

A Short History of The
WEST BETHESDA
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Located in Superior Township
Three Miles South of Montpelier, or Six Miles Northwest of Bryan



Prepared and printed for the Church's
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
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West Bethesda History

By Jesse Raymond Mick
A descendant of the original group

*A brief sketch of an Old School Presbyterian Church
organized in 1848 with twenty-three charter members.*

HOW WEST BETHESDA CAME TO BE

Any complete history of the West Bethesda community and church should have, as an introduction, the story of the 23 charter members previous to their coming to Williams County in the Forties. By that time the group of perhaps 50 that settled in the West Bethesda community, had come to be known as Scotch-Irish. While some were of German and Swiss origin, as witness such names as Wisman, Mick, and Lesnet, yet, for some reason difficult to explain, these had attached themselves to the Presbyterian group in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. Possible, through marriage and the lack of other churches for Germans and Swiss, they cast their lot with the Scotch Presbyterians, for it is well-known that the region around Pittsburgh had more Presbyterians per square mile than any other church organization.

The coming of the Scotch-Irish to Pennsylvania must have been around the year 1750, and they, most surely, come direct from Ireland. A large group of Scottish people went to Ireland about the 1611, or several years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620. After a century or more in Ireland the Scotch and Irish were somewhat mixed, so that it is not easy to say whether an immigrant from Ireland to Pennsylvania around the year 1750 was pure Scotch – Scotch-Irish, or just plain Irish. But wherever they settled in Pennsylvania or elsewhere, they established a Presbyterian church, which is evidence that in religious matters, at least, the Scottish trait was strongest.

There is evidence that some of the immigrants of that time were originally Irish Catholics, but for the most part, these soon took their place in the Presbyterian churches, either from choice or because of a lack of Catholic churches in the new world, especially in western Pennsylvania. Some of the families that most surely were of Catholic stock were the McAllisters, Lindersmiths, McKarns and Brannans, and it is quite safe to assume that these families were predominantly Irish. The Martin family was most certainly Scotch, and, possibly, the Cannan and Johnston families. So if one can visualize a group of immigrants from Ireland, made up of Scotch and Irish, coming to America soon after George Washington was born, and here meeting and mixing with other groups from Switzerland and Germany, and all living together for 50 or 60 years near Pittsburgh, before, during and after the Revolutionary War, he can form this own estimate of the make-up of these pioneers before they invaded our own state of Ohio soon after the year 1800.

CALLED "A DISTURBING ELEMENT"

The Scotch-Irish immigrant was called a disturbing element in Pennsylvania. They were stubborn, fearless, and liked to settle where land had not yet been surveyed, and it was claimed, resented nearly all governmental authority. They had come to America to escape

Kingly authority, and hoped to find real freedom from such rule in Pennsylvania, hence their unwillingness to conform to the prescribed set of rules.

Moving seemed an easy task for this restless band. First, they went from Scotland to Ireland. Becoming dissatisfied there a part of the group came to Pennsylvania; then came another move across the Ohio into eastern Ohio. After a stay of from 30 to 40 years in Columbianna County, the more restless were ready for still another venture, and this time came to Williams County and the West Bethesda community. After 35 or 40 years at West Bethesda the hive was ready to swarm again, and this time Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, and Dakota was their destination. Later, still, other fragments or descendants of the original immigrants went farther west to Colorado and California. Theirs was the spirit of the pioneer, and to their energy, restlessness, venture, and desire for improvement of their lot we owe much. In Scotland and Ireland their minds were filled with tales of the new world, and nothing short of a view of the Golden Gate in California could satisfy their intense longing for following the rainbow of promise wherever it might lead. The remnants of the group that were left behind after each move, gradually became integrated with other kinds of people in their community to form what we like to believe is the real America.

Such was the little group that decided to settle in Williams County that year before the West Bethesda church was organized. The most of them died here, although, as has been said, some with their children moved farther west where opportunities seemed to offer more satisfactions. Getting back again to church history, it should be said that the Pennsylvania group that crossed the Ohio soon after 1800, organized the Bethesda Presbyterian church in Columbianna County, Ohio, near the town of Millport. This was in 1820. The Bethesda community in Columbianna County was the birthplace of many who later organized the West Bethesda church in 1848. Some, of course, had been born in Pennsylvania and Maryland. A visit to the cemetery of the old Bethesda church will reveal such names on the gravestones as McCrea, Copeland, McKarns, Martin, Lindersmith, and others equally familiar.

CAME TO WILIAMS COUNTY

By the year 1846 a part of this community was ready to try their fortunes farther west, and so they come to the new County of Williams in 1847. It is true that the George Wisman family had come in 1836, but the "great migration" came about ten years later. The Wisman family was the magnet that drew the others to this particular section. Their home was sure to be visited by their old neighbors and relatives whenever they came here to look for new homes. George and Susanna Wisman must have proved good sales people, for we know that hundreds of acres of virgin land near their home soon was purchased by the folks "back east". It has been related by James Lesnet, who was a son of a charter member of West Bethesda, that after the heads of families had come from Columbianna County on foot or horse back, and purchased farms, James Martin, as a sort of pilot, went "back east" as Columbianna County was called, and supervised the migration of this larger group to Williams County. There have been much larger migrations in human history, but no doubt, this one in 1847 had much the same experiences, trials and sufferings as are recorded in the story of other migrations.

