

CHURCHES

New Albany's two oldest church organizations – Wesley Chapel Methodist Church and the First Presbyterian Church – this year mark their 140th anniversary. Both were founded in 1817 when the city was a tiny village only four years old. The founding of these two pioneer churches not only marks the beginning of church history in New Albany, but also indicates that the infant community was beginning to establish a regulated and stable society – the village had started to become the city we know today.

An old familiar hymn sung by a pioneer woman as she went about her tasks in her small shop was the beginning of New Albany's first church according to the traditional story handed down through the years. That hymn, heard by another settler as he wended his way past in the moonlight, inspired him to set about forming a prayer group – a group that about June of 1817 formed itself as a Methodist Church with the Rev. John Shrader as its first minister. Sometime the following year the group erected a log meeting house near the site of the present Wesley Chapel Methodist Church.

New Albany Presbyterians, who had helped form a church in Jeffersonville in 1816, established the First Presbyterian Church in New Albany in December 1817, a few months after the Methodist Church had been formed and in 1818 they, too, erected a church – a frame structure on State Street, and it was in this building in 1819 that the first Sunday School class in Indiana was organized.

In 1825, New Albany's third organized church, the First Baptist, was formed through the efforts of Seth Woodruff who presented the group a church building on Washington Place opposite Scribner Park.

Nine years later, in 1834, St. Paul's Episcopal Church was organized and in 1837 erected its first building on Spring Street where St. Mark's educational building is now located.

Religious growth in New Albany now became rapid and the church buildings and denominations increased almost yearly. In 1835 Park Christian Church was founded by a group of followers of Alexander Campbell, and Campbell himself later preached in the church. The following year the city's first Catholic Church, Holy Trinity, came into being, although Mass had been celebrated by visiting priests in private homes for many years previously. In 1837 the growing number of German immigrants led to the founding of the German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church which erected a small church on State Street near Oak – the beginnings of St. Mark's Evangelical and Reformed Church.

In 1848 the United Brethren Church, another German denomination, was founded and erected a church at Spring and West Sixth. Three years earlier other German immigrants had founded a German Methodist church and later erected a building on East Fifth between Spring and Market. This later developed into Calvary Methodist which in 1955 merged with Centenary Methodist.

The passing years saw additional churches founded by the original denominations. Centenary Methodist, whose handsome church building is the oldest yet standing in New Albany, was founded in 1839 and was so named because that was the centennial year of Methodism. German Catholics founded St. Mary's in 1859.

The Hutchinson Memorial Presbyterian dates from 1853 when it was founded as the Third Presbyterian. The first pastor was the Rev. John J. Atterbury whose son later became president of the Pennsylvania Railroad and for whom

Camp Atterbury is named. This church originally was at East Ninth and Oak. It was later united with the Second Presbyterian which occupied the building now used by the First Baptist. The present building at Thirteenth and Elm was erected about 1890. The name was changed to honor the Rev. Charles Hutchinson who served as pastor for some fifty years.

Another early church was Main Street Methodist, formed in 1849 and often called the "Yawl" since it was a mission of Wesley Chapel which was affectionately known as the "Old Ship of Zion".

DePauw Memorial Methodist had its beginnings in a mission established on Vincennes Street by Washington C. DePauw, who contributed much to the Methodist cause in Indiana. It received its name as a memorial to Jennie DePauw, DePauw's daughter who died in childhood.

To tell the full story of New Albany's churches would require far more time than is available – the story of the John Street Methodist Mission founded in 1854, now the Trinity Methodist which is about to erect a beautiful new structure of modern design on Charlestown Road; the story of the founding of Central Christian in 1874; of Culbertson Avenue Baptist founded as a mission in the late 1880s; the story of the two new Catholic parishes, Holy Family and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which have been established during the past ten years; the story of Grace Lutheran, the only Protestant church in New Albany to operate a parochial school; the story of the organization of the Indiana Methodist District conference in New Albany 125 years ago; or the story of St. Mark's with its cornerstone inscribed in German, now being wrecked to make way for another and finer St. Mark's to rise on the same site . . . they are all part of that seed planted 140 years ago by pioneers in the wilderness – a seed that continues to flourish and grow stronger with each passing year.