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The Pioneer Missionary Priests

Painting One

Father Jacques Marquette stands at his mission site at Sault Ste. Marie.

SCARCELY two decades after the first white men set foot on Michigan soil, Roman Catholic missionary priests joined the early exploration of central North America. Their mission: to study, map and help explore the area and plan for the future of their church.

In their long, black gowns, these missionaries from France stood on the Great Lakes shores and—with the help of French frontiersmen who could speak some Indian language—preached to the natives they encountered. They were the first Christians to bring the word of the Gospel to the interior of North America.

It was more than a decade before the Pilgrims landed on the New England shore in 1620 that France began a rule of the area around the Upper Great Lakes that was to continue for 155 years.

France, under Samuel Champlain, had a military force at Quebec that exerted dominance over the water routes to the west as early as 1608, the year after the founding of Jamestown Colony in Virginia. In 1618, a teen-aged explorer, Etienne Brule, became the first white man to see the inland empire that included the vast territory that is now Michigan.

In the wakes of the long Indian canoes of those first French explorers came the French Jesuits from the Huron villages around Montreal, arriving at the foot of Lake Superior in 1641 and preaching to the Chippewas they found catching whitefish in the rapids.

The first of the priests—Fathers Issac Jogues and Charles Raymbault—changed the name of the foaming torrent from the Indian "Bowating" to "Sault de Sainte Marie."

Some of the other initial Christian pioneers in "Mishigamaw"—the Chippewa word for "Great Water"—were Father Rene Menard, Father Claude Jean Allouez (he reported the discovery of copper in the Keweenaw Peninsula in 1665) and Fathers Claude Dablon and Jacques Marquette.

Dablon and Marquette established a permanent mission at the "Soo" in 1668. Near the foot of the rapids, where lake-bound fur traders' canoes soon would begin their portages, the priests built a chapel and a house with a log palisade around them. Three centuries later, 1,000-foot-long ore carriers "locked down" from Lake Superior into the St. Mary's River past the site.

In 1670, a war-like band of Sioux from the western end of the Great Lakes threatened Indians with whom Marquette had worked at Chequamegon Bay near Duluth. They fled eastward across the Upper Peninsula and Marquette followed them to Michilimackinac, where he founded a mission at St. Ignace in 1671—more than 100 years before the American Revolution.

Chiefly because of his explorations in middle America, Marquette cut himself a niche in history that his fellow priests failed to achieve.

In an awesome journey by canoe that began at St. Ignace on May 17, 1673, Marquette—accompanied by Louis Jolliet—mapped the Mississippi River as far south as the mouth of the Arkansas River. He died in May 1675, on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan at the age of 37.

In 1701, a lesser-known French priest wrote a footnote in Michigan's history when he accompanied settlers who founded a community along a sparkling river that connected two of the "lower lakes." The settlers were under the direction of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, who named the fur trading outpost Fort Ponchartrain du Detroit.

The priest—Father Francois Vaillant, a Jesuit—helped erect the little church of vertical logs and roof of thatch and remained just long enough to name the parish St. Anne's, since Cadillac had landed on St. Anne's Day.

The settlement became one of America's largest cities and St. Anne's—Michigans oldest congregation and second oldest continuously maintained parish in the United States—in 1986 was in its eighth edifice.

Persistent and earnest as were the first carriers of the Gospel, the French priests accomplished little in Christianizing the Indians. But maps and reports they sent back to France—the "Jesuit Relations"—were important sources of early information about the land around the Great Lakes.

Michigan's First Churchmen

Painting Two

British Army Chaplain Turring—perhaps the first Protestant minister in Michigan—performs the marriage of Mariana Navarre, a Canadian French-Indian, and Dr. G.C. Anthon.

THE French flag continued to float over Northern Michigan outposts for 60 years after the founding of Detroit.

Not until the British arrived in the Straits area in 1761—120 years after the first French priests set foot in the Upper Peninsula—did France begin to lose its grip on the land around the upper lakes.

The First Treaty of Paris in 1763 gave the British complete domination over Michigan territory and signalled the arrival of Protestant clergymen on the Michigan frontier. This was a dozen years before the first shots were fired in the American Revolution.

Probably the first Protestants to take up residence in Michigan were a colony of Moravian missionaries who earlier had established missions near settlements of Delaware Indians in Northern Ohio. Opposed to violence, they taught their beliefs to the natives, who then refused to side with either the British or the Americans in the War for Independence. The colony, including a number of converted Indians, fled to Michigan after some American frontiersmen slaughtered a band of Indians in Ohio during a surprise raid. Under the leadership of Moravian missionaries David Zeisberger, John Gottlieb Heckenwelder and Gottlob Senseman, the colony settled on the Clinton River just west of what is now Mt. Clemens and lived peaceably from 1782 to 1786.

What was possibly the first Protestant church building in Michigan—the Moravian chapel and meeting house—was consecrated on November 5, 1782. Four years later, the colony split up and moved back to Ohio and to the Thames River in Ontario.

But the Bohemian missionaries were not the first Protestant clergymen to preach a sermon and serve communion in the land that is now Michigan. That honor goes to some Anglicans, the first Protestant pastors on the Michigan frontier. They were chaplains of the British Eighth, Fifty-fifth and Eightieth regiments stationed at Detroit from 1760 until the end of the Revolution in 1783.

Records show only the name of one of them—a Chaplain Turring, who performed marriage rites on August 13, 1770 for Dr. G. C. Anthon and Mariana Navarre, a French-Indian of Canadian birth.

Except for the Moravians, there appears no record of a Protestant clergyman in Detroit until 1795, when a Rev. Mr. Burke served as chaplain of the Queen's Rangers. The British were stationed there 12 years after the Revolutionary War ended as England retained actual possession of Michigan territory. The fledgling United States of America wasn't strong enough to force an evacuation.

American General "Mad Anthony" Wayne was given a sizeable command with orders to push the Indians and British out of the Northwest Territory frontier. His impressive victory at the "Battle of Fallen Timbers" in Ohio in the summer of 1794 convinced the British to agree in the Jay Treaty to evacuate their western forts by June 1, 1796.

At Fort Lernoult on July 11, 1796, Wayne's forces watched the British embark for Lower Canada and raised the American flag for the first time over Michigan. One of Wayne's chaplains was the Rev. David Jones, a Baptist minister, who noted in his journal that he "preached to the troops in the citadel."

It was summer, 1800, before two Protestant missionary-ministers visited Detroit. They were the Rev. David Bacon, a Congregationalist from Connecticut, and the Rev. Thomas E. Hughes, a Pennsylvania Presbyterian. Bacon returned the next spring with his bride and her 15 year-old brother.