It is interesting to note that at this time Brigham Young was piloting the Mormons to Utah in what has been termed "the best organized migration in history." Coming to Williams

County this pioneer group crossed but two railroads, saw no telephone or telegraph lines, and used oxen hitched to their covered wagons. They came by way of Canton, Massillon, Ashland, and Tiffin. At the time of their arrival there was not a railroad in Williams county, the Mexican War was in progress, Abraham Lincoln was not known to a single person in the community, the Civil War was still 13 years ahead, and Oregon and California were about to become a part of United States territory. Someone has said that the unique thing about American history is that it shows how the pioneer met and conquered the problems that faced him in the unbroken forest. The history of West Bethesda shows that the problems of religion, education, clearing the land, drainage, roads, homes, and many other things were dealt with and the results shows that these pioneers were the masters of the situation.

MADE A RUDE ALTAR

James Martin had already decided that there would be a Presbyterian church for the little band he was leading across Ohio, and he had already decided that the church should be on the corner of the farm he had so lately purchased. Mrs. Nancy Brannan McKarns, a lifelong member of the West Bethesda church, and a daughter of its first Ruling Elder, is authority for the following bit of religious history. Because she was regarded by all as a saintly woman, her statement may be taken as based on fact. She knew the original members, and heard the early history of the church repeated over and over in her youth. In 1918, when the church celebrated the seventieth anniversary of its founding, Mrs. McKarns related the following: "As soon as James Martin purchased his quarter-section of land in 1846, the year before the migration, he went into the newly-purchased tract – all in timber at the northeast corner, which is now the north part of the West Bethesda cemetery. There he gathered some sticks and brush to make a rude altar. Kneeling down in this lonely spot he dedicated that corner of his farm to God as a place of worship." Really, that was the beginning of the West Bethesda church. With the coming of Rev. John M. Crabb, about a year later, it is easy to see he had no difficult task in organizing a church. The soil had been prepared for his visit, and the church organization made in James Martin's log house just west of the present church building was the result of a long chain of history that traced back to Scotland, the home of James Martin's ancestors.

The Scotch-Irish here, as elsewhere, made good settlers. Not wealthy or well educated in the modern sense, they were hardy pioneers, ready to face any hardship. Hardworking, industrious, not too fond of beauty and culture, they subdued the forests, built homes, reared families, learned their Westminster Catechism, and worshipped in a church building which was bare and unattractive, but which was in keeping with their stern sense of duty. One of their number once remarked that he had money for repair of the church roof, but not a cent for ornament of the interior. They went to church because it was the right thing to do, and not because of a beautiful building, grand singing, and ministerial robes. There was some dissension when a few musically inclined suggested an organ for use in the church. One leader said he'd as soon have a fiddle in the church as an organ. Gradually, however, a few improvements such as organ music and choir enriched the church service somewhat, but the strong-willed (maybe stubborn) Scotch-Irish yielded ground slowly in the matter of any change.

SANG NOTHING BUT PSALMS

It is well to remind ourselves at this point that Presbyterians had long sang nothing but Psalms, and some of the charter members still own their leather-covered Psalm Books. The United Presbyterians still sing Psalms, and have no place for hymns and tunes invented by folks long after the Bible was written. The historical background for most of this come from the breaking away of the non-conformist church groups from the highly ritualistic Catholic and Church of England groups. Puritans could see no religion in stained glass windows, robed choirs, chanting, surplices for ministers, etc. As a consequence the dissenting groups, built bare, barn-like churches, usually not heated. They were meeting houses, and if attendance was a hardship then there was more religion in the act – at least this was the belief of Puritans, Pilgrims, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodist churches in England, Scotland and Ireland. Churches such as the Lutheran got their forms from the Continent of Europe and their ideas about church buildings, music, gowns, etc., were quite different from the others. It is necessary to remember these things when judging the founders of West Bethesda church. To them , religion was not something that came in a beautiful package – something to make them feel comfortable, or to give enjoyment. They did not believe in being “carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize or sailed through bloody seas.” We are prone to think of the people of the Reformation and the Puritans as having lived in ancient times. Actually, they lived in the West Bethesda church. Consider how the Sabbath was kept. Children and adults went to Sabbath School – not Sunday School. To them the word “Sunday” was not of Christian or religious origin. Where possible, necessary Sabbath labor was done on Saturday. All games, amusements, visiting, whistling, and unnecessary travel were frowned upon.

Back once more to the organizing group that decided a new church should be organized in their new home, and that it should be called West Bethesda in honor and memory of the older church in Columbianna County. There were but 23 charter members. Of these eleven were Martins, while six others were either husbands or wives of Martins. The others were made up of Brannans, Wismans, Lesnets, Cannans, Micks, Warricks, and Johnstons. The actual roll call gave the members as John Cannan, Nancy Cannan, William Martin, Elizabeth Martin, Rebecca Martin, Margaret Warrick, Isaac Warrick, George Wisman, Susanna Wisman, James Martin, Eleanor Martin, Margaret Brannan, Esther Martin, John W. Brannan, Margaret Brannan, John Wisman, Jane Wisman, John Mick, Nancy Mick, James Lesnet, Elizabeth Lesnet, John Johnston, Rebecca Johnston. The first ruling elders were William Martin and John W. Brannan, who served in that office until their deaths. As the church reaches its hundredth anniversary three of the church’s ruling elders are descendants of the charter members: they are Sol R. Brannan, Clyde Wisman, and Nancy F. Johnston.

