

## A HISTORY OF HOPEWELL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The earliest list of members at Hopewell is recorded in 1876 in the Gambier Circuit Record. William Smith was the Class Leader, and the following were the full members of the Class: Susan, William P., Rebecca, Ada B., Henry & Martha Smith; Dane & Mary Schooley; Crawford, Mahal & Amelia Hurford; Oliver & Electa Lhaman; Rebecca & Elizabeth Spry; David Kerr; Hester Lhaman; Collier & Sister Light; and Frances Smith. Probationers were Ollie Smith, Caroline and Annie Sellers. These 24 members of the Hopewell Society seem to have comprised the still small congregation.

One year later, David Kerr was also named as a class leader as the society had grown to 29 full members and four probationers. From the same records it is learned that all of these Methodists lived within three miles of the church. The new members joined having been added by transfer or received after examination.

From the history of Hopewell Methodist Church penned for the fortieth anniversary of the dedication of the present church, we learn that in the History of Knox County, published in 1881, a statement concerning early Methodists in the area: "Methodism was introduced into Mount Vernon in 1812 by Enoch Ellis, what at times preached in the Court House and in the log cabins. It is to be regretted that the larger part of the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Mt. Vernon (between 1812 and 1831) is involved in obscurity."

The same history mentions that records of Hopewell Church were also clouded in obscurity. In 1881 all that could be said of the church is that the building of that time, a frame structure thirty-six by forty feet, was built under the auspices of Rev. Allen Moffat in 1855. [Note: Rev. Moffat is not listed among the Hopewell pastors.]

From records of the church kept mostly at Gambier, a statement in the Quarterly Conference of Dec. 31, 1881, gives at least sketchy evidence that Hopewell and Gambier were established in the same year of 1832. If these facts are reliable, both Hopewell Society and Epworth Church have a similar, if not coincident, history.

There is great evidence to believe the attached list of pastors who served the Gambier church from its inception also served the Hopewell church.

Records show that Gambier from its earliest history was under the great influence of the Episcopal Church. Kenyon was established [in 1824] with the purchase of 8,000 acres upon which residents were at the mercy and whims of the trustees of the property until the 1850's when preparation was made for sale of surveyed parcels.

It can be surmised that Methodists in the Hopewell area had an easier time of it from the start.

Ohio Conference records from the 1830's show that prior to 1832 there was no permanent preaching place in Mt. Vernon. From then onwards, Mt. Vernon was a

regular appointment. Gambier Methodists, according to record, traveled to the Pleasant Valley (Monroe Mills) area for worship with other Methodists at Browne's house on Schenck's Creek. It is doubtful that Methodists in the Hopewell area traveled that far. It is more likely that Hopewell was an area into which forays of the Mt. Vernon circuit riders ventured, or that members of the society journeyed into Mt. Vernon for worship. However, history is vague at this point, and records are non-existent.

Gambier itself became a preaching place in 1837 as part of the Danville Circuit. A listing of the places of this circuit excludes Hopewell by name. However, in the journals of the conference, it is to be noted that Martinsburg was also a charge appointed. Another likelihood is that Hopewell society was ministered to through the circuit.

Hopewell was no doubt in the Ohio Conference in its early years. However, in 1835 the Michigan Conference was created out of the Ohio Conference, and Hopewell was a part of this Annual Conference jurisdiction.

Formerly in the Wooster District of the Ohio Conference, the Society at Hopewell fell into one of two newly created districts in the new Conference. If part of the Mt. Vernon or the Martinsburg circuit, it became part of the Mt. Vernon District; however, if part of the Danville Circuit, it became part of the Wooster District.

In the records of that day, no membership figures show for the individual societies, only totals from the circuits, making it impossible now to know of the exact number of Methodists worshipping at Hopewell. But noteworthy is the fact that at that time, the Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was called, was an integrated church, most black members having not withdrawn into Black Methodist societies yet. Both District records show black members in the area circuits.

The history of the Epworth church reflects that in 1837 many Methodist worshippers arrived in the area from Pennsylvania. Other histories show that this period of the early nineteenth century was one of rapid westward expansion. It can be expected that Hopewell was blessed by a bounty of Methodist immigrants to its parish.