A succession of Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal and other pastors visited the Detroit area during the next 15 years but were unable to establish lasting congregations.

Protestantism began to get a foothold with the arrival in 1816 of the Rev. John Monteith, under the sponsorship of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He preached weekly in the Council House at Detroit. He was paid $800 a year. A Presbyterian, Monteith helped form a First Evangelical Society made up of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists and others. One history says he received the appellation of "bishop, perhaps in deference to the Episcopalians or Methodists" and that the "Presbyterians were conciliated by the ordaining of three elders" and—assured that all pew-holders who paid $5 a year could vote on society questions—the Congregationalists "must have been satisfied."

The Settlers

Painting Three

A typical Michigan frontiersman and his family study the Word of God. Organized churches didn't exist and ordained ministers were few on the frontier, requiring families frequently to supply their own religious inspiration and training.

REGULAR church services were not always available in the early years of Michigan Territory. The small population and scattered communities left the early settlers to provide their own religious services. Most of the pioneers outside of Detroit lived in cabins along the rivers. Early historical accounts of life in the out-state of Michigan in the early 19th century are replete with stories from diaries and letters to loved ones back in the settled areas recounting brushes with death by the men who had forged ahead into the wilderness to stake a claim.

Often, the accounts told how the pioneers had occasion to "thank their Maker" for deliverance from a close call with a bear, a falling tree or an unexpected plunge into icy rivers or lakes.

Many a lonely family whiled away the evening hours in a rough cabin, reading from the Bible after a hard day's work in the woods or clearing stumps from land to make a place for next year's crops.

In the decade between 1830 and 1840, numerous schemes were devised by Christian settlers to establish colonies of families of kindred religious sympathies. Their motives were to organize churches and establish schools for the educational and religious welfare of their own families and that of their neighboring settlers.

One such colony was envisioned by Erastus Ingersoll, whose family had pushed westward from New England in the early part of the 19th century and settled at Oberlin, Ohio. Erastus' brother, the Rev. Elihu P. Ingersoll, was professor of music at Oberlin College. He and other Oberlin theologians joined with Erastus—then a resident of Farmington—to purchase 480 acres in the wilderness "midway between Detroit and Lake Michigan." Erastus moved onto the land in 1836 and became the first white resident of Delta Township, 11 years before the capitol was moved to Lansing six miles to the east. The grand

scheme for a "Grand River Seminary" never materialized, partly due to the financial crash of 1837 and failure of sufficient families to buy up the organization's land.

A more successful colonizing effort at another Eaton County spot was that of the Vermontville "Union Colony" of the Rev. Sylvester Cochrane, a Congregational minister from East Poultney, Vermont. It was formed with 36 lots of 10 acres each, selling for $212.50 apiece, in 1836. Twenty of the first 22 families to settle Vermontville were Congregationalists. They formed a church in 1838 and in 1843 built a frame chapel on the northwest corner of the town square that also served as a school. That structure is now the museum of the Vermontville Historical Society and is on the Michigan and National Registers of Historic Buildings.

Sometimes the first settler in an area was a missionary. By the time Michigan became a state in 1837, most of the new missions were operated by Protestants.

One of these was the Indian mission established on the Old Mission Peninsula by the Rev. Peter Dougherty, a New York Presbyterian who in 1839 became one of the first white settlers in Grand Traverse County. Dougherty was sent out by the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board to aid "a people perishing for lack of knowledge, degraded and wretched, suffering under an accumulation of the evils of this life, with no hope for the future . . ."

He reported in 1847 that in seven years a "dense thicket" had been transformed into a mile-long village with 20 log houses. Besides preaching and teaching, Dougherty made significant contributions to the study of the local Indian language. He continued to convert the natives to Christianity until the mission was closed in 1870. His efforts earned Dougherty the name of Mikoos (Little Beaver) because had had done "a heap of work for his size."

The Roman Catholic church renewed its interest in Michigan's Indians about the time that statehood was becoming a reality. The most active of the later missionary priests was Father Frederic Baraga, a native of Slovenia who spoke six languages when he graduated from law school and entered the seminary in 1821. He was sent out from the Cincinnati Diocese to work with the Indians, traveled in Michigan, Wisconsin and Canada. He opened a mission near Grand Rapids in 1833 and later that year dedicated a tiny bark chapel at Indian Lake near Manistique. Father Baraga also founded a mission at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, before establishing a mission on the west side of Keweenaw Bay.

The traditional separation of church and state did not keep the State of Michigan from naming Baraga County for the famed "Snowshoe Priest," whose church consecrated him a bishop in 1853. And Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his classic "Song of Hiawatha," made use of Baraga's Ojibway-English dictionary.

Although the frontier missions of these early church pioneers were rustic and scattered, established congregations were springing up in the more populated villages in the southeast part of Michigan.

The great migration of settlers in the years just before statehood brought many Methodists to Michigan. By 1837, there were Methodist churches in Ypsilanti, Adrian, Port Huron, Niles, Jackson, Coldwater, Kalamazoo, Flint, Ann Arbor, Marshall and Detroit.

Rev. Monteith's First Protestant Society of Detroit remained intact until the Methodists split away and formed their own church in 1821. The Episcopalians organized separately in 1824 and the Society was reorganized as the First Presbyterian Church in 1825. Within two years, the Detroit Presbytery included churches at Monroe, Pontiac, Farmington and Ann Arbor.

The pioneer Congregationalist in Michigan was the Rev. Issac Ruggles, who came from Connecticut to establish a church at Romeo in 1828.

Baptists near Pontiac had a head start when they organized in 1819, paying their pastor, the Rev. Elon Galusha, "$100 a year, one-third in cash and the remainder in produce."

The first pastor of St. Paul's Episcopal Church at Detroit fared much better his first year, receiving $150 from his parishioners and $150 from the church mission board.

Other "first" churches in Michigan:

— A Lutheran church at Ann Arbor, founded in 1833.
— A Friends (Quaker) Church in Raisin Valley, near Adrian, founded in 1831.
— A Universalist Church Society, organized in 1833 at Detroit.
— Second Baptist Church at Detroit, founded in 1836 by 13 ex-slaves who voluntarily withdrew from membership in the First Baptist Church, with the Rev. William Monroe as their first pastor.

The Christian Educators

Painting Four

Father Gabriel Richard and the Rev. John Monteith, Michigan's first Presbyterian pastor, discuss in 1817 the founding of what became the University of Michigan.

Painting Five

The Rev. John D. Pierce, a Congregational minister, and Isaac E. Crary, who became Michigan's first Congressman, discuss—in 1834—the blueprint for Michigan's unique public school system.

"Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." A quote from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

THOSE words from the document that created the Northwest Territory laid the groundwork for Michigan's unique marriage of religion and education despite of constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state.

From the beginning, government and the church worked hand-in-hand to push back Michigan's geographical and educational frontiers.

Ten years before Michigan acquired statehood in 1837, the Northwest Territorial Council passed a law requiring every township with 50 inhabitants to employ a schoolmaster "of good morals" to teach children reading, writing, English, French, arithmetic, spelling and "decent behavior."

It was only natural that many of the early leaders in education were also leaders in the church. Just as in Colonial America, the ministers of the Gospel often were the best educated men on the frontier.

Indeed, the institution which later became the University of Michigan—one of the nation's prestigious centers of learning—was founded in

1817 by Father Gabriel Richard, a French priest at St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church in Detroit, and the Rev. John Monteith, Detroit's first Presbyterian minister and the University's first president.

The institution, originally called the Catholepistemiad, was to consist of academies, schools, libraries and museums with the university at the top. As originally structured, the institution never became a reality. Four years later, the name was changed to the University of Michigan.

Father Richard claimed several other "firsts": founder in 1804 of a women's academy to train teachers; the first Roman Catholic priest to serve in the Congress of the United States; and publisher in 1809 of Michigan's first newspaper.

Another noted Michigan clergyman-educator was the Rev. John D. Pierce, a Congregational minister from Marshall. In 1834, Pierce and Issac E. Crary, a newly arrived lawyer-editor from Connecticut, drew the blueprint for Michigan's unique public school system that eventually became the pattern for American public education.

Pierce, a New Hampshire native, graduated from Brown University, taught a year and then entered Princeton Theological Seminary. After being licensed by the Congregational Church in 1825, he served pastorates in New York and Connecticut before joining the American Home Missionary Society. He stopped off in Marshall on a hot Saturday night in June 1831, intending to stay only through the Sabbath.

But, Pierce recalled years later, his sermon in a log cabin the next day—the first formal Christian service in that area—was so well received that he decided to settle in Marshall. He purchased the log cabin and it became a house of lodging, a community hall, a place for religious services and a hospital during the great cholera epidemic of 1832. Pierce's wife, Mary Ann, volunteered to nurse many of the village's victims until she, too, caught the disease and died.

With Crary, a Puritan-Presbyterian great-great-grandson of William Brewster of the Mayflower Company, Pierce discussed politics and education, often strolling out to the shade of a giant oak tree on a hillside at the village's northern edge for their talks.

Pierce recalled later that he and Crary were seated on a log beneath the big oak when they conceived the idea of the Michigan school system. For nearly a century and a half, the tree was known as the "Educational Oak" until it died in 1979.

In 1835, Crary was elected Michigan's first representative in Congress and before he left for Washington, he convinced the state's first governor —Stevens T. Mason—to appoint Pierce as superintendent of public instruction, the first man to ever hold that office in this country under a state constitution.

Michigan's third superintendent of public instruction was also a minister—Dr. Oliver Cromwell Comstock, a Baptist who first practiced

medicine in New York State, later served as a judge and finally was ordained as a minister in Rochester, N.Y. Before coming to Michigan in 1837, Comstock served as chaplain to the U.S. House of Representatives. He was a Baptist minister in Detroit while serving the state in the top educational post and as a regent at the University of Michigan.

Dozens of other theologians also took the lead in higher education. Evidence of this is the 23 denominational and church-related colleges in the state.

Pioneer educators founded church-related colleges in several Michigan communities in the 1840s, including Olivet College.

The Rev. John J. Shipherd, a founder of Oberlin College in Ohio and a co-promoter of the ill-fated seminary at Delta Mills (Grand River City, on Lansing's west outskirts) visited the state in 1843. Following paths through the wilderness, he became lost several times and repeatedly returned to the crest of a small hill in Eaton County's Walton Township.

"Accustomed to recognize the hand of Providence," Shipherd later wrote, he purchased the land and in 1844 led a band of 39 followers to the spot. Shipherd contracted ague (malaria) and died that autumn before the college opened its doors, but his leaderless colonists continued his quest and classes began in December.

Since Shipherd had failed to obtain church approval, the Congregational Church did not recognize the college. And, since Olivet persisted in enrolling women and blacks, as well as continuing the abolitionist sentiments of its founders, the school was denied a state college charter in 1846.

The institution changed its name to Olivet Institute. It was not until 1859 that Olivet was recognized officially by the state and another five years until it received recognition from the General Association of Congregational Churches.

Another Michigan college pioneer was the Rev. Asa Mahan, the president of Oberlin for its first 15 years who, in 1859, became the first president of Adrian College.

An evangelist reformer and an energetic abolitionist, Mahan eventually left Oberlin when critics found him lacking in "Oberlin Perfectionism." At Adrian, he managed to merge Wesleyan and Methodist Protestants in support of the institution.

In between his college presidencies, Mahan—originally a Presbyterian clergyman—served Congregational churches in Jackson and Adrian.

The Circuit Riders

Painting Six

A circuit riding minister prepares to leave a frontier cabin after a visit to a pioneer family in the Michigan wilderness of the early 19th century.

AS small towns and villages sprung up across southern Michigan's frontier in the first half of the 19th century, ministers started going out to meet the people and to spread the Gospel.

The Methodists were especially busy in this horseback ministry. Residents of the back country settlements would often see a cloaked pastor, his horse laden with packs containing food for the trail and the necessities of life in the wilderness, riding through the woods. The mounted minister would simply ride into a settlement and hold a religious service on the spot or wherever he could get a crowd.

It was a common occurrence for a circuit riding pastor to perform marriage rites for a couple who had waited for his next visit; or for the settlers to summon relatives and neighbors for a hastily arranged funeral the traveling minister would conduct over an already closed grave. Baptisms of new infants or converts were also part of that minister's duties. He recorded all of these rites in a notebook and the information would later be transferred to the records of the nearest organized church of the pastor's faith.

An early ministerial visitor to Detroit was the Rev. David Bacon, a Congregational missionary sent by the Congregational Missionary Society of Connecticut. He left Hartford on August 8, 1800—alone and afoot—and apparently walked all the way to Buffalo, carrying his own baggage.

Bacon's account of his trip failed to mention the rigors of crossing Connecticut and New York. But he was impressed by a three-day voyage "by sail-vessel" from Buffalo to Detroit.

Returning soon to New England, Bacon was married on Christmas Eve and on February 11 again left with his bride and her 15 year-old brother "for the woods and wilds of Michigan" in a two-horse sleigh. In his pocket was a missionary commission to "the Indians of the West." They sold the sleigh in western New York State when the snow melted in late March and continued on to Detroit, taking turns riding the horses.