A MARTIN WAS THE LEADER

When any institution’s history is traced back far enough one will often find it to be the work and thought of a single person. Going back far enough in West Bethesda history one is likely to conclude that it was a Martin who as head of a Scotch Clan influenced whatever group he was in to hold to the Presbyterian faith; and as a result West Bethesda was organized as a Presbyterian church. After leaving Scotland this Martin mixed with Irish Catholics, Church of England, German and other nationalities, but everywhere he went Presbyterian churches sprang up. As we know these did not spring from Irish, German or Swiss soil it is very certain they came from Scotch influence, and it is easy to visualize a

Martin as the leader. A quaint custom practiced by the Martin family not only marks them as Scotch, but as staunch Presbyterians. James Martin on whose land the West Bethesda church was built, said that it was the custom of his parents – when a communion service was observed – to bring a token, something like a coin to the church. This token or coin was handed to a guard as a guarantee that the parents were qualified members and worthy to receive communion. This strange practice dates back to Scotland to a time when Presbyterians held their communion services in caves, barns, or other secret places. Their meeting was against the King's wishes and often His Majesty's officers hunted down the worshippers in these places. To be certain that no improper person attended the doorkeeper collected a token from each communicant as he entered.

This custom was carried to Ireland by the Martins – then it was brought to Pennsylvania and, possibly, to Ohio. James Martin related that when he saw his parents depositing their token and entering a communion service, he felt like one on the outside. He wished to be admitted along with his parents – a wish that was later realized. Such was the background of the man who dedicated the corner of his farm for church purposes a hundred years ago. Since James and Eleanor Martin were childless, they became uncle and aunt to the whole community. No one would assert that James Martin was more religious than his neighbors, but because he had the best house in the community, more ready money, more leisure, and gave generously to the church, his home became the gathering place for old and young.

AGREED TO PUT UP CORNER

When the present church building was planned, and he learned that the probable cost would be two thousand dollars, he promptly agreed that his would put up one corner. This left but three corners for the balance of the church group to finance. This incident, probably, gives some idea of his importance in West Bethesda. In many respects his religion was one of good works. His older brother, William was a ruling elder until his death, reared a large family on his farm one half mile east of the church, and must have been a worthy person measured by all Christian standards. And this could be said for most, if not all, of the other charter members, but for some reason Uncle James Martin seemed to be the pivot on which the community revolved. The glory of James Martin was not that he was better than his neighbors, but, rather, that having some leisure, some money, freedom from family cares, he devoted his money, his time, and his thought to furthering the church of his fathers.

And this, in God's providence, is how West Bethesda came into existence one hundred years ago. "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." The beginning was made – as we say – in 1848, but really, the seed was sown in far-away Scotland before the 13 Colonies were founded along our Atlantic coast. The plant was set in the soil of West Bethesda a century ago, and this chapter of the church's history ends here. Another chapter must record the outcome of this adventure in faith.

The history of the first hundred years of the West Bethesda church is a record of births, deaths, marriages, baptisms, removals, accessions in membership, buildings, coming and going of ministers, music, money raising, Sunday School and other societies. Space will not permit in this brief sketch of little more than a mention of some of the activities and any omission or lack of detail must not be thought of as a reflection on their importance. Much gathered material has had to be omitted in the interest of brevity – and no topic has been treated fully.

Chapter 1 mentioned only the charter member families, but soon after the organization the original group was enlarged by the McKarns, the McHenry and Lucy, the Metzgar, and the Copeland families. And the most of these have been identified with the church for the greater part of its history, and they were of the same stock, all coming from the eastern part of Ohio.

BUILDINGS

The first church building – frame building 30 ft. by 50 ft. was erected in 1850 at the north edge of what is now a cemetery. The mother church in Columbianna County was built in a cemetery, so why not have the same in West Bethesda was, no doubt, the thought of those who planned the building. This church served for a quarter of the century, and the present building – erected in 1872-1873 – has been used the other three-quarters of the century. The present church building with the improvements made the last few years – such as basement, kitchen, tables, heating plant, together with the re-arranged and redecorated sanctuary – makes the church better fitted to serve the community than at any time in its history. Many an ox, as well as horse, braved the weather outside while Sunday School and church services were in progress. And inside the building, the worshippers were none too comfortable, because janitors found that a building 40 ft. wide and 60 ft. long with 20 ft. ceiling, could not be properly heated with two stoves and rather poor fire-wood. As a result there were complaints from some, but heating engineers to-day would decide the case in favor of the janitor, and say there trying to do the impossible. Living forty rods east of the church was John Mick. Because he was near, he served as janitor. All his four sons did likewise, and at least five of his grandsons, at various times, acted in that capacity. For at least half of the century the custodian of the church was a Mick, not because they were particularly efficient or well qualified, but because they lived near and could not say “No” when such service was asked for. In preaching the funeral sermon of John Mick, in 1886, Rev. George M. Miller used as a text: “I’d rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” To-day the building is heated by an oil furnace, and lighted by electricity. All this lightens the work of the custodian, and renders the church more usable at all times of the year.

