

The  
First Congregational Church  
of

ROCKWOOD, MICHIGAN

[The United Church of Christ]

*Seventy-five Years of Service*

*1886-1961*



The First Congregational Church of Rockwood was organized March 9, 1886. Prior to that time, church services were held in the old frame house east of the Swallow Apartments. The Rev. Robert Parsons of the Flat Rock Congregational Church and the Rev. William Cooke of the Flat Rock Methodist Church conducted services on alternate Sundays.

In February 1886, the Trustees met at the home of William F. Stoefflet and organized.

Chairman ..... Fred Butler  
 Secretary ..... H. H. Chapman  
 Treasurer ..... Mrs. Emeline Swallow

The deed to the land on which the Church now stands was presented by Austin B. Chapman, Sr. At a meeting on March 9, 1886, plans and specifications for a new church were accepted. Estimated cost—\$1800.00. The church was completed and furnished at a cost of \$2,505.06. Under the leadership of Mrs. J. P. Reed, the ladies earned \$148 for the purchase of the brick. Donations ranging from 25¢ to \$250 were recorded.

The church negotiated a loan of \$500 from the American Congregational Union on July 31, 1886. This money was to be used to furnish the church. The pulpit was a gift of the Rev. LeRoy Warren of Lansing. Dedication services were held September 19, 1886.

During its 75 years of existence, the church has been served by 16 ministers. The Rev. Robert Parsons of the Flat Rock Congregational Church, who helped to establish our church, was called to be the first minister. He also served the Newport Church. His salary was \$150 a year. Rev. Parsons was a student of books, and it is related that he often read during the service from the Greek or Hebrew Bibles.

The most notable pastorate in length was that of the Rev. John Fletcher Hutchinson, who served from 1900 to 1931, with the exception of 14 months when the Rev. Robert Huston was pastor. Rev. Hutchinson's salary was \$125 a year. In 1909 it was increased to \$200. His 1910 report shows that he delivered 241 sermons, made 1005 pastoral calls, expended \$77.60 for street car fare, (because he also served the Newport Church) and the cost for horse maintenance was \$107.50.

The roads that take us a few minutes to traverse today took three hours then. One dark Sunday night during a thunderstorm Rev. Hutchinson was on his way home to Flat Rock from Rockwood services. Horse, buggy and the Reverend went over an 18-foot embankment into the Huron River.

On his retirement in 1930, Mr. Hutchinson said he had spoken the magic words that established 482 homes. The Rockwood Church united with the Flat Rock in conferring the Honorary Degree of Pastor Emeritus in December, 1930.

Improvements and additions have been recorded.

Coal furnace .....	1921	New front doors .....	1952
Electric bulletin board	1925	Repair of glazed windows	1952
Gas in kitchen .....	1925	Electric organ .....	1954
Water .....	1929	Gas furnace .....	1956
Oil furnace .....	1947	House and lot .....	1957
Gas range .....	1951	Chimes .....	1957
Steam table .....	1951	Basement .....	1959

In 1902, \$22 was expended for lamps in hanging chandeliers, and it is assumed they were as proud of them as we are today of our present Gothic chandeliers which cost approximately \$500.

The Church Sanctuary has been redecorated in 1902, 1925, 1934, 1943, 1953 and 1961. The dining room was redecorated in 1951 and 1960. These have been highlights and have been marked by special observances.

Much credit goes to many groups for their support. The oldest functioning organization "The Ladies Aid" dates back prior to 1886. It was called "The Ladies' Aid and Home Missionary Society." In the early days, this group served 10¢ suppers in the homes of members, sold names to be inscribed on quilts and sponsored various kinds of socials. In 1953 this group changed their name to "Women's Fellowship" and a program was set up to work under State Congregational regulations.

The "Friendship Circle" organized in 1954, and was comprised of the young women of the church. This group has made many contributions in various ways, and gives financial aid to the Sunday School.

"The Men's Club" was organized on November 12, 1958. This group has had the largest attendance of any Down River Men's Club.

"The Busy Bees" organized in 1960. This group of women are very active in making contributions to the budget of the church and paying off the Ritter loan.