Somewhere east of Toledo, Ohio, Bacon sold one of the horses and he and his brother-in-law traveled the rest of the way on foot, arriving Saturday, May 9, 1801. His journal notes he was "much too fatigued" to preach the next day.

Detroit's first Methodist congregation was formed by the Rev. William Mitchell, a circuit rider, in 1810. The Rev. Joseph Hickox, another circuit rider, revived the organization in 1815 after a lapse during the War of 1812. On alternate Sundays, he would preach in River Rouge, Monroe and at several points in Ontario.

Although most historians agree Mitchell formed Michigan's first Methodist congregation, "The Methodist Church in Michigan," the official history of the church, credits the Rev. William Case with being the "Father of Michigan Methodism" on the strength of his May 1809 appointment to the remote Detroit Circuit, which also included southwestern Ontario.

Case didn't reach Detroit until September because he made so many stops along the way from Ancaster, Ontario. His converts later began the Methodist mission work at Sault Ste. Marie.

All the early circuit riders took pains to procure a large, strong horse and a good saddle with large saddlebags. Journeying around their circuits entirely on horseback, they carried their worldly possessions with them—possibly an extra suit of clothes, socks and perhaps an extra shirt.

And they always carried books and frequently a bundle of inexpensive religious tracts to distribute among the settlers.

Their usual attire, says 'The Methodist Church in Michigan,' "was a dark, straight coat with long tails and a standing collar. (They) wore either knee breeches or pantaloons and a long, heavy waistcoat. The trousers were frequently patched on the knees. (Their) hair was turned straight back and allowed to grow long, extending to the shoulders."

Frequently, the mounted ministers met only strangers on the frontier. When they encountered a group of any size, they would preach a sermon on the spot; otherwise, they might announce a time of services several days hence, giving a family time to notify the neighbors. The preaching usually took place in a schoolhouse or in a private home.

There were occasional accounts of settlers in southern Michigan yoking their oxen and setting out with their families for religious services perhaps 20 miles away, trips that might require three days before the family returned home.

The River Rouge Methodists first met in members' homes for sermons from circuit riders, and finally constructed a log chapel in 1818 on land that a century later was covered by the vast Ford Motor Company plant.

Lansing's first recorded Methodist meeting was held in 1845 when the Rev. Lewis Coburn, a circuit rider, preached in the cabin of Joab Page in North Lansing.

The Abolitionists

Painting Seven

After a long night's ride, a family of runaway southern slaves is ushered into the safety of a Michigan Quaker farmer's barn, a depot on the Underground Railroad in their flight to freedom.

ALTHOUGH Michigan's early statehood years saw some vestiges of slavery (even the first governor, Stevens T. Mason, owned slaves in Detroit) anti-slavery agitation was spreading rapidly to the state by the late 1830s. And by 1850, Michigan churches had joined the crusade for abolition—acknowledging the concept that it was immoral and anti-Christian for one man to own another—and had transformed the attack on slavery into a religious/moral issue.

In the limelight of this movement were leaders of several Protestant groups. The Friends Society, or Quakers, were particularly active in the "Underground Railroad," a clandestine network of secret escape routes manned by abolitionist agents from Ohio to Ontario who used a variety of means to spirit Negro runaways to freedom. Hiding them by day and helping them move northward by night, the volunteer "conductors" helped funnel their human cargoes into Detroit and across the international border into Canada and freedom.

Two heroic Quaker women made notable contributions to the Abolitionist movement—Elizabeth Margaret Chandler and "Aunt Laura" Haviland, co-founders with others in Lenawee County of the first anti-slavery society in Michigan in October 1832.

Mrs. Haviland was the daughter of a Society of Friends minister. She and her husband, Charles, moved to Lenawee County with two infant sons in 1829. In Adrian, she met strong-willed poet-essayist Elizabeth M. Chandler, who already had been involved in the abolitionist movement as ladies' editor in Philadelphia of Benjamin Lundy's anti-slavery newspaper "The Genius of Universal Emancipation." Both women were in their early 20s.

The Lenawee abolitionist society established one of the state's first depots on the "Underground Railroad." Members reportedly painted large five-pointed stars on the gable ends of their barns as signals of refuge. Mrs. Haviland became such an enthusiastic helper of the southern slaves in their sprints to freedom that a $3,000 reward was offered for her, dead or alive, by slavery interests in the south.

The Havilands in 1837 opened a manual training school on their pioneer farm north of Adrian. It was Michigan's first school to welcome students "of good character," regardless of sex or color.

The abolitionist movement was by no means a "whites only" operation. One of the main "stations" on the "Underground Railroad" was the Second Baptist Church of Detroit, founded by 13 former slaves in 1836. A century and a half later, the Second Baptist congregation still worshipped in downtown Detroit (at Monroe and Beaubien Streets in Greektown), the oldest continuous congregation of blacks in Michigan.

Most of the seven slave escape routes through Michigan funneled into Detroit. The slaves would come quietly—on foot, in the back of a buggy or stashed beneath hay or a canvas covering on the floor of a buckboard.

Under the direction of the Second Baptist Church minister, the Rev. William Monroe, they would be hustled into the church basement at dawn after a long, often scary ride across the Michigan countryside. Hiding in the basement until nightfall, the fugitives would then sneak out a side exit and into another wagon for a quick ride to the Detroit River's edge, where a barge waited to take them to Canada.

If the dash to freedom were interrupted at any point by fugitive slave hunters armed with federal papers, the runaway slaves faced a return to bondage and the "Underground Railroad" hands risked arrest for violating the Fugitive Slave Act.

Halfway across the state, another black abolitionist was also active in the movement in Calhoun County. Born as, simply, "Isabella," the daughter of slaves of a wealthy Dutch patroon in Ulster County, New York, she was owned by several New York families before she escaped in 1827. Isabella, then 30, went to live with a Quaker family whose friends helped her secure the return of her son, Peter, who had been sold illegally to an Alabamian.

Isabella moved to New York City about 1829, obtained domestic employment, joined first the John Street Methodist Church and later the African Zion Church, and eventually became involved in a street mission.

In 1843, she said "voices" commanded her to take the name of Sojourner Truth and to launch a sort of walking ministry, preaching the Gospel in her gutteral Dutch-accented voice and singing and discoursing at camp meetings, churches and street corners anywhere in New England that she could draw a crowd.

Eventually traveling west, she settled in Battle Creek in the mid-1850s and tramped throughout Michigan preaching God's love, abolition of slavery and—as the Civil War began—soliciting food and clothing for Negro volunteer regiments in the Union Army.

Sojourner Truth was 86 when she died in 1883. Her funeral at the Congregational & Presbyterian Church in Battle Creek was said to have been the largest held in the town up until that time.