WEST BETHESDA AND ITS MINISTERS

In the Forties Maumee Presbytery sent Rev. John M. Crabb into Lucas and Williams County to organize Old School Presbyterian churches. He arrived in the West Bethesda community just 30 days after the death of his first wife. The Crabb family had been living in or near West Unity, and the burial was at that place, the body being later removed to West Bethesda. January 31, 1848 the organization meeting was held in the log house of James Martin, though it was some weeks before all the details were completed. This gave time for three additional names to be added to that list of charter members, making twenty-three in all. John M. Crabb was a stranger to all the charter members, having been born in Kentucky in 1804. He organized most of the early Presbyterian churches in this section, and was a leader in establishing the Williams Center Academy of higher learning which gave the pioneer youth the education the early public schools could not offer. Plans were made for this educational institution in the West Bethesda church in 1851. James and David Anderson – both ministers, as well as brothers – were the teachers and conducted the academy for several years in Williams Center, a village which still hoped at that time to become the leading town northwest of Defiance. Although John M. Crabb came to West

Bethesda as a stranger, he remained in the community till the end of his life. He purchased a farm one mile west of the church, later known as the James Copeland farm, and now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Albert Snyder. Here the four Crabb children grew up. Henrietta married James Copeland, and became the mother of two sons and three daughters. She died about 1879. Melville Crabb married Rachel Craver – a neighbor girl – who was a sister of Rev. George M. Miller's second wife, Mary Craver. John M. Crabb organized other churches, and perhaps, spent considerable time away from West Bethesda, but his home remained on the farm he purchased in 1849, and at his death in 1859 he was buried in the West Bethesda cemetery. Henry Mick often related to his children that at the age of four he attended John M. Crabb's funeral in the old church building. Sarah Cannan Johnston (1838-1908) often told her relatives that John M. Crabb's text for his last sermon was: "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." This text is carved on his gravestone, but at this date is not easily read. He was of a family of nine. After his father's death John M. went back to Kentucky to settle the family estate which consisted of lands, houses, livestock, and slaves. After John M. Crabb's death in 1859, his widow – a third wife – married George Waltz of Lost Creek, Defiance County, Ohio. The Crabb sons lived around Lost Creek and Mark Center, Ohio, being well known to the late Walter S. Tomlinson of that community. Later they all moved to Iowa, and many of their descendants are scattered through the West. In 1933 E. Leslie Crabb of Guthrie Center, Iowa, exchanged material with the writer on the life of West Bethesda's organizer. Melville and Rachel Crabb's son, Rev. David Ernest Crabb was for 30 years a missionary in China, and now lives in Altadena, California. His son, Rev. E. Chester Crabb is, in 1948 pastor of the Presbyterian church of Bessemer, Pa. This great grandson of Rev. John M. Crabb, who organized the West Bethesda church in 1848 will be present to help in the church's celebration on August 8. He will preach at 10:30 and will appear on the afternoon program.

Only one of Henrietta Crabb Copeland's children is now living – Mrs. Belle Copeland Kyse of Archer, Nebraska.

Following 1859 David Anderson, Luke Dorland, John Sayman and James Roland served for short periods as ministers at West Bethesda. In the year 1865 a minister and college professor, wrapped in a single package, got off the New York Central train in Bryan, and inquired of the station agent about vacant Presbyterian churches in the county. The minister-professor was Rev. George M. Miller, 29, the late professor of Mathematics at Muskingum college, and the station agent was T.Q. Waterhouse. Mr. Waterhouse said he believed the West Bethesda church six miles northwest of Bryan was in need of a minister, and directed his questioner to the church. A few hours later Rev. George M. Miller was at the home of James Martin, having walked the distance alone. James Martin thought well of his caller, stranger though he was. Coming as he did from Muskingum County he had missed meeting the Scotch-Irish group that had earlier arrived from Columbianna County. Rev. George M. Miller did not sense any loss on this score, for he considered his early forebears fully equal to anything the founders of West Bethesda had to offer. He was made welcome at the Martin home, was accepted by the church as minister, and stayed 40 years. His Mathematics and theology were tough but his hearers never tired of his preaching, though sermons sometimes lasted a full hour. Rev. George M. Miller was considered the best Bible scholar in Maumee Presbytery, and some of his college students made great names for themselves.