The Sunday School plays an important role in the life of the church. It is growing steadily, and the workers are growing in efficiency due to increased interest in Christian education. Eighty-nine children are enrolled at present.

There are two Youth Fellowship groups. Both function to serve the needs of the young people. The Senior P. F. has been in existence many years.

There is another group who has served the church long and well. There is probably no record as to the date they began to serve. The Choir and the Organists are a vital part of our church. At present, we have had to place a limit on the number for the choir because of space. Stories related here and there lead us to believe that we have had musical talents with us all through these years.

Reviewing the church records, we find many memorial funds have contributed much to our church. These many gifts have added beauty and inspiration.

Organ .....	1886	Porch railing .....	1959
Pulpit .....	1886	Acolyte robes .....	1959
Organ converted to altar	1941	Candelabra .....	1959
Brass flower vases .....	1947	Vigil light .....	1960
Altar cross and candles ....	1947	Altar, pulpit and	
Pulpit and lectern .....	1952	lectern scarfs .....	1960
Communion table .....	1952	Lighted belfry cross .....	1960
Light over vestibule table	1952	Speaker system .....	1961
Electric organ .....	1954	Cornice board .....	1961
Chimes .....	1957	White dossal curtain .....	1961
Baptismal font .....	1959	Christian flag .....	1961
		American flag .....	1961

The records also show a slow growth in the 1920's and '30's. For five and one-half years (1931-1936) Rev. William Skentelbury faithfully and devotedly served our Church. There was an increase in interest, in membership and in other areas. These were happy years and he is remembered by many for his kindly ways. Twenty-seven new members were received. He had a heavy schedule for he preached at Flat Rock and Rockwood each Sunday, and on Thursday evenings at Gibraltar. He conducted the Sunday School before the church service. Mr. Skentelbury now lives in Litchfield and spends six months in Florida.

Rev. Nathaniel Skidmore served our church faithfully and well from 1937 to 1943. He, too, worked in the Sunday School as Superintendent. He directed the Choir, and led the singing in the Sunday School. Under his leadership another building project was launched. The dining room and kitchen was enlarged. Cost—\$1,594.16.

Dedication services were held on June 29, 1942. Dr. Harold Skidmore, State Superintendent, was the speaker. Temperature —95°. Rev. Skidmore now lives in Jackson, Michigan, and often preaches at the Arbor Grove Church where he is Pastor Emeritus.

His successor, the Rev. Edward L. Hughes and his wife drove through rain, snow and sleet from their home in Detroit to keep their appointments with us. The records show the faithful and constructive work performed. We were a yoked parish with Gibraltar. Ninety members were received into the church. Rev. Hughes' address is 2151 Groh, Trenton, Michigan. (We regret that because of his poor health, he will not be able to be with us.) He served until October, 1951. The vested choir began its services during this period. W. Merton Sivyer as Director, and Thelma Hawn, as organist, began their service about 1945. Music has added beauty and strength to the church life through the ministry of song.

Our appreciation goes to the South Rockwood Evangelical Church for sharing their ministers with us for seven years—1951 to 1958. The Rev. Lawrence Taylor, a consecrated young minister, fortified with energy and enthusiasm, was our leader for a year and a half. Improvements started by placing new eaves troughs on the church building, and repair on the brick wall. Redecorating began in the Sanctuary on February 23, 1953. It was a busy time for volunteers—the paper was steamed off, and the sidewalls were painted white, two glazed windows were removed and bricked up, Gothic chandeliers were installed and a new dorsal curtain was hung over the altar. New beauty was added to the Sanctuary by the new chancel furniture. The Dedication Service was held May 24, 1953. During this ministry there was a marked increase in church attendance, and new members were received into the church fellowship.

South Rockwood again shared their pastor, Rev. Robert Schurman, with us from May 1953 to May 1954—a short time

but marked by diligent service. The significant achievement of 1954 was the purchase of the Hammond Electric Organ—cost, \$2,699—on April 5 of that year. It is interesting to note that the Dedication Service offering of May 24, 1953 was set aside to start the organ fund. Rev. Schurman left us to continue his training at Dayton, Ohio, Seminary.