The Denominational Colonists

Painting Eight

The Rev. Albertus Van Raalte and his band of Dutch Reformed followers bow in prayer in the snow after picking a spot for their colony and naming it Holland. Numerous other Michigan communities were founded by denominational emigrants from Europe.

THE migration into Michigan Territory continued at a steady pace in the decades of the 1820s and 1830s. Most of the newcomers were absorbed by the villages and wooded farmlands of the south-eastern counties, although some of them fanned out into the central part of the territory and into the rich "Thumb" area.

By the time Congress ordered a special census in 1835—two years before statehood—there were more than 86,000 residents living in the Lower Peninsula, well above the 75,000 necessary for admission to the Union.

Many of the newcomers belonged to Christian colonies organized in Europe by religious leaders who were either escaping economic, political or state-church oppression in their homeland or perceived a calling to move to America to do missionary work among the Indians.

Other religious groups in New England—caught up in the euphoria of "moving west" for more space or independence—flooded into Michigan's wilderness and founded religious colonies. An example of the latter was a group of Congregationalists from East Poultney and Castleton, Vermont who migrated to Eaton County and formed a model colony at what is now Vermontville, under the guidance of the Rev. Sylvester Cochrane.

One of the earliest ethnic colonies in Michigan was the one founded at Westphalia by the Rev. Father Anton Kopp and his band of German Catholic followers. The settlement was named for the Prussian town from which its founders came.

The first log church was built in 1837-38 at a cost of $90.36, according to St. Mary's Parish records. Father Kopp officiated not only as priest, but also assisted his parishoners in secular affairs. He became the first supervisor of Westphalia Township in 1839 and taught school for several months the next

year. After he left the parish, Kopp organized St. Michael's Parish in Chicago. It was to become the largest German Catholic parish in America with 35,000 members.

Another German settlement—this one Lutheran—took shape along the Cass River in August of 1845. Its founder was the Rev. August Craemer, leader of a band of 15 who had subscribed in their homeland to a grand missionary scheme of Pastor Wilhelm Loehe of the Province of the Franconians.

Selection of the Frankenmuth site was partly the choice of the Rev. Frederick Schmid, who had been sent to Ann Arbor in 1833 from Germany to act as pastor to a growing flock there. He established several Lutheran churches in Washtenaw, Wayne and Monroe Counties.

Schmid, on the suggestion of Father Frederic Baraga, a Roman Catholic missionary to Indians on the Lake Michigan shore, had already begun missionary work among the Indians living near Sebewaing when he heard of the Loehe-Craemer plans and mentioned the Cass River location.

Within a few years of the founding of Frankenmuth, at least four Lutheran missions were teaching the "Word of God" to the Indians of Michigan's "Thumb."

A year later—in 1846—a group of 53 Dutch Reformed Church members in the Netherlands joined with a young minister, the Rev. Albertus Van Raalte, who had been labeled a "seceder" because he and other young pastors had broken away from the established state church in protest of a liberal element. The members were also tired of high taxes and hungry from a winter diet of dried beans and peas. They formed the "Society for Dutch Emigration to the USA" and left Rotterdam on October 2, reaching New York Harbor on November 17.

They had no exact destination in mind, although Van Raalte had told them of reports that had reached him of fertile, inexpensive land in Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan. He herded his flock aboard a Hudson River steamer to Albany, then aboard a train for a cold, windy ride to Buffalo, where they boarded another steamer across Lake Erie and up the river to Detroit. They reached Detroit in early December only to learn that they couldn't sail around the Straits of Mackinac because an early freeze had halted all boat traffic on the Lakes.

Van Raalte made arrangements with a ship captain at St. Clair to hire most of his male followers, who were master carpenters and cabinet makers, to help build a boat in a warehouse. The women and children were allowed to accompany them and the colony set up housekeeping in the warehouse for the winter.

Meanwhile, their impatient leader—anxious to find a spot in western Michigan or eliminate it from consideration as the society's new home—left the week before Christmas on an exploration trip. He went as far as Kalamazoo

on the new wooden rail-steel strap railroad. But from Kalamazoo northwestward to Lake Michigan, it was travel by horseback as far as the home of a Congregationalist missionary, the Rev. George Smith, on the rapids approaching the mouth of the Grand River.

Van Raalte, Smith and two or three Indians spent the next two weeks scouting along the Grand and Rabbit Rivers through deep snow. Van Raalte often had trouble keeping up with the others because he couldn't master snowshoes and had to plod along in his boots.

Occasionally, to get through a deep drift, Van Raalte would climb aboard the back of one of the Indians' snowshoes, wrap his arms around the native's middle and walk in unison with him, according to an account in "DeKolonie," a book by Marian M. Schoolland on how the Reformed Church came to America.

Finally, Van Raalte decided the area around Black Lake was ideal. He sent for the colony's leaders late in January 1848 and three weeks later six men and one woman arrived.

The next morning, the tiny group tramped through the snow to a rise of ground on the eastern end of Black Lake. Van Raalte in his calm Dutch voice eyed his handful of followers and suggested they kneel in the snow and ask God's blessing for finding them a new home.

They called their spot in the New World—simply—Holland.

The following year, Dominie Cornelius vander Meulen led another group of Hollanders to Michigan to settle at Zeeland. A century later, his great-grandson, the Rev. John Vander Meulen, was pastoring Lansing's first church, First Presbyterian.

Lansing's Church Beginnings

Painting Nine

Baptisms in the Grand River were frequent in early Lansing as church congregations grew steadily in the years after the capital was moved from Detroit. One group of six Baptists was immersed in the frigid stream in February of 1851.

IN a move that would have raised official eyebrows in later years, the 1848 Michigan legislature—in an effort to promote religion and education in the Capital City—granted to "all the religious denominations of professing Christians" and to each organized school district, one lot in "Town of Michigan," contingent only on the building of "a commodious house of public worship" or a schoolhouse.

By 1853, eight lots had been granted to churches.

But Christianity had reached the tiny village in the central Michigan forest at least three years before the arrival of state government in 1848.

As early as 1845, a Methodist circuit rider, the Rev. Lewis Coburn, cantered into the bustling village from his home base in DeWitt to preach in the log cabin of Joab Page where East Maple Street meets the Grand River.

Two years later, another "rider," the Rev. Frank Blades, preached to a congregation of 60 followers of Wesleyanism in an April assembly probably held outdoors.

Later in 1847, a group of Congregationalists formed a fledgling group under the leadership of the Rev. S. S. Brown, an agent of the Connecticut Home Mission Society. The seven members included some Presbyterians, according to Michigan State University Prof. Joseph L. Druse, author of "Pulpit and Prayer in Earliest Lansing."

