

Mt. Etna Circuit

In Huntington County, northern Grant County, and Wells County, between the Mississinewa and Salimonie Rivers, there had existed since the earlier reform period a circuit called Mt. Etna. Several churches founded in the period of reform continued on through the transition to holiness evangelism, and toward the end of this period there was a veritable mushrooming of Wesleyan churches on this circuit, leading to its division in 1887 into four units, Mt. Etna, Fairview, and Salimonie Circuits, and Traversville Mission.

Mt. Etna, in southwestern Huntington County, was the "mother" congregation of the circuit. It had been organized in the reform period, as early as 1847, but no later than 1852.²⁰⁴ When Aaron Worth wrote a description of his circuit early in this period, he described the village as free from saloons and grogshops, the church as thirty-six by forty feet in size, and the parsonage as a one-story, five-room dwelling next door.²⁰⁵ This church continues to the present. A church variously known as Prairie Creek, Salem Chapel, and in more recent times, South Salem, also dates from the reform period, with log cabin meetings held along Prairie Creek in Wells County beginning as early as 1850. During the early part of this period, the work here was weak. But a revival took place late in 1879, and by the third

²⁰⁴The Wesleyan Methodist, LXXVI, 3991, March 4, 1914, p. 12; LXXXIV, 4151, May 12, 1926, p. 14.

²⁰⁵American Wesleyan, XXVII, 1367, March 17, 1869, pp. 460-61.

Sunday in May 1882 a new building was dedicated.²⁰⁶ This church survived until past the middle of the twentieth century. Bethany was a log church dating from reform days, located in Huntington County one mile north and two miles west of Monument City.²⁰⁷ A revival occurred here as late as 1877 but apparently the work went down soon afterward.²⁰⁸ Another congregation dating from reform days was Fairview, five miles northeast of Marion in Grant County, dating from about 1858. A neighboring schoolhouse congregation known as Sugar Grove had apparently merged with it by this period and both names were used for reference to the church. Aaron Worth described this as "one of the most pleasant and delightful country churches with which I am acquainted." It was here on May 29, 1870, that the young people gave Worth a quilt called the "Irish chain," bearing on it the names of the contributors.²⁰⁹ Fairview had its own circuit, 1875-78, and was set off again in 1887. This church continued into the twentieth century. Pond Creek, four miles south of Mt. Etna, had existed in the reform period at least as early as Fairview.²¹⁰ It was the site of a quarterly meeting in 1870,²¹¹ but apparently did not survive

²⁰⁶Ibid., XXXVII, 1926, Dec. 3, 1879, p. 5; XL, 2051, April 26, 1882, p. 5.

²⁰⁷Monument Chapel local church history.

²⁰⁸American Wesleyan, XXXV, 1779, Feb. 7, 1877, p. 3.

²⁰⁹Ibid., XXVII, 1367, March 17, 1869, pp. 460-61; XXIX, 1467, Feb. 15, 1871, p. 26.

²¹⁰Ibid., XXXVI, 1845, May 15, 1878, p. 7.

²¹¹Ibid., XXVIII, 1409, Jan. 5, 1870, p. 3.

much longer.

A new period of establishing churches was introduced on the Mt. Etna Circuit simultaneously with the holiness revival. The tiny village of Pleasant Plain was the site of Wesleyan meetings as early as 1879.²¹² A Wesleyan parsonage was situated there at the beginning of the twentieth century, and perhaps a church building.²¹³ On the western edge of Huntington County, a church was organized at Monument City, early in 1880. This church was very close to Bethany and may have incorporated the remnants of that congregation in its organization, since nine of its sixteen charter members joined by transfer.²¹⁴ The church was quite weak as late as 1886, but a revival meeting which closed on February 15, 1887 resulted in its reorganization,²¹⁵ and was followed by the erection of a church before the end of the year.²¹⁶ This church continues to the present, now known as Monument Chapel. A church named Rush Creek was organized early in 1882, but nothing more is known concerning it.²¹⁷ In 1884 Wesleyan preaching began at Warren,

²¹²Ibid., XXXVII, 1885, Feb. 19, 1879, p. 4.

²¹³The Wesleyan Methodist, L, 2604, Dec. 7, 1892, p. 3, the pastor writes of the neat little Wesleyan Methodist Church a few steps from the parsonage. But in an interview with Mrs. Margaret Roberts, March 4, 1957, the writer was told the Wesleyans used the Friends building and an old store building. Mrs. Roberts was born in 1857, lived to be 106, and knew the Pleasant Plain congregation well.

²¹⁴American Wesleyan, XXXVIII, 1945, April 14, 1880, p. 3.

²¹⁵The Wesleyan Methodist, XLIV, 2304, March 2, 1887, p. 5.

²¹⁶Ibid., XLV, 2347, Dec. 28, 1887, p. 2.

²¹⁷American Wesleyan, XL, 2043, March 1, 1882, p. 4.

in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Opposition and persecution developed and the church was closed to the Wesleyans. Later services were renewed at an abandoned Presbyterian church, followed by a tent meeting in the summer. The results of the tent meeting are best expressed in the words of C. E. Rowley, the evangelist.