For the third time, South Rockwood shared their pastor, Rev. Walter Ladley, with us. He stayed with us until August 11, 1957 when he was transferred to Grand Rapids. These, too, were faithful years. We were inspired by Mrs. Ladley's musical ability. In 1955 the Sunday School under the direction of Mrs. George McWebb, established a Building Fund. \$1500 from her Antique Shop was given to the church for the Basement Project. There is a record of gifts and the donors, but strangely enough, there is no record to show how we acquired the bell that proclaims the invitation of "Come and Worship the Lord."

For the fourth time we shared with South Rockwood. The Rev. Fred W. Knecht began his pastorate September 1, 1957, and rendered commendable service. It was a disappointment to be advised by the Evangelical U. B. Church that they could only share their minister with us until January 1, 1958. They were in an extensive building project program and needed full-time service of their pastor. In October of 1957, the church negotiated the purchase of the home and lot on adjacent property.

On January 5, 1958 we welcomed the Rev. Ralph Askew as our first full time pastor. Records show the increased membership in 1958—72, in 1959—28, and 1960—50. The increased membership has helped financially to meet operational costs and benevolences, etc. The Men's Club and Adult Bible Class were organized. There have been building improvements, new roof, exterior painting of the church, folding doors installed between the Sanctuary and educational room, and the basement project was completed. Special contributions this year are

# Our Former Pastors

erasing this loan rapidly. Again, there have been many memorial gifts and dedication services. The Junior Choir, under the direction of Dorothy Sivyer with Thelma Hawn as organist, has added another fine note to some of our services.

Our church was the first church in the Detroit association to vote into the United Church of Christ.

The history of the Rockwood Church is comparable to the weaving of a beautiful piece of tapestry, not woven by one pair of hands but by many. The developments have been gradual through the years with the greatest growth having taken place from 1958. Each decade has had its dedicated members. God has richly blessed. "We have loved the beauty of Thy house, the place where Thy glory dwelleth."

*Compiled by Mabel Woodruff*

## PASTORS

1886-1891 .....	Rev. Robert Parsons
1891-1893 .....	Rev. John S. Edmonds
	Rev. John P. Sanderson (supply)
1894-1896 .....	Rev. Henry A. Parker
	Rev. John P. Sanderson (supply)
1898-1900 .....	Rev. John W. Dickson
1900-1912 .....	Rev. John F. Hutchinson
1912-1914 .....	Rev. Robert Houston
1914-1931 .....	Rev. John F. Hutchinson
1931-1937 .....	Rev. William H. Skentelbury
1937-1943 .....	Rev. Nathaniel Skidmore
1943-1951 .....	Rev. Edward L. Hughes
1951-1953 .....	Rev. Lawrence R. Taylor
1953-1954 .....	Rev. Robert Schurman
1954-1957 .....	Rev. Walter E. Ladley
1957-1958 .....	Rev. Fred W. Knecht
1958- .....	Rev. Ralph H. Askew, A.B., B.S., M.A., B.D.



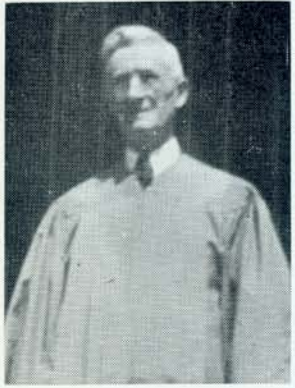
REV. ROBERT PARSONS  
D.D.L.L.D.  
1886-1891



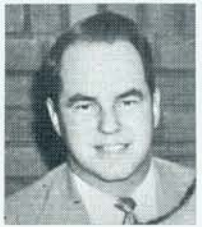
REV JOHN E. HUTCHINSON  
1900-1931



REV. NATHANIEL SKIDMORE  
1927-1943



REV. EDWARD L. HUGHES  
1943-1951



REV. WALTER E. LADLEY  
1954-1957



REV. LAWRENCE R. TAYLOR  
1951-1953



REV. ROBERT SCHURMAN  
1953-1954



REV. FRED W. KNECHT  
1957-1958



REV. RALPH H. ASKEW  
B.A., B.S., B.D., M.A.



