

The Churches of Canal Winchester

The United Brethren in Christ Church - nka Hope United Methodist Church

No serious consideration of the development, growth, and history of the Canal Winchester area can ignore the influence of the religious community. From the beginning of settlement in the area, there were religious gatherings. By 1815 there were established meeting places. By 1834 there were church buildings in the community. By the middle of the 19th Century, there were four major congregations in the village, as well as a few smaller congregations in the area. The next series of tidbits will look at the those churches that were established in Canal Winchester in the 19th Century, built magnificent edifices in the village, and still exist today – although the denomination names of some have evolved over the years.

The first congregation to be established in the Canal Winchester area was part of the United Brethren in Christ denomination. The United Brethren in Christ Church in Canal Winchester traces its origin to George Bennadum, one of the first United Brethren evangelists in Ohio. One of his converts was Ludwig (aka Lewis) Kramer, who came to Ohio from Pennsylvania in 1807 and settled in the Winchester area. According to Bareis, "The United Brethren class of Winchester was organized in about 1815 and was known as Kramer's Class." The first meeting of the United Brethren was held in the home of John Kramer, Sr., son of Lewis Kramer. Meetings were then held in various homes and a log school house just north of the village.

"Lewis Kramer, a local preacher, was one of the most active members, and when he built the log residence on his farm he included a large room" for meetings. About 1829 or 1830, Mr. Kramer sold his farm to Henry Dietz – reserving the right to continue using the room for meetings. "It is said that the meetings often got too noisy for Mr. Dietz, so 3 or 4 years later, in 1832 or 1833, he purchased this privilege and the money was devoted to help erect a church building."

Bareis related an "amusing incident at a meeting led by Lewis Kramer. He had forgotten his glasses, and talking slowly, said: 'My eyes are dim, I cannot see; I left my specs at home.' Hesitating a moment, the congregation, thinking he was 'lining' a hymn as was the custom in those days, began to sing, and sang the words through. He then tried to explain by saying, 'I did not say that you should sing "I left my specs at home.'" Again the congregation sang, much to the embarrassment of the leader."

In about 1828, the United Brethren leased a grove belonging to Lewis Kramer "for the purpose of holding camp meetings. As many as 50 'cottages' were erected and a space in which to hold the services was enclosed with a log wall some 4 or 5 feet high." After Kramer's land was sold, the camp meetings were held in other locations including a woods north of Winchester.

In 1833 at a meeting at the residence of Adam Kramer, north of Winchester, it was decided to erect a frame church building in Winchester on Columbus Street. It was completed in the autumn of 1833. On February 1, 1834, the conference met in this new building. In 1850 the frame church building was moved across the street where services were held until a brick church was completed on the old site. The brick building was occupied until 1887 when it was torn down to build the present building.

In the early 1880's, "the United Brethren Church was sadly in need of repair. The walls needed paper, the ceilings were falling off, seats were uncomfortable, and the floors were bare." The question was whether to build a new church or remodel the old one. "It was decided to raze the old building to the ground and erect a new church." On August 14, 1887, the workers began tearing down the old church. The January 25, 1888, edition of The Times relates that: "As the work progressed, it was discovered that nearly all the old material, such as timber and brick, could be used in the new structure. After the walls were torn down another cheerful discovery was made in the fact that the foundation was equally as good, or probably better, than a new one could be made. . . . On the front of the old building, foundations were laid for the tower and a class room, and the work of building the new church was begun. The work progressed rapidly during the summer and fall, and even during the severe weather of the past month no time was lost, and on last Saturday the finishing touches were given to the interior of the building." The new building was dedicated on Sunday, January 29, 1888.

The church building has had additions and renovations in the 20th Century. In 1915 a portico was added. In 1952 fellowship rooms and a kitchen were built. An educational wing with 10 classrooms was completed in 1960. The parking lot was acquired in 1959. A wheelchair access ramp was added in 1991.

Bareis related a custom that seems to be unique to the Canal Winchester United Brethren Church. Up until the 1870's, all the women in the congregation were seated on the west side of the church and all the men on the east side. There was a solid board partition about 3 ½ feet high in the middle. Bareis relates that the choice seats for the young people were along that middle wall.