Whether the immigrants brought Methodism or whether the preachers evangelized others into Methodism is obscured. But at the end of the 1830's, there were the beginnings of the church that presently exists.

Something should be said about the life of the early Methodist Episcopal Societies. The Methodist system and life grew out of Anglican England. Wesley had been the father of a new breed of Episcopalianism. Himself an Anglican until his death, he had organized a class system and a system of societies of Christians seeking for fuller Christian holiness. At the close of the eighteenth century, the Methodist Episcopal Church had been founded in America and begun its expansion through the new nation. But at the center of all its life was the desire to raise up a body of sanctified Christians.

From the 1832 edition of the Methodist Discipline, we find the description of the early life of the Hopewell Society. "A society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.

Each society was divided into groups called classes of about 12 members each. One of these members, the "Leader," was responsible to meet each one in his class once a week, at least to inquire how their souls prospered; to advise, reprove, comfort, exhort, as occasion might require; and to receive their offerings to the support of the pastor, the church, and the poor. Each week he would meet the pastor and the stewards of the church and report on his members who needed special pastoral attention and to pay to the stewards his receipts for the week. The classes would meet weekly with their leaders, with or without the pastor being present. And they would pray, examine, and aid one another toward living a more perfect Christian life. Anyone wanting to become a member of a society needed "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." Persons joining a society had to become a member of a class as a probationer for six months minimum unless formerly a member of an "orthodox" church, that is, of a recognized denominational body. Those transferring from another church of the Methodists were admitted by letter, and those from another denomination were admitted upon examination by the Pastor. Members who did not meet the requirements of regular attendance at public worship, Preaching services, The Lord's Supper, family and private prayer, Bible study, and fasting and abstinence as evidence of their desire of salvation could be removed.

Being a Methodist was a serious business to the church and to the members.

Without early records, prior to 1876 concerning the Hopewell church, and only going on the records of the testimony of the Knox County History, one can only guess that for a long time, the Hopewell Society was without a regular meetinghouse of its own. It possibly held series in homes, in the open air, or in the local schoolhouse, as was done in Gambier until the 1850's. Or perhaps they journeyed to another chapel nearby. In any event, these serious founders of our church invested many hours of prayer and denial in order to save us our heritage.

In 1840, the area of Knox County was again affected by the reformation of the Conference lines, and the Society fell within the North Ohio Conference until 1912. The Wooster District held jurisdiction of the area including Hopewell.

In 1861 the District was named the Mt. Vernon District. Not until September 17, 1870, does the name Hopewell appear in the records of the circuit with Gambier. From quarterly conference minutes, we find William Smith representing Hopewell. Hopewell paid its first assessment of \$16.87, and overpayment of \$12.13.

At a meeting held in Danville on April 6, 1872, a committee of three from each society was appointed to confer upon the subject of dividing the circuit into two appointments. Hopewell was represented by William P. Smith, C. Hurford, and William Smith. Trustees of Hopewell in the same year were William Smith, Daniel Schooley, and William Walker.

The Gambier Circuit, to which Hopewell had become attached, had formerly been part of the Amity Circuit until it had been separated in 1860. The Gambier Circuit was made up of four appointments: Gambier, Pleasant Valley, Millwood, and Danville. Mt. Holly was added at the time Hopewell joined, and there were six preaching points as a result in the Gambier Circuit in 1870.

September 1873 shows the following membership records: Gambier – 30; Hopewell – 18; Pleasant Valley – 23; Millwood – 47; and Mt. Holly – 16.

It is interesting and sad that no record of the impact of the Civil War is reflected in the records of the Hopewell or the Gambier churches. However, it no doubt had some very real impacts in terms of family life. Oddly enough, there seem to be no major records of any war's toll throughout its history. God may have been gracious to the Knox County churches, or at least to our little home society.

Hopewell does not seem to figure in the life of the Circuit to any great degree.

The first Quarterly conference held at Hopewell was in March of 1873. Prior to that date, little official church activity on the charge seems to have been carried on there.