Being a teacher, his sermons, according to his own words, were lecture-sermons. He was serious in all matters spiritual, but a good, lively, conversationalist, with a ready bundle of stories and illustrations. But he approached the Lord's house and the pulpit in a grave, reverent manner. His pulpit prayer often began thus: "Oh Lord, we come into Thy presence with fear and trembling. We are told that pure and holy angels approach Thy throne with the greatest reverence, crying Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole world is filled with Thy glory. Now if pure and holy angels approach Thy throne with such fear and trembling, how much more should we, weak, sinful creatures of the earth, approach Thy throne with the greatest of humility and reverence." With 40 years of ministry such as George M. Miller gave to his people, one would expect important results. His life, teaching, and preaching set a pattern of thought and behavior – a religious flavor that may be likened to the leadership of Moses. He felt his coming to West Bethesda was providential, and he was reluctant to leave a place where the Lord had placed him. He retired, when nearing seventy, and spent his remaining years in Bryan. He was twice married. After living as a bachelor in the James Martin home for some years, he married a minister's daughter named Mary E. Henderson who became the mother of three sons – Robert, James, and Matthew. Robert, alone, survives, living in Toledo. The second wife was Mary E. Craver who survived her husband many years. She spent her last dozen years in Toledo with her three daughters – Eunice, Hope, and Lucy, who are this year helping in the hundredth anniversary celebration of the church where their parents gave such devoted service for 40 years. Their farm home one and one-half miles east of the church has only recently been disposed of, after being in the Miller family three-fourths of a century. Of interest to many will be the will of George M. Miller, made Nov. 2 1894, which reads as follows:

"I, George M. Miller, sensible of the uncertainty of life, do ordain and establish this my last will and testament:

First: I commit my body to be decently buried, and my soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus.

Second: My wife and children I commend to the kind care of the God of my fathers.

Third: My property, both real and personal, I commit to the care of my wife without appraisal or bond, to be used by her for her and my children's good, and at her death to be divided equally between all my children."

Ministers who served West Bethesda from 1904 to 1948 are as follows: Charles E. Lownie, E.J. Peacock, W.M. Wilson, W.S. Wirt, E.E. Parkinson, F.W. Bruins, T.G. Smith, Franklin Trubee, Will Amis, and the present pastor, H. Oscar Stevens who was installed early in 1948.

Since John M. Crabb and George M. Miller served the church fully half the century, more space has been allotted them than to the others. Both are buried among their relatives in the cemetery adjoining the church. They called West Bethesda their home and the observance of the hundredth anniversary of the church's founding is a proper place – although much belated – to call to mind their devotion and sacrifice as they led the congregation through so many years.

THE WEEKLY CHURCH SERVICE

In the sixties it was common to have two sermons on a Sunday. At the close of the first sermon there was an intermission. Then mothers gave a hasty lunch to their children – for they were always present at church services, no difference how young. Then church was resumed, and after another long sermon, the congregation was dismissed and the members left for their homes feeling, like Evangeline in Longfellow's poem, that God's benediction was upon them. In the Eighties the seating of the families gave the older one the seats near the front, while the younger parents with small children filled the rear. If mothers of small children forgot to take something for the youngsters to eat during service, they were often supplied by the family who sat next to them. Just how a tired mother with a half-dozen squirming children could get much from the minister's sermon, and at the same time keep some kind of order among her brood, the writer has never been able to determine. Each mother deserved a crown for venturing into a service with her many children. I say "her children" because from the lack of attention given them by her husband, they must have been the sole property of the mother. No general of an army ever displayed more skill than these mothers of a seat-full of children showed during a long church service. When the boys became twelve to fourteen they felt too big to sit in the family pew, and took a place in another part of the church where boys of their age congregated, and this was always on the east side of the church – never the west side, because there seemed to be an unwritten law that the west side of the church was for girls. Families occupied the same pew year after year. If a pew was empty everyone knew the family was not present – there was no use to look elsewhere. The church service had a social as well as a religious value. For some mothers the only outside contact with the community was the weekly church service. Here they could meet their acquaintances who may have lived as far as five or six miles distant. It may have been but a nod or a single word of greeting, but it was a contact the pioneer mother remembered through the following week. The few minutes before and after service often served to bring the mothers, especially, up to date on neighborhood happenings. Modern churches recognize this need and provide for the social side of the individual and the community. But few will ever know how much the mothers of long ago appreciated the brief bit of social intercourse the Sunday service afforded, and eternity, alone, can reveal how many lives were embittered, and how many personalities failed to develop because of the lack of social contact in pioneer churches. Fortunately for the congregation and the community, the West Bethesda church, in 1948, has sought to provide space and equipment for social gatherings. Much use is being made of these facilities, and it is satisfying to know that the coming generation will be better served, socially, than the one now past.

Midweek prayer meetings were long held in West Bethesda. It was a common saying that certain members were able in prayer – whatever that means. Some prayers still remembered are those of Isaac Warrick, Benjamin Cannan, James Brannan, Samuel Cannan, Martin R. Brannan, and James Copeland. Rev. George M. Miller took note of this at the funeral of Isaac Warrick in 1896, when he chose for a text this scripture: "The prayers of David, son of Jesse are ended," a fitting recognition of the prayers of the deceased. James Copeland's voice in prayer was so weak that those farthest away could not hear him, and they had to watch those nearest to him for a signal to be seated when he had finished, for prayers were always offered standing. Kneeling in prayer was never practiced in West Bethesda.