The Rev. Benjamin Millard was later sent out to lead the group, which quickly split up, with several of the Congregationalist members leaving town. When Millard returned east on a money-raising tour, he recommended that a Presbyterian congregation be established in the "Town of Michigan" and that the congregational group be disregarded.

The early meetings of the Presbyterians were held in the wooden schoolhouse on North Cedar Street across the river from the present Ottawa Street Power Plant. Later, church records show, Sabbath services and Sunday

School classes were held in the Ohio House, an inn in the 100 block of West Washtenaw Street.

By late 1848, both the Presbyterians and Methodists were looking for larger quarters. James Seymour, one of First Presbyterian's founding fathers and an up-and-coming financier-real estate developer, donated a warehouse on North Cedar which the two congregations used on alternating Sunday afternoons, along with the schoolhouse. Morning services, however, were held in the "new" wooden State Capitol building on the south side of Allegan Street between Washington and Capitol Avenues.

Members of both churches reportedly referred to Seymour's donated warehouse as "God's Barn," and were denounced by the stern Methodist Page, who thought the appellation to be blasphemous. The building, after the Presbyterians built the town's first church in 1852, continued in use by the Methodists until 1870.

Baptists in early Lansing had a more difficult time getting organized. As early as 1848, three different Baptist congregations were noted, although none was connected with the later First Baptist Church. The original churches of Baptist faith were called, respectively, First, Second and Free Will. They met in the homes of members.

The forerunner of the present (1986) First Baptist Church was the Regular Baptist Church of Lansing. Members joined with the Methodists in "God's Barn" at first, and later met in the public sitting room of a Franklin Street (Grand River Avenue) tavern after its proprietor became a convert.

Druse's research uncovered an account of a February 1851 meeting of that group. Twenty candidates for church membership showed up to hear the Rev. Eliphalet S. Tooker preach and the meeting concluded with the baptism of six of them in the frigid Grand River.

One of Tooker's successors, Druse relates, took off his shoes and left them on the river bank while he presided at another immersion ceremony. After the rites, the minister—unable to locate his shoes—had to walk home in his socks.

The Universalist Church also had its Lansing beginnings in 1848. Its pastor during the decade of the 1850s was the Rev. C. W. Knickerbocker, a popular, civic-minded cleric who organized a Sunday School in the State Senate chamber and established the custom of an annual Thankgiving Day service there.

Roman Catholics in early Lansing found it difficult to practice their faith. Missionaries in Detroit, Corunna, Westphalia and Ionia occasionally visited the growing village, but bad roads prevented regular masses or confessions until 1854, when the Rev. Father Kellert, a German missionary from Westphalia, offered the first mass in the log home of Thomas Saier at Lenawee and Townsend Streets.

The first Catholic structure was a wooden church at Madison and Chestnut Streets, constructed in the late 1850s. The first resident priest, the Rev. Father Louis Van Driss, was not assigned to Lansing until August 1866.

Lansing's first German-speaking church was a Methodist Church on Seymour Avenue, built in 1853. Two years later, German-speaking Lutherans organized Emanual First German Lutheran Church with the Rev. Christian Volz as its first pastor. German language services were still being held there in the 1980s.

The Church of the United Brethren got its start in Lansing under the Rev. Aaron Bowser, "a young man of marked ability," according to an 1856 account. He initially held services in the Senate chamber.

The "U. B." church building at Kalamazoo Street and Capitol Avenue made news even before its dedication when two rowdy brothers torched the under-construction building in Lansing's first big arson case.

During an 1858 revival session, 25 persons united with the church and 23 were baptized by Bowser in the Grand River—probably at Kalamazoo Street, before a wooden bridge spanned the stream.

Episcopal Church beginnings in Lansing are not as well-defined as the other denominations. One historian mentions an 1849 meeting of several Episcopalians in the Senate chamber. The next year, St. Paul's Parish took title to a legislative grant on the southwest corner of Washington Avenue and Ionia Street. But the organization seems to have disintegrated almost immediately.

The next mention is of an Episcopalian communion celebrated by "the Rev. Brown" for four families gathered in the Benton House, a downtown hostelry. It was not until January 1856 that the Rev. John Bramwell was appointed to the parish, which that summer—boasting 15 members—was admitted to the Episcopal diocese. Apparently superiors decided Bramwell had plenty of spare time, for he was quickly shouldered with missions in DeWitt, St. Johns, Delta Township and Owosso.

Records indicate Bramwell was assigned to the "healthier" clime of Lake Superior, Prof. Druse reported, and he died shortly thereafter. His successor, the Rev. William Withington, arrived in 1858 and the next year pushed for the construction of a Gothic frame church that cost $1,500.

Like most other things, the cost of religion increased rapidly after those first years when Lansing was emerging from the wilderness.

Lansing's First Church

Painting Ten

The montage features the three church structures which have housed the First Presbyterian's congregation. The frame structure at Genesee Street and Washington Avenue was built in 1852; the stone structure at Capitol Avenue and Allegan Street was completed in 1889; and the colonial edifice at Ottawa and Chestnut Streets was first used for worship services in 1948. The Rev. W.W. Atterbury was the first pastor.

THERE was barely an inch of crusty snow on the ground, but dark clouds had piled up on the horizon west of the "Town of Michigan" on that blustery evening in November 1847, a hint that winter was on its way.

A few dry leaves that hadn't blown up against the log cabins and rail fences—or into the Grand River—tumbled across the snow as the cloaked figure stamped his feet in front of the wooden schoolhouse on North Cedar Street, then fumbled with the door latch and finally entered the building, shutting the door behind him.

Presently, there was a dim glow in the schoolhouse that could be seen from outside as the Rev. Calvin Clark, a missionary agent for the American Home Mission Society for Michigan, lit first one, then the other whale oil lamp to illuminate the one-room school.

A few minutes later, a lone man arrived at the school and went inside; then a man and a woman together; and finally an older woman, with a shawl pulled over her dark coat, opened the schoolhouse door and entered.

When they left the little building less than two hours later, the quartet, with Clark's help, had organized the First Presbyterian Church of the Town of Michigan. A month later, the group met at the school again—on December 17, 1847—and formalized the action, adopting the Confession of Faith and Covenant of the Marshall Presbytery by which the founding group had been recognized.

Thus, two weeks before Michigan's seat of government was moved from Detroit to the wilderness Town of Michigan, First Presbyterian became the first congregation in town to affiliate, officially, with a major denomination.

The founding members were James Seymour, a prosperous merchant-financier; Aaron and Louise Norris; and "a Mrs. Randall." Clark served as moderator.