In 1876-77, Danville and Mt. Holly were separated from the Gambier Circuit to form the Danville Circuit. Gambier became a half-station. In 1879-80, Millwood was detached from Gambier Circuit, leaving Hopewell, Gambier, and Pleasant Valley. Pleasant Valley refused to pay its assessments in 1880 and was expelled from the Quarterly Conference officially in that year. At the following Annual Conference, Gambier Circuit, already a whole station, was made up of Hopewell and Gambier alone.

The Gambier Circuit decided in 1879-80 to begin plans for a parsonage to locate the pastor in Gambier because of the community's new status. The parsonage was constructed in Gambier. As a result of this location, Quarterly Conference, held on October 11, 1880, decided to have the pastor reside in Gambier, preach twice on every Lord's Day in Gambier (probably morning and evening) and once on every other Lord's Day, as has been the previous rule, at Hopewell in the afternoon. The assessments for the following year were as follows: Gambier - \$625.70 and Hopewell - \$180.50.

In 1882 in the Quarterly Conference of the Gambier Circuit, plans were laid for the "semi-centennial" celebration of the founding of Methodism at Hopewell and Gambier. Thereafter no other notes are found concerning that celebration, but it serves as evidence of the Hopewell birth date.

1886 saw the Pleasant Valley church added to the Circuit once again, and it remained part of the Gambier Charge until 1898 when its membership was absorbed into the Howard church.

Gambier built its present stone and brick edifice in 1888-89. It was in that year that internal strife broke out among the Hopewell members. The nature of the dispute is not recorded. However, as the pastor reports in the Historical record, the members, being dissatisfied that the pastor would not take sides in the dispute, refused to meet their assessments for his support. As a result, Hopewell was without a preacher for a while, until another man could be secured at the next Annual Conference.

A glance at the record books shows that there are periodic spurts of added membership and removed membership. Pastors either kept the records well or neglected them altogether. Periodically one or another church leader would set down the historic events of the churches' lives, but there are long periods of emptiness. No doubt the Lord was moving through all His servants. He was building up, pruning, refreshing, and reviving the spirits of His body.

Revivals were regular in Gambier and Hopewell, according to the record. Between 1906-07, 21 members were added to the charge: 13 at Epworth and 8 at Hopewell. Revivals were held in the winter normally, but at times also in the summer. A review of the baptismal records shows periodic flourishes of immersions and sprinklings. Marriages were almost all performed in private homes or in the parsonage. Few ventured to have formal church weddings. Class membership was a continuing regimen of the church. But in addition, as a result of new emphasis in the church in the latter years of the nineteenth century, Women's Societies, Epworth League, and the Junior League were initiated in local churches. The church was much involved in the mission movement from the 1840's when the first overseas missions were begun as well as the continuing of the Home missions among the Indians in all areas of the U.S. The Women's Foreign Missionary Society abounded with charitable bazaars, dinners, socials, etc. And one best not leave out the Sunday School movements that carried on their programs about nine months out of the year. The life of the church was very active, and in an era of little transportation, the church functioned as the center of the community for its members.

The work of the pastors became simplified as the circuits became divided and roads better developed. Formerly, in the earliest days of the circuits in the 1800's, the traveling elders, as they were called—those only who could administer the sacraments at will wherever they went—took upward of two weeks to circumnavigate their areas. They kept their mounts saddled and their seats warm. But with the church having come so far, as well as the countryside having opened up so much since those early times, the pastor had an easier time of ministering.

A look at the records of the pastoral appointments also shows that the length of appointment became longer as time went on. In 1832 the Discipline forbade the Bishop

from allowing any preacher to continue at one place for longer than two years in succession. But with the turn of the century, the pastors on the Gambier charge began to continue for longer periods of time.

Formerly the circuit had been made up of upwards of eight (or more) churches. Within the latter years of the nineteenth century, circuits became smaller and smaller. Where formerly there had been one or two traveling elders assigned to a circuit with their attending local preachers under them, there developed a pattern of one full time ordained pastor on a small charge with no assistants. Rented parsonages replaced sleeping places, and in their turn were replaced by church-owned pastoral residences. Old or less permanent church structures were torn down and most often replaced by new, more impressive buildings.