It has always been the custom for Ruling Elders in the church to serve for life. Because of their long tenure a list of their names would not be long: William Martin and John W. Brannan were the first. Then came such men as Christopher Brannan, John B. Grim, Benjamin F. Cannan, Eli Wisman, James Copeland, James Brannan, Samuel Cannan. About 1916, Thomas R. Patton, Harvey J. Brannan, George Shasteen, and J. R. Mick were elected. All except the last named are deceased, and he has moved from the community. The present Eldership is recorded elsewhere in the 1948 list of officers.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

It is believed that organ music in the church was introduced about seventy-five years ago, and piano music soon after 1900. Those who have provided organ and piano music for the church and Sunday School include such persons as: Nellie Mick Shoup, Mattie McCrea, Blennie Young Baker, Ola Wisman Blue, Mae Shankster, Edna Cannan McKarns, Roy C. Miller, Elfie Shasteen Brannan, Leola Johnston Pike, Effie Housman Courtney, Nancy Cannan, Undine Meech Medlock, and Evadna Culler Rickner.

READING AND LIBRARIES

One might be curious enough to ask what the residents of West Bethesda read. Of course, libraries, outside the homes of ministers, were almost unknown, though throughout his married life, Benjamin Cannan had a library fairly well stocked. In the average home the choice of books was limited to a few volumes. Most homes had at least two books – the Bible and Bunyans's Pilgrim Progress, the latter being considered next to the Bible in importance. Then, there were to be found such religious papers as the Presbyterian Banner, Herald and Presbyter New York Weekly Witness, Sabbath Reading, Ram's Horn, and Christian Herald. In secular reading the Ohio Farmer, Farm and Fireside and Lancaster Almanac held high place. School teachers read the Normal Instructor, and Wesley Shoup was said to be very fond of the Scientific American. The Sunday School library, as early as the late Seventies, contained some choice books which were widely distributed through the community. If any book was used more than the Bible, it was the Shorter Catechism. The writer's mother could give the answer to every one of the questions in this difficult book, and accomplishment none of her children ever achieved.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The church membership of West Bethesda has never been large. It was probably highest in the late Eighties or early Nineties when the membership stood at 200. The greatest accession to the membership was following a revival (usually called a protracted meeting) service in those years when nearly 60 persons – mostly under 25, united with the church.

As the first century closes there are four persons living who are children of charter members of 1848. Nellie Mick Shoup of New Caledonia, Michigan, and James E. Mick of Grand Rapids, Michigan, are children of John and Nancy Mick. Frank E. Warrick of Montpelier and Mrs. Luella Wells of Vinton County, Ohio, are children of Isaac Warrick. The last charter member to die was Mrs. Susanna Brannan Wisman in 1899 at the age of 93. Not only was she the last of the original group to die, but also the last of the large Brannan family. Having these things in mind Rev. George M. Miller could think of no more appropriate text for her funeral than: "And Susanna." In 1829 she married George Wisman whose ancestors had come from Switzerland to Maryland and Virginia. The lives of these two span the period between

George Washington and William McKinley in our national history. Their twin sons born soon after their arrival in Williams County in 1836 were the first white children to be born in Superior Township. Three of their grandchildren and several great grandchildren are members of the church in 1948.

As the George Wisman home was the first in the church community it experienced frontier difficulties that seem far removed today. From Pulaski and Williams Center there were but blazed trails to their home, and the towns of Bryan and Montpelier had never been thought of. The young Indians came to their cabin to play with the Wisman children, while adult Indians came for food, which often was not too abundant in the new home. After surviving the rigors of rough, pioneer life for thirty or more years the Wismans, after a family conference, decided on an improved means of travel. Really, they jumped from the crude to the fastidious at a single bound. Instead of changing the ox-cart for a four-wheeled wagon, and later changing this for something slightly more modern, George and Susanna Wisman purchased a grand carriage – the wonder of the whole community. With its roomy seats, soft cushions, polished handles on the doors, and glossy paint, it was a sight for the gods, and no Colonial governor ever rode out in more style or comfort than the Wisman family when they attended church in their coach. Susan Wisman Shoup and her husband Wesley Shoup, later used the carriage, which was said to have cost \$600.00, and present members of West Bethesda in the persons of Albert Shoup, Mrs. Eva Courtney, and Phoebe Shoup, rode to church in the Eighties and Nineties with their parents in this grand conveyance. If ever vanity or envy replaced religious thoughts on a Sunday morning, it was when the grand carriage stopped in front of the church door to deposit its passengers. Needless to say the arrival was witnessed by an interested group of onlookers. The carriage was in use as late as 1894, when it was used by the Shoup family when attending the Fort Defiance Centennial at Defiance, Ohio. But like Holmes' One House Shay, this conveyance which marked the community's greatest achievement in local travel in its day, had to succumb to the ravages of time, and make place for something else. Others in the community used farm wagons to take the family to church. One of the writer's earliest church recollections is of riding four miles to church in a wagon, without benefit of springs or cover. On each side of the church there was a platform for loading and unloading wagon passengers. The young considered the fun of unloading and loading some compensation for the long, jolting ride. A passenger could step from the wagon to the platform, and then reach the ground by descending four steps. These, along with wagons, were in use until the late Nineties. Gradually wagons were replaced by carriages, and these were later replaced by the motor car.

This historical sketch of West Bethesda has dealt with the distant past. Recent church history is still fresh in the minds of all of the younger generation. It is the hope of the writer that, before it is too late, someone of this group may feel inclined to write of the recent past and the present. As the century ends West Bethesda greatly enjoys and appreciates the assistance and leadership of newer members of the community. "The old order changeth" and West Bethesda is no exception. New faces, new families, new blood, graciously mixing with the older group, and all working for the Glory of God, makes the coming years bright with promise as the church enters its second century of service.