MR. KENNETH WISEMAN  
Chairman of the Board

## The Present Church Board

*Chairman:* Kenneth Wiseman

*Church Clerk:* Mable Woodruff

*Treasurer:* Rose Bostwick

*Assistant Treasurer:* Bill Ashley

*Sunday Supt.:* Francis Tonkin

*Assistant Supt.:* Charles Kinney

*Sunday School Secretary:* Shirley Beaker

*Trustees:* Ebin Cook, Leo Sieman, George Strauss, William Sivyver, Edward Burgess, Earl Smith, Bill Ashley, James Benham and Marie Podhola

*Board of Deacons:* James Crocker, Leonard Peryam, Corbitt Smith, Dwight DeRoest, Hjalmer Johnson, Loren Dean, Harold Cooper, Paul Harris and Glenn Podhola

*Deaconesses:* Georgenna Johnson, Mardell Smith, Lila Alexandria, Nellie Wiseman, Marion Green, Lilah Smith, Margaret Dean, and Mary Mangrum.

*Honorary Deaconesses:* Mrs. Seward Woodruff, Mrs. M. Kiander, and Mrs. W. F. Cunningham, Mrs. Edith Story (deceased)

*Board of Christian Education:* Rev. R. H. Askew, Francis Tonkin, Thelma Hawn, Dorothy Sivyver, Aina Button, Richard Arason, James Crocker, and Charles Kinney.

*Music Committee:* W. M. Sivyver, Francis Tonkin, Mrs. Dorothy Sivyver

*Church Organists:* Thelma Hawn, June Klingel, Nancy Watrous

*Presidents of the Womens Fellowship Circles:*

Eunice Persche—Friendship Circle

Nellie Wiseman—Busy Bees

Effie Galligan—Circle One

*The P. F.:*

Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Gerbo, Sponsors

Bob Sivyver, President of Senior P. F.

Glenda Stoychoff, President of Jr. P. F.

*President of the Mens Club:* Donald Wiseman

#### TREASURERS

1896-1914—

Fred Butler  
Emeline Swallow  
Henry M. Smith  
Arton A. Wilson  
George Zinner  
James Story

1926-1956—

Seward Woodruff  
Lamont McCall  
James Crocker  
George Brown  
Rose Bostwick

#### CHARTER MEMBERS

Dr. J. P. Reed  
Kate M. Reed  
Dunstan Story  
Hannah Story  
Hobert H. Chapman  
Mrs. Hobart Chapman  
Austin B. Chapman, Sr.  
Catherine Chapman  
Henry M. Smith  
Mary Smith  
William Richardson  
Anna Story Richardson  
Wilson Hill  
Mrs. Wilson Hill  
Mrs. L. G. Brown  
Miss Cornelia Chapman  
    Joined in 1891  
Mrs. Emeline J. Swallow  
Miss Hattie Swallow

#### CHAIRMEN OF THE BOARD

Louise Gay—25 years  
Clark H. Ford  
Mrs. Ralph Dodge  
Lamont McCall  
Kenneth Wiseman  
The ministers served as  
Moderators for many years.

#### CLERKS

Hobart Chapman  
Dr. J. P. Reed  
Seward Woodruff  
Frank L. Smith  
Mabel Woodruff  
Margery Cook  
Mabel Woodruff

#### ORGANISTS

Cornelia Chapman  
George Burton  
Mrs. William Dryer  
Mrs. William Story  
Mrs. Leona Valrance  
Mrs. Alva Story  
Mrs. J. I. Mabee  
Mrs. F. Brown  
Amelia Ballinger  
Mrs. Frank Smith  
Mrs. Howard Button  
Mrs. M. Ella Jones  
Mrs. H. Vollmer  
Mrs. Byron Aseltine  
Mrs. Clifford Hawn  
Mrs. Merrill Klingel  
Mrs. Nancy Watrous