Conference and District boundaries became more fixed and permanent, and the work of internal development was addressed. A look at the nature of the records kept from year to year, and of the records made to the conferences, shows more administrative duties instituted.

1912 saw another Conference change as the North Ohio Conference was merged with the East Ohio Conference to form the North East Ohio Conference. The overall lines of that change have been maintained to this day.

August 1, 1915, saw the laying of the cornerstone of the new Hopewell Methodist Episcopal church. The building currently standing is the same church. The former church building having been valued at \$1500 in 1873 was in need of much repair and thought best to be replaced. In commemorating the dedication of the House (Hopewell Church), reports were carried in the local Knox County newspapers.

Quoting from the newspapers:

KNOX COUNTY REPUBLICAN NEWS – Tuesday, April 25, 1916: “Gambier, O. April 21 – The new edifice of the Hopewell M. E. Church in Pleasant Township, two and one-half miles South of here, will be dedicated Sunday, April 30. There will be services at 10:30 A.M., 2:30 P.M. and 7 P.M. At the noon hour a free dinner will be served in the Grange Hall. The Rev. E. E. Whittaker, D.D., of Mount Vernon, will assist the pastor, The Rev. Mr. Russell, in the services of the day. This Church has just completed one of the neatest and most modern edifices in the rural portion of Knox County. The cost will be about \$5000.”

Following the dedication, KCRN:

“The Hopewell M.E. Church recently completed, at a expenditure of \$5500, was dedicated Sunday, the ceremonies extending thru the day.

“In the morning the Rev. E. E. Whittaker delivered an excellent sermon and was instrumental in collecting over \$700, a little more than needed to provide for the balance due on the entire cost of the building, about \$4800 having been previously collected.

“In the afternoon at the formal dedication, conducted under the direction of the Rev. J. Edgar Russell, Pastor of the Church, the Rev. H. H. Miller occupied the pulpit. In the evening there was preaching by the Rev. Henry Smith of Amherst, who was born and reared in the community. Dinner was served at the Grange hall by the ladies of the Church free of charge to those who cared to remain at noon hour. All three services were largely attended.”

THE DAILY BANNER – Monday, May 1, 1916:

“CHURCH DEDICATED FREE OF ALL DEBT. Through the efficient efforts of Rev. E. E. Whittaker of the city, the new Hopewell Church was dedicated on Sunday, free of all debt. It was necessary to raise \$625 to accomplish this and Rev. Whittaker raised over \$800. He preached the dedicating sermon in the morning. Rev. H. H. Miller, of this city, preached in the afternoon and Rev. Henry Smith in the evening.

“The Church was packed at all services. The new edifice cost between \$4000 and \$5000. A feature of the day was the singing of a hymn by Rev. Mr. Jones of Amherst who is 88 years old.”

In 1921 records bear witness to 167 members at Epworth and 103 members at Hopewell. This is perhaps the highest number that was ever attained in either church. The latest Conference Journal of that era lists Gambier Charge, Mansfield District, with a total of 156 in Gambier and 96 in Hopewell; there were two services per Sunday at Epworth and one service every Sabbath at Hopewell.

From that point onward there seems to be an era that is lost to us. Direct records of history are non-existent. We have the membership lists and the record of conference journals, but up until the 1950's we have no continuous record of quarterly conferences or other church bodies of the Gambier Charge.

We gain glimpses of the church through the shrouds and veils of time. Perhaps because of the fire at the Parsonage in Gambier in 1951, many of the records are now buried in the embers of the past.

1927 brought Amity under the Gambier Circuit during the pastorate of Rev. Harry Young. As a result of this change, the Gambier Charge was once again increased to three preaching points. Sometime after 1949, Amity was transferred to a full station itself, and by 1951, no ties between Amity and Gambier-Hopewell are to be noted.

In 1939 one of the most far-reaching steps was taken by the denomination of Methodist Episcopal Church. The Northern church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South and Methodist Protestant Church merged into one united church once again. These three splinter groups having been split first by the question of episcopal (bishop) appointment, and then by the slavery issue. These three churches became known collectively as the Methodist Church. And from that time onwards, Hopewell bore the name of Methodist Church, Episcopal having been dropped as a result of the merger.