CHURCH OFFICERS OF WEST BETHESDA IN 1948

Elders: Sol R. Brannan, Clyde E. Wisman, LaVon Culler, Nan Johnston, Mrs. Myrtle Shoup, Donald Krill.

Trustees: Mel. C. Brannan, LaVon Culler, Gale Rickner, Jr.

Sunday School: Supt., Ed Shellenberger; Secretary, Howard Lee.

Christian Endeavor: President, Zola Schad; Vice President, Ralph Rickner; Secretary, Beverly Shellenberger.

Ladies' Aid: President, Mrs. Blanche Wisman.

COMMITTEES FOR CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, AUGUST 8, 1948

Invitation and Reception: S. R. Brannan, Chairman; Mrs. S. R. Brannan, Clyde Wisman, Mrs. Belle Lesnet, Mrs. Eva Courtney, Mr. and Mrs. Albert E. Shoup.

Program: Ed G. Shellenberger, Chairman; Mel. C. Brannan, Nan Johnston, J. R. Mick.

Publicity: LaVon Culler, Chairman; Mrs. LaVon Culler, Mrs. Luree Creek.

Display: Miss Phoebe Shoup.

Dinner: In charge of Ladies' Aid, with Mrs. Blanche Wisman as chairman.

Organized Young People: President, Leon Shoup; Vice President, Paulina Wisman; Secretary, Anna Buda.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The organization of the Sunday School in West Bethesda dates back beyond the memory of any living member. So far as authentic records go, it seems that in the early days children in the community, in common with children elsewhere in the world were to be "seen and not heard." One member born in 1855 often related that he and his companions were gathered together in the front of the church once each year for Children's Day services which consisted of a long talk by the minister. By the early Seventies, at least, there was a Sunday School with Frank L. Brannan as superintendent. In the late Eighties this Frank L. Brannan – known locally as Squire Frank, because he was a Justice of the Peace, moved to Nebraska, and later to Denver. James Brannan, a younger brother, then became superintendent and saw the Sunday School reach the largest attendance in its history – at least for a brief period. It was during James Brannan's term or about 1892, that a county Sunday School contest was staged on the County Fair Grounds at Montpelier, in which all schools in the county participated. For weeks before the big day at the Fair Grounds special effort was made to increase the enrollment and considerable more than two hundred were in attendance. To transport the Sunday School to the contest four and six-horse teams were hitched to large, gaily decorated wagons, and in these four conveyances the children and young folks rode as proudly as if they were taking part in the King's Jubilee. Many still living marched in the parade that day, as judges made the official count of the various schools. West Bethesda won first prize for having the largest school in the county, and was awarded a silk banner which hung on the church wall for forty years.

About 1896, James Roland Cannan (named for a minister named Roland) was elected superintendent and served two years, when he left the community to study dentistry. From 1898 to 1910 James Lesnet, Charles E. Blue, Frank Warrick, Guy Knepper, M. C. Brannan, Sr., and George Shasteen served as superintendents. From 1910 to 1922, J. R. Mick was the superintendent, and he was followed by Sol R. Brannan, who served for several years. In 1933, West Bethesda had its first, and only, woman superintendent – Nan Johnston, a

teacher in the public schools. She served efficiently until 1940, when Floyd Stutsman was chosen for that officer, and he was followed by Harry McQuilken, LaVon Culler, and the present superintendent, Ed Shellenberger.

No accurate list of teachers is in existence, but a fairly complete list in the Eighties and Nineties would include: Jane Cannan, Emma Cannan, Mrs. Josephine Gilcher, Mrs. Rosina Betts Brannan, Mrs. Nancy McKarns, Mrs. Mary E. Miller, Rev. G. M. Miller, and Martin R. Brannan. At a later date such as list would include: James R. Cannan, Mrs. Hettie Mick, Mrs. Mary Woolf, Mrs. George Shasteen, T. R. Patton, Mrs. Margaret Tressler, John Lesnet, James Lesnet, Mrs. Edna McKarns, Vione and Alida Young, Mrs. Belle Lesnet, Frank Warrick, Robert Miller, Mrs. Belle Patton, Mrs. Blennie Baker, and Eunice and Hope Miller, the last seven named being alive in 1948. For the last quarter of the century the list would include such teachers as Mrs. Myrtle Shoup, Mrs. Eva Countney, Mrs. Violet Custer, Nan Johnston, Mrs. Mabel Cox, Mr. and Mrs. LaVon Culler, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Shellenberger, Mrs. Floyd Stutsman, Mr. and Mrs. Gale Rickner, Jr., and Mrs. Donald Krill, and the 1948 teachers are, for the most part of this last group.

