

1898	John H. McCune
1901	Samuel R. Williams
1904	Fergus O. Jones
1905	Fred H. Townsend
1906	Clemet Ainge
1911	George Thurston
1913	Harry Biddlecombe
1918	Fred J. Clifford
1924	G.R. Millard
1930	Harry Felton
1931	Fred I. Walker
1934	William S. Smith
1942	Rial E. Simons
1956	Charles H. Beynon
1962	Frank Cowick
1967	Floyd P. Braun
1970	Ronald D. Carter
1979	Clyde E. Smith
1981	John W. Hinkle
1989	Gary R. Imms
1991	Alan W. DeGraw
1995	Evans C. Bentley
2004	David E. Huseltine
2008	John K. Benissan
2011	Dana R. Strall
2017	Amy N. Triebwasser
2022	Rachael Dunlap



**First United Methodist Church
of Flat Rock
Bicentennial Celebration
1823-2023**

Flat Rock First United Methodist Church
Bicentennial Commemorative Booklet



Citations:

1. <https://www.flatrockmi.org/community/history.php>
2. Sesquicentennial booklet from 1973
3. Anniversary Services booklet from 1948

Our Ministerial Leaders

- 1823-1833 James B. Finley
- 1833 W.H. Brockway
- 1834-1835 E.C. Gavitt, A. Buckles, Elias Pattee
- 1936-1838 W. H. Brockway
- 1838-1845 R. Pengelly, George King
- 1846 W.H. Hayes
- 1847-1850 G. F. Hemmingway
- 1850 S.C Woodward, Isaac C Abbott
- 1851 R. Bird
- 1852 S.C. Stringham
- 1853 B.F. Doughty
- 1854 Richard McConnell, R. Johnson
- 1855 Richard McConnell
- 1856 Jedediah Dwelle
- 1857 J.J Smith
- 1858 J.J. Gridley, J.R. Gordan
- 1859 J.J. Gridley
- 1860 Thomas Wakelin
- 1862 Rufus C. Crane
- 1864 Alfred Allen
- 1866 George Stowe
- 1868 S. Kitzmiller
- 1870 Jesse Kilpatrick
- 1873 James Kilpatrick
- 1875 Alexander Gee
- 1877 Andrew W. Miller
- 1879 M.W. Pierce
- 1881 William J. Clack
- 1884 J.L. Walker
- 1885 William Cook
- 1888 Lewis Moon
- 1892 William Clemo

Continued on back



The following was written by Rev. Rial Simons upon the celebration of 125 years in 1948, but truth is timeless. It has been updated to reflect the current anniversary

Two hundred years have passed. We could not visualize that day. They could not have dreamed of ours. But the gospel that met their needs and shaped their world for good will also meet our needs and shape our world if we give it an opportunity. The church lives and thrives and serves its purpose as it walks with Him who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

No one can tell the story of a church. It comes into being because there are those who believe in the church and its Lord. It continues to live because we hold to the same beliefs and love the church enough to sacrifice for it and serve it. And two hundred years of existing means and endless amount of serving.

Rev. Rial E. Simons

History of the Area

“Flat Rock began as a Wyandot settlement. It was later designated as a reservation for the Wyandot, and still functioned as such in 1830.

The first Euro-American settlers in Flat Rock were Michael Vreeland and his five grown sons between 1811 and 1820. Michael had been captured by British Rangers during the Revolutionary War and released after American independence. The family purchased 800 acres (3.2 km²). The town was called the Village of Vreeland until 1838 when the Vreeland family sold off the majority of the land and relinquished control of the area. The Vreeland families built the first grain and lumber mill, having brought the grinding stones from New York. Descendants of Michael Vreeland still live in the town and attend Flat Rock public schools, being the seventh generation to reside in the town their family founded.

In 1818, a land office opened in Detroit, and Solomon Sibley purchased 330.93 acres (1.3392 km²) of land. In 1824 it was sold to Michael and Jacob Vreeland. The villages of Vreelandt and Smooth Rock were platted on part of this acreage. At this time there were Huron, Seneca, and Wyandot Indian villages in the area.

With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, large numbers of people, especially from New York, came to Michigan to settle. By 1828 the village had four stores, two saw mills, a wood carding mill, a flour mill, and 250 inhabitants - serving as a center mainly for farmers who lived in the area immediately surrounding the settlement.

The village of Flat Rock was platted and recorded in 1838 by the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Land Co. They were attempting to build a canal to connect Lake Erie with Lake Michigan. This effort ultimately failed.

Henry Ford was attracted to the water power of the Huron River, and in 1925 he established the Ford Motor Company Lamp Factory along its banks.”