Renovation, painting, installation of a new organ, new roofs, etc., are the major changes in the building between 1920 and the present. Births, deaths, marriages, transfers and normal membership changes took place up until 1966.

At this time, Rev. David Liscomb was pastor and the major membership changes of the last 40 years took place.

With the strong support of the Discipline of the church, the rolls were pared. Both churches' total membership was listed as 195, Gambier – 121 and Hopewell – 71, at the beginning of the 1965-66 Conference year. By the end of that year, the numbers had dropped to 108 and 59, respectively. By the reporting time in 1969, membership had further dropped on the charge to a total of 111. Hopewell showed a membership of 54 members with an average attendance of 15 per Sunday.

It must be noted that within the modern history of the charge, student pastors had come to serve the churches more and more. Presently [1976] the church is a student charge. The effectiveness of part-time ministerial service to the membership has taken its toll. However, with the present financial strength of the congregation taken into consideration, it is difficult to see a favorable future for a full-time appointment. The budget of the Hopewell church has risen to a staggering \$4538 for the year 1976 [\$18,725 in 2014 dollars].

Present membership at Hopewell officially stands at 51. Regular attendance at worship has fluctuated but remains around 20 persons per Sunday.

Fortunately history is a living anthology. Changes, such as those in District name from Mt. Vernon District to Mansfield in 1912 and back again to Mt. Vernon District in 1970, or such as those in the Conference from the North East Ohio to the East Ohio in 1968, and the name from Hopewell Methodist Episcopal Church to the Hopewell United Methodist Church in 1968 resulting from the merger again of historically parallel denominations into one larger church, are and only should be incidental to the real history of a church. This is the real life of the church, and the real work of the Spirit. Who can tell what impact the Society of Methodists located in Pleasant Township has had upon the lives of the members, the probationers, the Baptized humanity that has passed under the hands of 93 pastors in succession. Nor can anyone tell what indelible mark was made upon the ministries of those who labored as the shepherds and servants of those looking for Holier living.

Time must be taken out, however, to single out two of the most honored persons who came into the Hopewell fellowship. Rutherford B. Hayes once taught Sunday School at Hopewell near the middle of the 1800's. No exact date is extant, but it is clear that it must have been in his early life. The 19<sup>th</sup> President of the United States at least left an imprint in the record books of the church and is Hopewell's highest claim to political fame.



Early on in his career, too, a young pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church served in Gambier, and probably in the Hopewell backwoods. William L. Harris was to become a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, consecrated at the General Conference of 1872. One can only surmise the great pride and enthusiasm the local Methodists felt when in 1875 Bishop Harris presided over the Mt. Vernon-seated North Ohio Conference. It is not hard to imagine the Methodists of Hopewell and Gambier flocking to Mt. Vernon at what is now Gay Street United Methodist Church to watch “their own” Bishop preside over the business of the church for which they had so long labored.

Bishops, elders, local preachers, laymen and women, they all make up the colored fabric of Hopewell’s patchwork quilt history. Would that a history of each of the members could be written, and the glories of God’s Kingdom be recounted as souls were won, nurtured, and laid to rest. Dear Mothers and Fathers of the past, may God grant that we carry the torch of faith forth into the world to light up men’s hearts. Would that we could abide in the spirit of the fellowship you helped to spawn out of individual lives blended together in love and devotion.

This historical attempt is begun and finished on the eve of the 60<sup>th</sup> dedication anniversary of the Hopewell church. Histories of many hands have provided the dust out of which this creation has been raised by God’s help. I pray that it may be an inspiration to all, and give heart to the present congregation that has passed through the troubled times of the past decade. It has been a decade of decline in general for the numbers in the church. However, it has never been a despair of little faith. The WSCS and the little worshipping congregation that comes out faithfully Sunday after Sunday still seeks the bounty of our Heavenly Father through the justifying and sanctifying work of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

May God grant this little white chapel in the middle of nature’s harvest land to stand tall with the whitened fields of corn and wheat and reap the fruit of all our labors. And may all that enter into the fellowship of the believers find rest and peace from the world and mount up with new strength. AMEN!