The churches of Canal Winchester have a history of interfaith cooperation. The original frame church building of the United Brethren Church (built in 1833) was, at one time, also occupied by Winchester's

Methodist Episcopal Class. The two congregations occupied the church on alternate weeks from 1838 until 1850, when the Methodists built their first church building. The Reformed and Lutheran congregations also shared a building a one time. In the 20th Century, the churches would hold a cooperative community Thanksgiving service each November, and The Times would often announce special programs at the various churches with an open invitation extended to all in the community to attend.

The United Brethren Church is generally recognized in Canal Winchester for having the first Sunday School, the first library, the first church bell, the first parsonage, the first organ, and the first celebration of Children's Day.

The United Brethren in Christ operated a Sunday School in Canal Winchester in 1833 (possibly as early as 1828 or 1829). This was undoubtedly the first in the Old Scioto Conference and among the earliest in the denomination. Not everyone favored Sunday School, but in 1836 a Union Sunday School was organized in the frame school house in town. About 30 "scholars" attended.

Bareis related that the Sunday School "rules" were printed on a 3½" by 4½" card. Some of the 10 rules were: 1. I must always mind the superintendent and teachers of this school; 4. I must always be still; 5. I must not leave my seat till school goes out; 7. I must not lean on the next scholar.

Although no records of the Union Sunday School exist between the beginning in 1836 and 1848, there is reason to believe the Sunday School was continued from year to year, but very likely only in the summer seasons. In 1848, there were 145 attending the Union Sunday School. The younger children were taught their ABC's and the older children used "question books" in the Sunday School sessions. A Sunday School library was purchased about 1840 and was the first library in Winchester.

The United Brethren in Christ congregation put a bell on the old frame church (built in 1833-34) in about 1846. This was the first church bell in Winchester. The first organ was purchased in 1865 – although instrumental music was generally opposed at that time. In a history of the Church, it was stated that the leadership of Bishop Hanby, the minister at the time, was required to overcome the opposition to an organ. Rev. Hanby's daughter was the first organist. Previous to the organ purchase, John Boyd, who was said to be a "wonderful singer," led the singing. One source stated that if "Uncle John Boyd was not there to start the hymns, they did without singing."

A Children's Day observance dates to June of 1879 in the Canal Winchester United Brethren Church. Mrs. Davis, wife of the minister, had "the conviction that the birthday of Philip Wm. Otterbein should be fittingly observed. She obtained a picture of Otterbein and decorated it with a wreath. She trained the children in a special program and directed the service. This service, according to all available records, was the first observance of Children's Day in the United Brethren denomination."

The first parsonage of the United Brethren in Christ Church was built on what is now West Columbus Street in 1839. The second parsonage was built in 1877 and the third in 1887, both on West Mound Street. The second and third parsonages are in the West Mound Street National Register Historic District. Today, all three former parsonages are private homes. The fourth and present parsonage was built 1955-56 on the lot adjacent to the church.

The first organization of women in the United Brethren Church in Canal Winchester was known as "The Woman's Church Friend," and was organized in about 1882. Eleven or twelve years later a missionary society was formed. On January 26, 1905, the "Ladies Aid Society" was organized.

It was suggested that the ladies purchase the property east of the church and use it as the United Brethren Aid Home. The property was purchased on December 10, 1919, for \$900. The brick building was built in 1851 and used as a school for 11 years. It was then used as a dwelling until 1925 when it was remodeled and used as the Aid House for meetings and church affairs. In 1952 it was torn down to make way for the present parsonage.

In 1951, the Ladies Aid Society merged with the Missionary Society which had taken the name Women's Society of World Service on January 7, 1948.

In 1946, at a meeting in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church joined to become the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church joined to become the United Methodist Church. Canal Winchester then had two United Methodist Church congregations – interestingly enough on the same street. Neither of the congregations wanted to close its church building, and, for the most part, each congregation continued to attend services at their original building, so there are now two United Methodist Churches in the village. The former Evangelical United Brethren Church took the name Hope United Methodist Church to distinguish it from the former

Methodist congregation. Before, each church was just referred to by the denomination name, or as the Canal Winchester E.U.B. or Methodist Church. In an ironic twist, the two churches that had once shared a building on alternate weeks would, 130 years later, become part of the same denomination.

Note: Sources for this tidbit include, but are not limited to: the files of the Canal Winchester Historical Society; information from publications of Hope United Methodist Church; The Times, Canal Winchester's local weekly paper since 1871; In Celebration of 150 Years, the 1978 Canal Winchester Sesquicentennial publication; and A History of Madison Township, by George Bareis, published in 1902.