The area was incorporated as a village in 1923 and as a city in 1965. While Flat Rock is a rapidly growing community today, even with its growth, it remains a unique "small town" with many of its residents having roots reaching back to the 1800s."

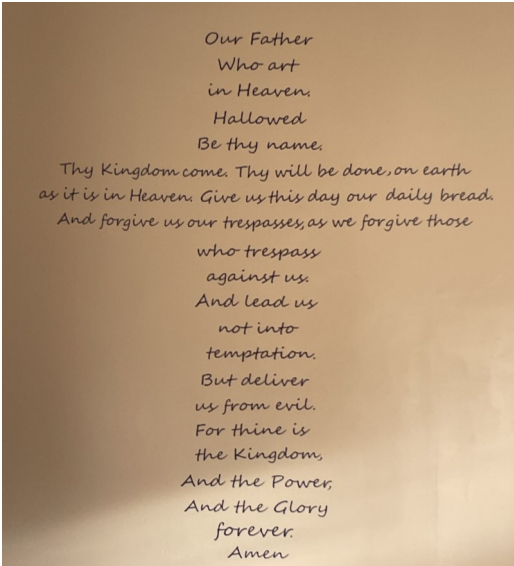
History of our Church

"Late in the afternoon of Sunday, December 24, 1823, we arrived at the Huron River, on the Wyandot reservation of eight sections. Here we had a very formidable difficulty to encounter. The river was just fordable and frozen on both sides for two or more rods. We alighted, took our tomahawks and cut the ice; then jumped our horses down into the water, got on and rode to the ice on the opposite shore. Here we sat on our horses and cut the ice, when the water was more than mid-sides deep, and I think a colder day I hardly ever experienced.

After staying in the water nearly half an hour we got on the ice. We were not out of the water 10 minutes before our clothes were frozen stiff, and then we had miles to go before we could arrive at any house. We set off at full speed and arrived at sundown at the residence of our old friend, Honnis, where we were most cordially welcomed and our wants comfortably supplied. We immediately sent forth word in the village that we could hold a meeting at night. All were in attendance. The next morning we had a meeting again and formed a class of 12 members. This was the first Native American class formed in the Michigan Territory."

Although there were one or two Methodist Episcopal classes organized in Michigan shortly before this time, this was the first class organized solely among the Native Americans of Michigan and it was done on Christmas Day 1863, only 39 years after the Christmas Conference of 1784.

As we gather to celebrate the remarkable milestone of our church's 200th anniversary, we are not only honoring the rich tapestry of history that has woven us together, but also embracing the limitless potential of our future journey. For two centuries, our congregation has stood as a beacon of faith, resilience, and community, embodying the unwavering spirit of unity and love. From the humble beginnings that saw us take root, to the challenges we've overcome and the joys we've shared, we've evolved into a family bound by a common purpose. As we look back with gratitude and ahead with hope, let us remember that the strength of our church lies not in the brick and mortar that constitute its walls, but in the hearts and souls of every individual who has contributed to its legacy. Let this momentous occasion remind us that with God as our guide, there are no limits to the heights we can reach, the lives we can minister to, the disciples we can make, and the light of Jesus we can shine into our world. Here's to 200 years of unwavering devotion, and to the countless chapters of our story that are yet to be written.



Our Father
Who art
in Heaven,
Hallowed
Be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth
as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those
who trespass
against us.
And lead us
not into
temptation.
But deliver
us from evil.
For thine is
the Kingdom,
And the Power,
And the Glory
forever.
Amen



Small groups are an important part of our connectiveness as a church family. “Handicrafters” meet every week for crafting and fellowship. 50 more or less meets monthly for dinner and fellowship. The Women’s group known as “The Wolf Pack” meets for fellowship on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The men’s group meets weekly in the morning for breakfast and fellowship. Throughout the year, there are other opportunities for connectiveness, community outreach and worship at The Advent Tea, Blessing of the Pets, Home Plate (Tiger’s game), participating in the Downriver Church Sports League, Trunk or Treat, Bible Studies, Book Studies, Sunday School (for all ages), and Church Work Days.

COVID-19 was a big challenge for all churches and ours was no exception. Other than the end of the Roast Beef Dinner, we also experienced the end of our weekly chancel choir. The positives during this time, however, were that we developed a call/care team to keep us in touch with one another, Sunday Schools, Bible Studies and small groups met on Zoom and the worship service was live streamed. We halted in person worship and when it was reinstated, we observed social distancing with no live singing. The praise band recorded songs individually and together outdoors and hymns were recorded. While we are back to our regular worship service that is a blend of traditional and contemporary, we continue to livestream which is a blessing to those who can not attend in person.