Clark had been sent specifically to organize the church. Earlier in the year, another Presbyterian—the Rev. Benjamin Millard—was in the Town of Michigan under the auspices of the Connecticut Home Mission Society to preside over the organization of a Congregational church. Since the national headquarters of both churches were working together on frontier church organization, Millard's assignment raised no eyebrows. Besides, several of the seven members who formed the Congregationalist group were former Presbyterians.

But the congregation soon split up. The most prominent Congregationalist leaders moved out of town, and when Millard went east on a money-raising journey, he recommended that a Presbyterian congregation be established and that the Congregationalist group be "disregarded."

One of the first items of business facing the new First Presbyterian Church of the Town of Michigan was to change the designation to "Lansing" after legislators balked at calling the capital "Michigan, Michigan" and forced the town's name change.

Later in 1848, the church called its first pastor, the Rev. William W. Atterbury, a stated supply minister commissioned by the Board of Home Missions at a salary of $400 per year.

Sunday services were held initially in the House of Representatives chamber in the new wooden Capitol. Then, for about three months the Presbyterian faithful met in a back room of the Ohio House, an inn on Washtenaw Street, where an upturned flour barrel—according to accounts passed down by church members for generations—served as a pulpit.

Later, morning services were again held in the Capitol, and afternoon sessions alternately in "God's Barn" on Cedar Street or at the old schoolhouse.

It appears membership in the First Presbyterian Church remained at four during the first year, but in January 1849 increased to 10. One of the new joiners—Shubael R. Green—was to make a marked impact on the church during its first four decades.

Two months after joining the church, Green became one of the first elders. He also accepted appointment as superintendent of the fledgling Sunday School and acted in that capacity "most of the time until 1854."

Green and his construction business partner and fellow Presbyterian, "Capt." John R. Price, were awarded the contract to build for the congregation the first church structure in Lansing. That was in March 1852.

The Green-Price bid must have included an enormous benevolence factor. They agreed in April to build a 38 by 53-foot frame structure, with a steeple, and have it ready for occupancy by the end of that year. The contract price was $3,700. The building was dedicated on the last Wednesday of December 1852. By this time, First Presbyterian had 46 members.

Building pledges, totaling $2,200, came from church members and Atterbury solicited the remaining $1,500 in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, the nearby towns of Detroit, Marshall and "other places," according to some historical reflections of one of his successors.

The cost of the building site at Washington Avenue and Genesee Street was "dirt cheap"—a total of $105, according to church records. Five dollars of that was apparently a registering fee for an original church lot at the northeast corner of Capitol and Ottawa that had been granted by the State of Michigan in 1850. It was quickly exchanged for the lot where the first church was erected and today is the site of Lansing Community College's student services building.

Atterbury remained with the church for more than five years, finally accepting a call to a church at Madison, Indiana in May 1854.

The second pastor, the Rev. Benjamin Franklin, remained for one and one-half years. After he left in November 1855 the church was without a pastor for seven months. During this time, Elder Shubael Green often led the Sunday service.

The next July, Chester S. Armstrong, a recent theological seminary graduate, was ordained and installed as pastor. He remained until 1864, when he took an appointment as a chaplain in the Union Army. During his tenure, 230 members joined the church. An in his final year, 50 left to form Franklin Avenue (North) Presbyterian and 30 to form a Congregational Church.

Beginning in the fall of 1856, First Presbyterian was "heard from" daily in Lansing, thanks to a brass bell placed in its tower. Women of the church Ladies' Society earned $400 through bake sales and bazaars—an amount equal to the pastor's annual salary—to purchase the bell. Since it was the only bell in town, it was rung every weekday at 6 a.m., noon and 9 p.m. as a service to the citizens. That bell was also rung to alert volunteer firefighters.

In 1868, a 16-foot addition was constructed and a basement room added, with contractor Green again supervising the work. The church was again lengthened in 1874 and an $1,800 pipe organ installed, largely through funds raised by the ladies.

In the next 20 years, First Presbyterian continued its leadership role in Lansing's downtown churches. Several ministers came and went during an eight-year period until the congregation called the Rev. Dr. George Duffield to the pulpit in December 1876, the year of the nation's centennial.

Duffield was the son of a famous Detroit Presbyterian minister—an earlier George Duffield. "Our" Dr. Duffield already had gained some fame eight years before he arrived in Lansing by penning the words to the hymn "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus!" Curiously, he refrained from asking the Presbytery to install him as pastor "for reasons best known to himself," as one church history put it.

Duffield helped supervise a temperance campaign during this time in Lansing. It climaxed with a packed audience at Baird's Opera House and mass signing of temperance pledges.

But perhaps his greatest achievement outside the pulpit was in using his religious music talents to supervise the musical program for the January 1, 1879 dedication of Michigan's new Capitol. He also wrote an "Ode to the New Michigan Capitol," sung by a massed choir at the opening ceremony in the House of Representatives chamber.

The serious illness of Mrs. Duffield caused him to return the pulpit call on April 19, 1879. Five years later, he surfaced as pastor of Detroit's Westminister Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps the first member of First Presbyterian to pursue a career in the ministry was Louis F. Esselstyn, who completed his seminary work and returned to be ordained in his "home" church at Washington and Genesee. Another attraction for the young minister was Mary Huston, whose family had been active in the early years of the Franklin Avenue Presbyterian Church. They were married in the summer of 1887 and their honeymoon trip, it developed, was a journey to Persia, where Esselstyn had accepted a missionary appointment to Teheran. Members of both churches gathered at "First" on a memorable August 27th Sabbath for a reception and farewell to the popular young couple on the eve of their departure.

In an isolated corner of what is now Iran, the Esselstyns opened an outpost mission that featured a soup kitchen catering, eventually, to 4,000 souls a day. In a 30-year ministry, Louis and Mary Esselstyn returned to America only once. He died in 1918 of disease, fatigue and poor nutrition and Mary returned to America.

A large, red cover lectern Bible was presented to the First Presbyterian Church in 1985 by members of the Esselstyn-Huston families who were still members of the church. It honored the missionary efforts begun 98 years before that were once termed the most important piece of social service ministry in the first 100 years of Presbyterian activity in Persia.

Talk of need for a new, larger church building—at a new location—was heard at congregational meetings as early as 1874. During the next decade, there was a vote taken by the congregation to remain at Genesee and Washington and another to move and build a larger church.

Finally, at a meeting on March 24, 1884, the congregation decided by a 91 to 47 vote to construct a new church, according to some historical notes written by the Rev. George A. Beattie. The notes, incidentally, were penned on the reverse sides of some lined note paper bearing the legend "First Presbyterian Church, Lansing, Mich.—Pastor's Study, 309 Capitol Avenue, 1887." The yellowed pages are still (1986) in the church archives 99 years after they were written on the eve of the cornerstone laying for the "new" church at Capitol Avenue and Allegan Street.