Rev. Dale Epple  
April 24, 1976

History Update  
1976-2014

Membership numbers  
Break from Epworth – 2011?

List of Pastors Serving the Gambier/Hopewell Area  
Since 1832

1832-33	James Wilson	1912-14	C. R. McMeekin
1833-34	Hiram Shafer	1914-15	Virgil Turner
1834-35	Abner Goff, O. Mitchell	1915-17	J. Edgar Russell
1835-36	David Gray	1917-20	M. A. Burris
1837-38	Charles Thomas, John Scobes	1920-21	E. S. Bowers
1838-39	Charles Thomas, Alexander Blakely	1921-24	Harry A. Smith
1839-40	Leonard Parker, Jesse Prior	1924-29	Harry J. Young
1840-41	Leonard Parker, Jesse Prior	1929-30	J. H. Jonews
1841-42	William L. Harris, Zephaniah Bell	1930-32	Melvin A. York
1842-43	William L. Harris, J. T. Neal	1932-34	B. M. Hanninger
1843-44	Oliver Burgess, J. Freese	1934-35	Herbert B. Shiltz
1844-45	J. Freese, L. W. James	1935-36	Albert B. Denton
1845-46	Sanford C. Parker, B. Rosberry	1936-38	Bruce T. Riley
1846-47	Sanford C. Parker, M. French	1938-40	Russel M. Bohner
1847-48	M. French, John Burgess	1940-42	Hollis Hayward
1848-49	R. H. Chubb, O. Mitchell	1942-44	Charles Hager
1849-50	E. Raymond, O. Mitchell	1944-46	Fredrick W. Haas
1850-51	E. Raymond, William Conant	1947-49	George Sidwell
1851-52	J. McNabb, Bell	1949-53	Charles Stoneburner
1852-53	L. Parker, J. K. Ford	1953-54	H. Floyd Wallace
1853-54	L. Parker, B. D. Jones	1954-58	Gilbert Chalfant
1854-55	J. Wolfe, A. B. Cochran	1958-59	William B. Van Valkenburg
1855-56	Philip Plummer, B. Heskitt	1959-61	Phillip Hanni
1856-58	Philip Plummer	1961-63	William Holmes
1858-59	D. Lambert, Lewis Lybarger	1963-64	Walter Timmer
1859-60	D. Lamber, William Hudson	1964-67	David Liscomb
1860-61	William Hudson, C. Craven	1967-68	Karl L. Winegardner
1861-62	Chilton Craven	1968-69	Milton D. Smith
1862-64	James Wheeler	1969-72	Henry D. Curtis
1864-66	Oliver Webster	1972-74	Robert D. Sayre
1866-68	John Buxton	1974-76	Dale E. Epple
1868-69	J. Haldeman	1976-79	Nolan Turner
1869-70	J. M. K. Barnes	1979-80	Richard Dunn
1870-71	W. C. Hueskis	1980-81	Robert Barr
1871-73	Oman Lawrence	1981-85	Gary Dickson
1873-74	George McKillips	1985-90	Robert Bloomquist
1874-76	James Johnson	1990-91	Tom Snode
1876-78	Stephan Fant	1991-95	Loring Prest
1878-80	Vincent D. Lawrence	1995-99	James Ellison
1880-81	V. D. Lawrence, J. P. Mills	1999-2000	Don Newland, John Dietsch
1881-83	F. A. Gould	<u>Kenyon College Interns</u>	
1883-84	L. H. Baker	Alissa Clark and Jane Ward	
1884-86	Joseph Long	2000-03	Dale Sutton
1886-89	F. G. McCauley	2003-07	Kevin Pellinen
1889-94	William R. Chase	2007-11	Michael Padula
1894-96	L. A. Edwards	2011-12	Elliott Bush
1896-1901	William H. Eglin	2012-13	Joe Beran
1901-04	B. F. Rhoades	2013	David Havens
1904-07	Thomas Hambly	2013-14	Don Newland
1907-10	A. C. Corfman		
1910-12	David A. Morris		