Our Church

The entire membership of the church on that first morning of worship Thursday, December 25, 1823 was made up of twelve Native Americans and Reverend James B. Finley. In the years following, area settlers would join the original 12 members. The first church building was a small log building similar to the one pictured below.



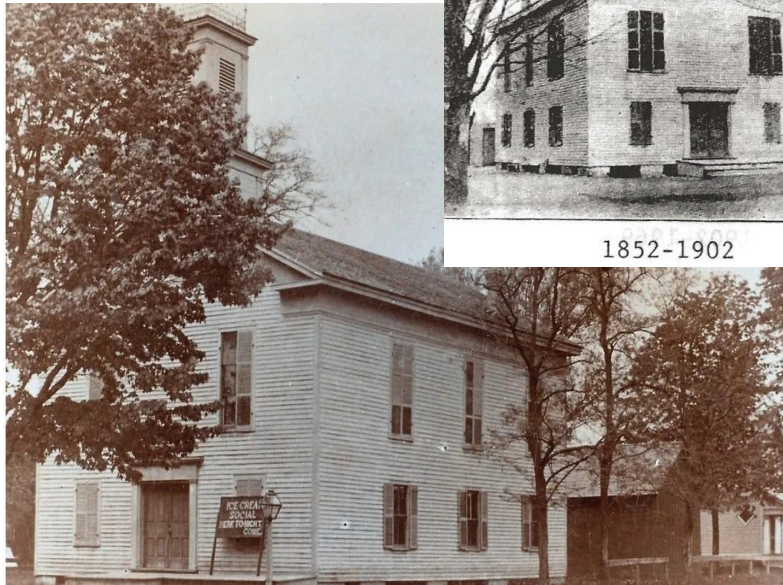
This log building would have been used as a school in the winter months and was located in a spot that is now 25869 E Huron River Drive. During the years in which the congregation worshiped in this location, (1824-1834) it was known as the “Huron Mission School” and the “Smooth Rock and Wyandot Missions”. Rev Finley, who was not only the Pastor but Presiding Elder for most of that period, was Pastor until 1833 when Reverend W.H. Brockway was appointed. Meetings continued with regularity even though the Pastor, due to the expanse of his circuit, could not always be present.

After some time and effort, the church was able to secure enough subscriptions (what we now call pledges) as well as a grant from the denomination to build a small white frame building at what is now 26212 E Huron River Drive. The congregation worshiped in that structure from 1834-1852. It was likely a simple construction with a center pulpit, wooden pews and a wood burning stove.

The size of the membership grew, and in 1852 the congregation dedicated a larger and more pretentious two story white frame church. It was built on the same site and used for fifty years. Members who worshiped in that building recalled the unusual double entrance doors, the sanctuary on the second floor, and the three foot high partition down the middle of the sanctuary. Women worshiped on one side of the partition and men on the other. The church had a place for the choir in the front, a center pulpit and an altar table and rail. Twenty-six ministers served the congregation during the years that this building was in use. As the membership grew to over 100, the need was felt to build again.



1852-1902

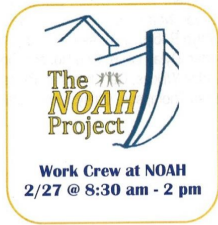


In 2017, we created a “Grace Space” in the sanctuary which serves as an area for children during worship services.



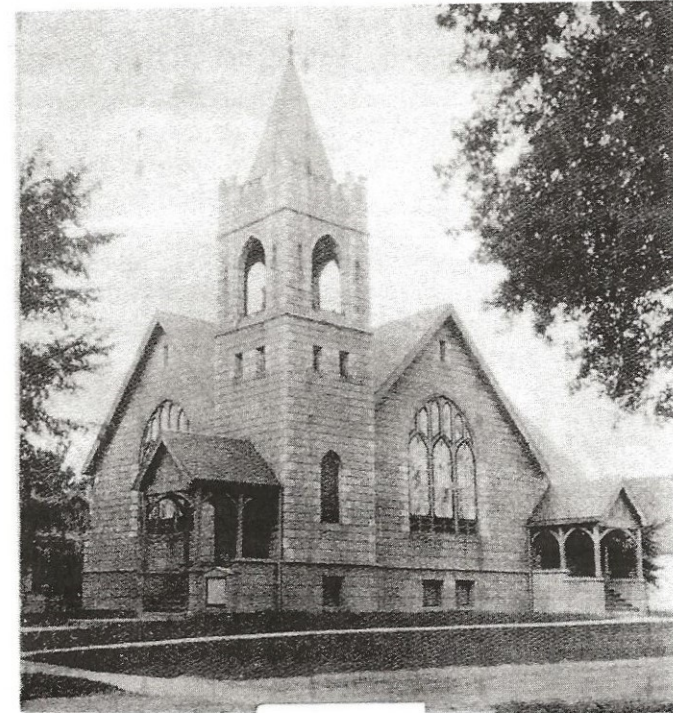
Our church is very mission oriented. As well as the aforementioned missions, we also support United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and have an active Prayer Quilt Ministry (Prayers and Squares). In partnership with the American Red Cross we host a blood drive every 8 weeks. We sponsor a “little library” located in front of the church making it easily accessible to our neighbor, Bobcean Elementary. We have also distributed water and treats to the parents who park in our lot to pick up their students. Our neighborhood committee has distributed treats to our local police and fire departments as well as the schools in our city.