Hallelujah! The God of Israel is giving us victory in Indiana; just closed a tabernacle meeting at Warren, a strong-hold for satan as to the lodge, fashionable and time-serving churches, worldliness and singenerally. Brother Joseph S. Robinson, of New Jersey, was with us in the name of the Lord, also sisters Bratton and Black of this place. After rebuking sin for a few days, and tearing off the mask of religion worn by these popular churches, we were notified to leave their town under the penalty of an egg dispensation, and having our tabernacle demolished,--denouncing us, by the way, as a set of "black legs." The Lord poured out his Spirit; we spoke on the words he gave us, and souls were saved from sin. On last Saturday morning we found one half of our tabernacle flat on the ground, some of the enemies of the cross having seen fit to untie the guy-ropes and ropes supporting the wall, two of the latter being cut. This, however, stirred up sympathy in our behalf. The tide turned in our favor. Last Sabbath was a day of power in the Holy Ghost. The meeting closed with the Sunday night service; tabernacle crowded, and many eager listeners on the outside. A few minutes before the close, a man notoriously wicked, stepped to the front and desired to speak. Permission being granted, he proceeded to state how he had been stumbling over an unsaved church, and that he had approved the teaching given in this meeting from the very first, and that he was a miserable man, not able to sleep at night. He then declared he would forsake his sins and serve the Lord Jesus. There was great rejoicing at this. Hallelujah! Truth prevails!

By January 18, 1885, Jacob Hester was able to organize a church of twelve members. Some of the subsequent meetings were held in the city hall.²¹⁸ This church continues to the present. In December 1885 Hester conducted a

²¹⁸Local Warren church history; The Wesleyan Methodist, XLII, 1268 (sic), July 23, 1884, p. 3; XLIII, 1295 (sic), Jan. 28, 1885, p. 3.

revival at Christman Schoolhouse, three miles west of Warren, and organized a church here early in 1886.²¹⁹ This group survived until after 1887, but there was an early tendency for the members to transfer to Warren.²²⁰ An organization was planned at Tramel Schoolhouse, seven miles southeast of Mt. Etna, during the latter part of March 1886.²²¹ This would have been close to Warren and even if the organization was effected the members probably drifted to Warren or Plummer's Chapel. In March 1885, a revival at Belleville, four miles north of Warren, led to the organization of a church with forty-eight members.²²² By November 1887, this church had "gone down" but an attempt was being made to revive it.²²³ Very late in 1885 or early in 1886, Jacob Hester organized a small church at Gunda or Gundy's Schoolhouse.²²⁴ Another meeting in the schoolhouse at Otterbein, next door to the United Brethren Church, led to a small organization there very early in 1886.²²⁵

²¹⁹The Wesleyan Methodist, XLIII, 2241, Dec. 16, 1885, p. 3; XLIV, 2253, March 10, 1886, p. 7.

²²⁰Ibid., LXXIX, 4399, Dec. 10, 1919, p. 14.

²²¹Ibid., XLIV, 2256, March 31, 1886, p. 4.

²²²Ibid., XLIII, 1303 (sic), March 25, 1885, p. 4.

²²³Ibid., XLV, 2340, Nov. 9, 1887, p. 5. Cf. History of Huntington County, Indiana, (Chicago: Brant and Fuller, 1887), p. 673.

²²⁴The Wesleyan Methodist, XLIV, 2256, March 31, 1886.

²²⁵Ibid., XLIV, 2253, March 10, 1886, p. 6.

These two churches were still existing separately in 1887 but subsequently combined to form Plummer's Chapel, a church six miles west of Warren which survived past the middle of the twentieth century.²²⁶ Apparently the Belleville members also joined Plummer's Chapel²²⁷ In March 1887 a revival was reported at Bethel, three miles southeast of Bluffton, and it was indicated to be the third meeting in Wells County.²²⁸ The Traversville Mission was one of the divisions made off the Mt. Etna Circuit in 1867 and apparently centered in Wells County. A congregation was organized following a revival at Landesville northeast of Marion in a house belonging to the Mott family by December 6, 1886. An acre of land was donated and plans were being laid for building.²²⁹ This church was one of those involved in the partition of the Mt. Etna Circuit in 1887 but did not long survive. In July 1886 Jacob Hester and Charles S. Smith conducted a tent meeting one-half mile south of Lancaster, resulting in the purchase of land in Lancaster for the erection of a Wesleyan church. Hester wrote to the denominational periodical that he planned to organize a church there December 8, 1886.²³⁰ The local church history says that he actually effected the organization in February 1887. Services were

²²⁶Interview with Mrs. Roberts. She was a charter member of the Otterbein group.

²²⁷Frank Summer Bash, et al., editors, History of Huntington County, Indiana, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1914), Vol. I, p. 319.

²²⁸The Wesleyan Methodist, XLIV, 2306, March 16, 1887, p. 2.

²²⁹Ibid., XLIV, 2293, Dec. 15, 1886, p. 5.

²³⁰Ibid.

held in the Methodist Episcopal Church and later the schoolhouse, until the building was completed in the fall. The church was dedicated on Sunday, November 13, 1887.²³¹ This church continues to the present. In 1886 and 1887 there are references to meetings at a Zion Church, at Lofer's Corner.²³² When the division of the Mt. Etna Circuit was effected in 1887, there is mention of a Macedonia Church.²³³

The dynamic thrust of the holiness revival is fully evident in the rapid multiplication of churches on the Mt. Etna Circuit during the 1880's. In 1887 when the Circuit was divided into three circuits and one mission, it appears the churches were organized as follows: Fairview Circuit included Fairview, Pleasant Plain, Landesville, Gunda, and Otterbein;²³⁴ Mt Etna Circuit included Mt. Etna, Monument City, Macedonia, and Lancaster;²³⁵ Salimonie Circuit included Salem Chapel, Warren, and Christman, plus Hartford City from the New Castle and Blue River Circuit.²³⁶ Traversville Mission probably included only Traversville.

²³¹Ibid., XLV, 2343, Nov. 30, 1887, p. 5.

²³²Ibid., XLIV, 2256, March 31, 1886, p. 4; XLV, 2302, Feb. 16, 1887, p. 5.

²³³Lancaster local church history.

²³⁴Fairview local church records.

²³⁵Lancaster local church history.

²³⁶The Wesleyan Methodist, XLVII, 2406, Feb. 13, 1889, p. 2.