

Westfield and Boxley Circuits

The last of the circuits containing a congregation dating from 1843, the founding year of the denomination, was that of Westfield. In 1872, this circuit was divided, with the northern part becoming the Boxley Circuit and the southern part retaining the name of Westfield Circuit.¹⁵⁶

From 1866 to 1869, H. C. West was pastor of the Westfield Circuit. His diary mentions many preaching places, including (1) churches such as Westfield, Boxley, Deming, and Robert's Chapel, (2) schools such as Numbers 3, 7, 10, and 16, (3) apparent homes of Perry, Jeffries, Woodey, Collins, Nathan Wicker, and (4) miscellaneous sites--Poplar Ridge, Bethlehem, Grassy Branch, and Hinkle Creek. Such a list helps to portray the fluid and complex state of these circuits.

The Wesleyan church in Westfield was the oldest on this circuit, dating from December 1843 and continuing to the present. The period just after the Wesleyans determined to continue their denominational identity following the Civil War was one of great revival for the Westfield Church and Circuit. In the 1870-71 year, 163 members had joined, nearly 100 had been baptized, two new church organizations had been formed, and two new buildings were under construction. Pastor J. W. Hiatt made it clear that the moral reform emphasis was still popular at this point in Westfield.

Our people are alive on the subject of moral reform, persistently opposing the use of rum and tobacco, church festivals, and religious lotteries, a fashionable Christianity and popular religion.

¹⁵⁶Minutes, 1872, p. 110.

He declared that secret societies were declining around Westfield, and that he had received "five receding Masons into the Church who had become tired of their Gentile associates."¹⁵⁷ Another church dating from the reform period was at Deming. West's diary records the fact that he planned to reorganize this church February 18, 1867.¹⁵⁸ In March he reported a revival there which brought in sixty-three new members.¹⁵⁹ But the work must have quickly gone down as there is no record of it after 1867. No. 7 Schoolhouse is spoken of repeatedly as the meeting place of a church, and was apparently in existence as a separate congregation from the earlier reform period through most if not all of this period.¹⁶⁰ Hazel Dell, four miles southeast of Westfield, may have been organized as a church as early as 1854.¹⁶¹ A building was planned in 1871,¹⁶² and was named Wesley Chapel when erected.¹⁶³ The congregation was reorganized in January 1881,¹⁶⁴ and the congregation

¹⁵⁷American Wesleyan, XXVIII, 1438, July 27, 1870, p. 118; 1441, August 17, 1870, p. 130; XXIX, 1480, May 17, 1871, p. 81.

¹⁵⁸H. C. West's diary, February 9, 1867.

¹⁵⁹American Wesleyan, XXV, 1264, Mar. 20, 1867, p. 46.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., XXXIX, 2002, May 25, 1881, p. 5; 2018, Sept. 7, 1881, p. 3; The Wesleyan Methodist, 86, 11, March 13, 1929, p. 14.

¹⁶¹The Wesleyan Methodist, LIV, 2816, Jan. 13, 1897, p. 15.

¹⁶²American Wesleyan, XXIX, 1473, March 29, 1871, p. 52.

¹⁶³The two names (Hazel Dell and Wesley Chapel) were used interchangeably, as is evident from comparing the Minutes, 1902, p. 13 with the Westfield Church local history.

¹⁶⁴American Wesleyan, XXXIX, 1990, March 2, 1881, p. 3.

continued until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁵ Poplar Ridge near Carmel is mentioned as a meeting place in West's diary in 1867, but several obituaries printed long afterward in the denominational periodical concur in narrowing the organization of the church to about 1869 or 1870--making it perhaps one of the two mentioned in the Westfield revival report referred to above.¹⁶⁶ A building was constructed and the congregation persisted into the twentieth century. Forest Grove, south of Sheridan and west of Hortonville, dedicated its new building August 4, 1879. Nothing further is known of its origin, but this country church also continued existence well into the twentieth century. W. H. Kennedy reported a revival there in 1883 which resulted in fifty-nine conversions and twenty-seven new members who came in the "shouting way."¹⁶⁷ Grassy Branch and Eagletown are mentioned as meeting sites during this period, but there is no evidence of continuing congregations there.¹⁶⁸

In the northern part of the original Westfield Circuit, Boxley was the oldest congregation on the newly formed Boxley Circuit. It dated from 1844 in the earlier reform period, and lasted well into the twentieth century.

¹⁶⁵Minutes, 1902, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶The Wesleyan Methodist, XLII, 1267, July 16, 1884, p. 7; LXXVIII, 4213, April 3, 1918, p. 15.

¹⁶⁷American Wesleyan, XXXVII, 1887, March 5, 1879, p. 3; XLI, 2097, May 14, 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., XLI, 2092, Feb. 7, 1883, p. 5; The Wesleyan Methodist, XLIII, 1299 (sic), Feb. 25, 1885, p. 2.