Beattie had answered the pastoral call on September 12, 1886, just as the church had purchased the building site for $5,000, scarcely a block from the center of downtown Lansing and across from the Capitol. A building plan submitted by S.B. Volk, a New York architect, was chosen and the construction contract for the edifice of Lake Superior red sandstone was let to Claire Allen of Ionia for $27,000.

Allen, recalled Beattie, promised to have the building enclosed and the lecture room ready for occupancy "by the middle of December." The entire structure was to be completed a year later.

An estimated 1,000 showed up on Halloween afternoon for the cornerstone laying according to that day's State Republican. And who manned the silver trowel to smooth the mortar? Elder Shubael R. Green—after he had delivered one of the dedicatory addresses.

The State Republican completed its story by printing Beattie's remarks in toto, except for his closing sentence, undoubtedly deemed too ecclesiastical for a news column. Concluded Beattie:

"Standing under the vaulted dome of this October day, surrounded by the rising walls of the new structure, with hearts full of gratitude for the past and hope for the future, we thank God—and take courage."

Back at the old wooden church, the congregation marked its 40th anniversary on December 17, 1887, starting with what The State Republican described as a "feast" from "tables laden with a bounteous spread." It was apparently the reporter's first experience with a Presbyterian carry-in supper.

Sadly, Beattie—still grieving over his wife's death—resigned his pastorate on November 1, 1888, only a few weeks before completion of the new church. In a little more than two years of Beattie's shepherding, 116 new members had joined the First Presbyterian fold.

Thanks to a detailed advance story in The State Republican, huge throngs turned out on Sunday, June 9, 1889 for all three dedication services in the new church, which had a sanctuary seating capacity of 450.

The story was headlined "Elegant Temple" and said the new place of worship "stands forth an ornament to the city." It described the building in detail and mentioned that the $27,000 construction contract had been increased "by committee changes" to about $30,000.

Of special interest to the story's writer was a ventilation and heating system "entirely controlled by the janitor." Said the newspaper article: "From his position near the main entrance, he can open or close all or any of the ventilators or windows by means of a system of wires and levers which are invisible."

The day after the dedication, The State Republican noted the attendance of "hundreds of well-dressed people" at the services, reporting "carriages rolled up to the curb by the dozens" and standing room only crowds. One of the addresses was given by Gov. Cyrus Luce on "the power of the pulpit in the land."

As a result of an appeal for building fund contributions by the Rev. W.K. Spencer of Adrian, a former First Presbyterian pastor, approximately $4,000 in cash and pledges was realized. Former Lansing City Mayor Orlando M. Barnes, also a Lansing financier and chairman of the church building committee, promptly pledged an additional $5,000 if the entire building debt were cleared within a year. Another $200 was raised at the afternoon dedication, the newspaper reported, "and the indebtedness was still further reduced" at the evening dedication.

Concluded that report: "With one of the most beautiful modern churches in the state, a light debt, and an energetic, talented and earnest pastor, the First Presbyterian Church of Lansing has every reason for self-congratulation upon its prosperity."

Alas, within 35 years, members of First Presbyterian were again talking of building a bigger, better church.

When the Allegan-Capitol structure was completed, Lansing's population was 13,102. But during that next decade something happened that was to change forever Lansing from being "just" the state's capital city. Ransom Eli Olds put a gasoline engine in the back of a buggy, called it an "Oldsmobile"—and set Lansing to growing at a breathless pace.

By 1900—11 years after the "new" church was built—the census counted 16,485 in Lansing. It nearly doubled in the next decade, reaching 31,229 by 1910. By 1920, the count was 57,327—and still increasing.

By mid-decade, despite the addition of electrical wiring and modern plumbing, the church was bulging. Basement Sunday School rooms were small, dank in the winter and musty in the warmer months. Early in 1930, the congregation decided to sell the building, purchase a new site and construct a third house of worship in less than 80 years.

On May 23, 1930—in the depths of the Great Depression—the Ruling Elders announced the building was for sale. A Lansing State Journal news item the next day said the purchase price would be $150,000 and that plans call for building "a $350,000 edifice" at a site optioned in 1929 at Chestnut and Ottawa Streets.

But in the depression climate, there were no takers. And church finances—the same as those of church families—suffered during the next decade. About the only thing that increased were the populations of Lansing (78,397 by 1940) and of the church, which became more crowded.

Just as the economy started to improve and members of First Presbyterian again began thinking of resuming their building project, war clouds started to form over Europe. Building materials and construction labor were both funneled toward the war effort and the church plans were again shelved.

But as soon as World War II was over and materials again became available, the project was revived. By now, Lansing was a bustling community

of more than 90,000 and the city's first denomination-recognized congregation was desperately in need of more space.

When First Presbyterian presented a December 1947 pageant marking its centennial, the production—according to a review in The State Journal—had to be presented on two nights to accommodate everyone. The previous summer, the congregation had decided to erect the present colonial style church with an exterior of varigated Brian Hill sandstone in a random ashlar pattern, with wooden portico and cornices, and a seating capacity of 750 including the balcony.

It was designed by O.J. Munson, an architect and member of the church. The general contract was let to the Reniger Construction Company for $250,000 which covered the original excavation, footings, foundations, basement walls, ceiling and necessary utility provisions. The understanding was that the remaining superstructure, including the tower-steeple and sanctuary, would cost another $175,000.

When it appeared that a recession in the late 1940s would again forestall construction, the church made a decision that was at least partly responsible for the successful completion of the structure. The contractor was instructed to proceed and the church started another building drive. But first, the congregation had the basement of the structure completed and capped with a temporary roof. First Presbyterians worshipped in that basement beginning in the autumn of 1948.

More than four years later, the main superstructure and steeple were completed. The dedication of the new sanctuary was held on October 11, 1953. The final phase of the Christian Education wing was added two years later—at a cost of $90,000, increasing the total spent for construction to $515,000.

At the end of 1955, an appraiser figured the total church value, including appreciation and the price of the land purchased for the site 26 years earlier, at $712,305. Certainly that figure would have been beyond the comprehension of those original building fund donors who invested in the city's first little wooden church constructed in 1852 for $3,700.

The finishing touch came with the completion and dedication on January 8, 1984 of the Molly Grove Chapel, financed by a bequest of over $3,000,000 from the estate of Nancy Wood Holmes, a third generation member of a pioneer Lansing family. The designer of the addition was MJK Architect Engineers Planners and The Christman Company was the construction manager-builder. Both are Lansing firms.