During the 1970's our church was involved with missions in the Philippines as well as Costa Rica supporting them by sending servants as well as monetary donations. During that time, the youth group also took two big trips to Washington D.C. and New York City. There was also an annual all church "family camp" that met for a week at Lakeside Camp in Brighton. In 1984 the Roast Beef Dinner began as a fundraiser for the parking lot. Being well received, a decision was made to hold the dinner on a monthly basis during the school year. As with so many things, the Roast Beef Dinner came to an end in March of 2020 when Covid-19 arrived and the State ordered Michiganders to "Stay Safe/Stay Home."

The 1990's and 2000's saw our church beginning to support the ChristNet rotating shelter for area homeless as well as The Community Food Pantry. We also became involved with making sandwiches for the N.O.A.H (Networking, Organizing, and Advocating for the Homeless) project, and supporting Hands with Detroit, the Redford/Brightmoor Store, and Methodist Children's Home Society. The youth traveled to Bessimer, NC and Ichthus in Kentucky, for missions and attended DCLA in Washington, DC. During this time a three piece praise band known only as "Da Band" began providing contemporary music during worship service. Some members have moved away and more have been added to make up the current Praise Band, now called "Broken".



1902-1961

In 1902, the old building was moved away, and a concrete block building with stained glass windows was built at the same site. The town grew and so did the congregation .

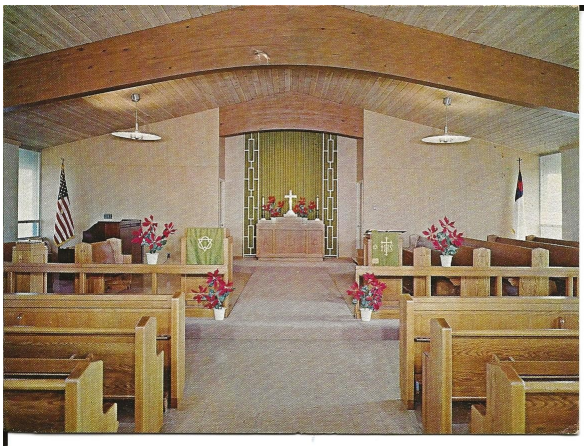
In 1948, the church's 125th anniversary was celebrated in this building under the leadership of Rev. Rial Simons, who was made Pastor Emeritus of the church in 1966. Rev Simons has the distinction of longest tenure of service as pastor of this church. He was Pastor for 14 years from 1942 -1956 Our Simons lounge is named in his memory. During these years a new subdivision was built in Flat Rock (Magnolia, Aspen, Red Cedar and Tamarack) and as the town grew, so did our church.

Youth and Sunday School Classes 1960



In 1954, property was purchased on Gibraltar road between Evergreen St and Van Riper St. Plans to build a place of worship at this location were altered, however, when, in 1959, Carson Metler and his wife Martha, donated 6 acres of their farmland to the church. On May 12, 1960, ground was broken. On March 12, 1961, the first worship service was held in the sanctuary which is now the Sunday School wing.

1960's Sanctuary



CHURCH DURING CONSTRUCTION



In the 1960's ,the Women's Society's annual Bazaar was the talk of the town, and the Downriver Church Sports League (still in existence today) was formed, the church looked rather like a motel, but the plans were already in place to build a large sanctuary in the center of the two wings. Foundation was laid, walls and roof were built. On July 4, 1969 at about 5:30pm, a tornado ripped through Flat Rock, completely destroying one house and severely damaging our church, Except for the small section shown in the photo, the entire south side of the sanctuary roof was torn off, most of it landing in Mr. Metler's corn field across the street (where the community ball fields are now). To say members were heartbroken would be an understatement, but our resolve was strong and a little less than a year later, on May 17, 1970, the first services were held in our current sanctuary.