A revival brought fifty-four members into the church in 1870.¹⁶⁹ The parsonage which was provided by this circuit in 1880 had sufficient stabling and outbuildings, fruit trees, garden, and several acres of land for cow pasture or cultivation.¹⁷⁰ The church building was remodeled in 1884,¹⁷¹ but a great windstorm blew off the spire and bell in 1886, damaged the parsonage and demolished the stable.¹⁷² Robert's Chapel was organized in a settlement of free Negroes who had moved there from the South in pre-Civil War days. The organization went down under the impact of a Negro Masonic Lodge, but was revived at the beginning of this period under West's ministry, and a frame meetinghouse was erected. While the Wesleyans followed the Methodist custom of allowing baptism by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, the latter method was quite popular. Thirteen were baptized on one occasion by the Robert's Chapel congregation, and the scene on the riverbank was dramatically pictured by the reporter.

To hear the shouts of rejoicing, and the sweet songs of praise that echoed through the forest from the vast concourse assembled on the bank of the stream, conspired to render the scene in the highest degree impressive.¹⁷³

This church continues to the present although it is no longer technically a part

¹⁶⁹American Wesleyan, XXVIII, 1417, March 2, 1870, p. 34.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., XXXVIII, 1951, May 26, 1880, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷¹The Wesleyan Methodist, XLII, 1271 (sic), Aug. 6, 1884, p. 3.

¹⁷²Ibid., XLIV, 2264, May 26, 1886, p. 3.

¹⁷³American Wesleyan, XXVII, 1376, May 19, 1869, p. 499; XXVIII, 1460, Dec. 28, 1870, p. 166.

of The Wesleyan Church. No. 3 Schoolhouse was a meeting place for Wesleyans repeatedly in 1867, and as late as 1877¹⁷⁴ was the site of a stirring revival, which would probably justify the conclusion that it represented a continuing congregation through the earlier part of the period. Local tradition indicates that the Liberty (Bakers Corner) Church grew out of a log cabin fellowship of people belonging to the more distant Boxley congregation, a fellowship which may have developed as early as 1864.¹⁷⁵ But the church was actually organized February 21, 1870, with thirty-five members, making it probable that it was the second organization referred to in the Westfield Circuit report of revival mentioned above. The first meeting place was reminiscent of the one at Greensboro in Henry County described earlier.

While brethren were fitting up an old dwelling house at this place, to hold meetings in till they can build one, and while talking of the mysterious providence of God, it was remembered that in this same house a few years ago, when Spiritualism was spreading mildew and death in the community, a Bible was burned by them on the hearth, and they danced in hellish glee over their impious work; and in a half mile of this place, the Bible was thrown out of a District school by this same infidelity. A Sabbath-school is to be organized in two weeks, and steps are already being taken to build a meeting house.¹⁷⁶

In 1871 a frame meetinghouse was erected. This church continues to the present. The Sheridan Church was organized November 7, 1882, the congregation meeting in the Methodist Episcopal building until their own meeting-house

¹⁷⁴Ibid., XXXV, March 7, 1877, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵Bakers Corner local church history.

¹⁷⁶American Wesleyan, XXVIII, 1417, March 2, 1870, p. 34.

was completed and dedicated, April 20, 1884.¹⁷⁷ It too continues to the present. A meeting at the Cody schoolhouse near Terhune early in 1885 apparently led to an organization there, for by 1887 statistics were reported from a church on the Terhune Mission.¹⁷⁸ Hortonville is mentioned as a preaching point on the circuit in 1885,¹⁷⁹ but does not give evidence of having been an organized congregation.

Montmorenci Circuit

A circuit developed in west central Indiana, in Warren and Tippecanoe Counties, as early as 1844 in the earlier reform period. In 1867 this circuit was named the Montmorenci Circuit. The strength of this circuit fluctuated greatly, with as many as five preaching appointments, four church organizations, and two meeting-houses reported at different times. But by 1878, the Conference made provision for the sale of the church and parsonage property,¹⁸⁰ and when William Lacey left the pastorate there the following year the work went down. A letter from the community indicated that in 1882 former Wesleyans were forced to attend other churches because there was no Wesleyan church there.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷The Wesleyan Methodist, XLII, 2148, March 5, 1884, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., XLIII, 1299 (sic), Feb. 25, 1885, p. 2; XLIV, 2264, May 26, 1886, p. 3; cf. Minutes, 1887, p. 30.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., XLIII, 2230, Sept. 30, 1885, p. 4; 2234, Oct. 28, 1885, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰Minutes, 1878, p. 287.

¹⁸¹American Wesleyan, XL, 2037, Jan. 18, 1882, p. 6.