The Sunday School has always chosen its own officers, elections being held each year. The attendance, except for a few brief periods, has been good through the years, though largest in summer. In the Eighties no winter school was maintained. As the century closes the Sunday School is strong and vigorous. The Children's Day service in June always brought out a record attendance of at least 400, taxing the seating capacity to the limit. Before the event, weeks were spent in rehearsals, drills, and other preparations. Changing the order of the early part of the century, children at this service were heard as well as seen. It was the banner day of the church year. Offerings went to National Missions. When money was scarce and prices low, a mission Sunday School in the far West could be maintained for \$50.00 a year, and the West Bethesda school aimed to provide for one or more such schools. Picnics were held frequently. For several years around 1900 the school held Fourth of July celebrations in the groves, and speaking, singing, and games made up the program. Sometimes a joint picnic was held with the Lick Creek school – two miles south. This school had a reputation for good singing, and each school always brought out their best singers on these occasions. Rev. George M. Miller always claimed the success of the West Bethesda Sunday School lay in the fact that the parents did not send their children but, rather, went along, themselves. He said a successful farmer of this acquaintance when wanting a piece of work done, always said, "Come, boys." And never "Go, boys." This was real co-operation, and the work was soon completed.

In recent years the Sunday School has added the Daily Vacation Bible School, held at the close of the public school year. The latest session had 85 pupils in attendance, with 15 adults as supervisors and teachers. The success of this type of religious education readily marks West Bethesda as one of the most progressive and successful schools in the county. The present superintendent, Mr. Ed Shellenberger is proving an earnest and talented leader, as well as a Bible student and teacher whose work is greatly appreciated. He has an able group of teachers. Interest, attendance, and finance are excellent. No more interesting school can be found anywhere.

MARRIAGES AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Marriage ceremonies, in West Bethesda, were performed in the homes – not in the church. It is safe to say that, although there have been a few marriage ceremonies in the church in recent years, and although there was no ban against using the church building for such occasions, church weddings did not occur until the organization was eighty years old. Custom simply prescribed some else. Today church weddings are popular, and deservedly so. Young folks display good judgment and refinement in choosing the Lord's house for a wedding. In the Seventies and Eighties it was the custom, on the day following the wedding, to hold a second gathering at the home of the groom's parents, or some of his relatives. Locally, it was called an "infare," but the writer is not certain whether the custom was introduced by the German element in the church group, or whether it was of Scotch origin, and final determination must await further historical research. The custom almost disappeared in the Nineties, and if such gatherings are held today, they are known by a different name.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Funerals were, invariably, held in the church building. Today this practice is changing and few use the church for funeral services. In West Bethesda church funerals were the custom until the Nineteen Thirties. The burial service in the church consisted of singing, and a long sermon; and the male relatives did not remove their hats – a practice that has practically disappeared within the past forty years. At the grave the minister – when he repeated from his burial service the words "Earth to earth – Ashes to ashes" – would seize the grave digger's shovel and throw dirt on the lid of the box around the casket with sufficient force to make a noise that startled all mourners, and reminded them of the frailties of the human body. This custom, too, is now gone, along with the wake, grave-robbing, black-edged handkerchiefs, veils, and other customs connected with death and funerals. Many residents of West Bethesda have watched for grave robbers to appear the nights following the burial. Only one robbery is definitely known to have been made from the cemetery. In 1853 the body of Jane Wisman, great grandmother of the present church Elder, Clyde Wisman, was stolen from her grave in the West Bethesda cemetery. Christian burial is something every community demands for its dead, and the history of no church is complete if it fails to mention burial service. In this respect, West Bethesda has more than upheld the Christian tradition.

THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC

In music West Bethesda never attempted to compete with communities such as the German and Welch, who have long been famed for their excellent music. However, there was much musical talent and it was utilized to the enrichment of the church and community life. Tuning forks were used to pitch the tune before the days of organs and pianos. The practice of "lining the hymn" goes back to the days when worshippers either could not read or were too poor to own hymn books. The minister would read a line and the congregation would repeat it after him. Then another line and another until the hymn was finished. It is not thought that such practice ever was used in West Bethesda, but as a carry-over of that custom, Rev. George M. Miller through his forty years as minister, always read the entire hymn before having it sung by the congregation. Music schools were held in the church, and many young folks in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties could read music from the

notes. The best singers are said to come from hilly countries – not flat countries. Since the West Bethesda Scotch came from the Lowlands of Scotland, it is perhaps fair, if not wholly truthful to say the best music was provided by the German and Swiss of the group. Some well-remembered song leaders of a half-century ago, were John Lesnet, M. C. Brannan, Sr., and Jesse J. Housman. Today's chorister is Ned Buda and he is rendering efficient service.

CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

Mission study and Ladies' Aid organizations have had their part in the life of the church. The names of the leaders of the past are recorded in the topic on Sunday School, and will not be repeated here. Mrs. Bacon of Toledo, and a sister of Grover Cleveland, often attended the missionary meetings, and also attended church services, occasionally. Missionary meetings were held in the homes, and the efforts of the women in starting the hymns without the aid of an instrument often provided amusement for the boys in the home, who sometimes kept within hearing distance of the meeting, though not in sight of the singers. Mrs. Blanche Wisman is president of the Ladies' Aid Society in 1948. The program of the society has become expanded since the re-modeling and modernizing of the church building. The Christian Endeavor movement was launched in Boston by Rev. Francis E. Clark, in 1881. About ten years later the movement had reached West Bethesda. There was able leadership, and the society did a valuable and constructive work for many years. The Christian Endeavor work flourishes in West Bethesda today, more than a half century since a society was organized. The hope of the future is in the young people, and in this respect West Bethesda has a right to expect great things in the years ahead.