seven room home then valued at about \$35,000, was built. Harry Chapman, Mr. Robert Grant, and Mr. Garnett Morris were instrumental to the successful completion of this task.

In 1953 Levitt & Son's purchased 5000 acres and did not want to sell any to our congregation. They had plans to use every square inch. After several meetings and negotiations and 8 months later, the land that was

unavailable became available. At this time, it allowed us to build a parsonage, expand the cemetery and planning of the new sanctuary began.

In 1968, one of the largest mergers in U.S. history, the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church.

Meanwhile, the old chapel was showing its age. High winds in February of 1976 tore the roof off, and the overall condition of the building made renovations a necessity. It would take a few years and a lot of volunteer labor to render the chapel safe enough for services.



Pictures taken October 2, 2019

Since 1980, there have been more changes to Emilie's physical appearance. In 1983 the steeple from a church in Washington's Crossing was added to our old colonial style chapel. Last year, when the building's condition had deteriorated to the point where either it would have to be completely demolished, or undergo extensive, expensive repair.

Currently, in 2019, our chapel houses Girl Scouts meetings, Youth events, Addiction and Substance Abuse meetings and Men's Prayer Breakfast every Saturday morning.