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Topeka Area Historical Society

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First Baptist Church of Topeka

Written by A.W. Ritter for the Centennial Celebration that was held on Sunday, May 2, 1943

(This "Brief History of the Church" appeared on the back of the worship folder)

The First Baptist Church was organized by Rev. Bishop in 1843, in the log house of Mr. and Mrs. Collett which stood on the farm now owned by Harry McEntire. There were eight charter members that met every Sunday for worship. About this time there was an organization of the Jones Chapel Church, and the membership of the Haw Patch (later known as Topeka) Church being small was united with the Jones Chapel Church. But after a few years of worship together, it was thought best to reorganize the Haw Patch church again, as many more families were located within reach of the church.

The organization was formed and the place of meeting was the Horner School house. This stood on the west side of the road about 15 rods north of the Jesse Clark residence. The school house was entirely surround by large beech trees. Many happy years were spent in worship. A good Sunday School was maintained, and people came from miles around and filled the building. It might be added here that when the two churches were together the members never thought of missing a covenant meeting which was held on the last Saturday of each month at the Jones Chapel Church. Although the only means of transportation was a lumber wagon which would take at least three hours each way to make the trip, they very seldom failed to make the trip.

It was said that the Haw Patch Church was the first church of the Free Will Baptist Faith to be organized north of Fort Wayne. Among the first pastors to serve the church were Reverends Dodge, Kinnison, and Jones. In 1874, in the month of March, Rev. Jones, who was serving as pastor conducted a series of meeting at which time I with many others was converted. The church was strengthened and its membership enlarged to such an extent that we felt the need of a better place to worship. The German Baptist people were very kind to us and granted us the use of their church. Rev. J.W. Haggerty, an evangelist, held a three week meeting with good results. This church stood on the corner where the Ira Smith store now stands. A

movement was at once launched to build a church building. J. Norman Babcock offered the ground where this building now stands free if we would build a brick church. A meeting was called and a building committee was appointed as follows: Joseph Kime, Ruben Vanslyke, Amos J. Yoder, Luther Stoler and A.W. Ritter.

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1843 A HUNDRED YEARS 1943
IN HIS SERVICE



First Baptist Church

TOPEKA, INDIANA

KENNETH L. BEILBY, MINISTER

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Sufficient funds were subscribed to start the building. It was a busy time of the year but a day was set aside to start hauling stone for the foundation. I will never forget that morning. No one came but Brother A. J. Yoder and myself. Brother Amos got on the wagon with me, putting his arm on my shoulder and said, "What shall we do? Give it up or go to work?" We decide to go on and we kept it going all summer.

The building was completed and dedicated to the Master's work November 17, 1889. Rev. H.M. Ford, President of Hillsdale College preached the sermon. Here is a description of the building at that time. The entrance to the auditorium was at the center of the west side (where the big window is now). Above the entrance was a tall belfry with the bell in it. The seats were straight across the room with an aisle down the center.

The building was heated by two large stoves, one on either side, with long pipe meeting at the center and uniting and running across the room to the east side where it entered the chimney. Two large kerosene lamps hung from the ceiling in this room and one in the side room. Outside, on the north, east and south were hitch racks for the horses, sufficient for at least thirty teams.

In the year of 1896, we purchased the property now owned by Bert Steinbarger on Harrison Street for a parsonage. Rev. H.A. Huey was the first to occupy it. But after a short time we were dissatisfied, and sold the property and purchased the one we now have on Harrison Street (at the rear of the church).

The church has many times been on the mountain tops — and yes, in the valleys, too, but God has greatly



The original building was torn down in 1997. Long time member Bill Davis was the first to give money for the building of the new fellowship hall.



blessed us and many have found the way to the more abundant life within its walls. May God continue to bless the little brick church on the corner.

Here are several additional bits of information that were not included in A.W. Ritter's brief history of the church.

- **A.W. (Adrian) Ritter** operated a drug store in Topeka. He was also the undertaker. He died in 1953 and is buried in the Eden Cemetery
- **Reverend Bishop's** first name was Nathan.
- **Jones Chapel** was located in Eddy east of Topeka. When that church closed is not clear.
- **J. Norman Babcock** was a school teacher in Haw Patch and was the driving force behind the building of Sycamore Hall. He was also Orvin Kent's son-in-law. Babcock died in 1918 and is buried in the Eden Cemetery west of Topeka..
- **Rev. H. M. Ford** was a minister in Hillsdale, MI. While he may have taught at Hillsdale College, there is no record on the Hillsdale College website of him ever serving as college president .

TAHS Quiz

1. Who was the first pastor of what is now First Baptist Church of Topeka?
2. Who donated the land where the First Baptist Church is currently located?
3. Who was the Baptist pastor in 1943?
4. Who painted the Topeka Rose barn quilt?
5. Who signed Delorma Blake's bicycle permit?

Track Talk



Schedule of Events:

November 19, 2013

Dinner Meeting
Election of Officers

January 21, 2014

TBA
Topeka Branch Library

The Depot Museum is closed for the winter. Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

Topeka's 1st Barn Quilt Honors Doris Haggard

On August 10th, the Topeka Area Historical Society (TAHS) honored Doris Haggard with the town's first barn quilt. The barn quilt, painted by local artist Cindy Bontrager, is of the Topeka Rose and hangs on the north side of the Depot Museum.

"No one deserves this more than Doris," stated TAHS President Harold Gingerich. "She had really wanted us to buy a barn quilt which was exhibited at this year's Topeka Quilt Show & Sale. But the more we thought about it, the more we wanted something that was truly Topeka. Since

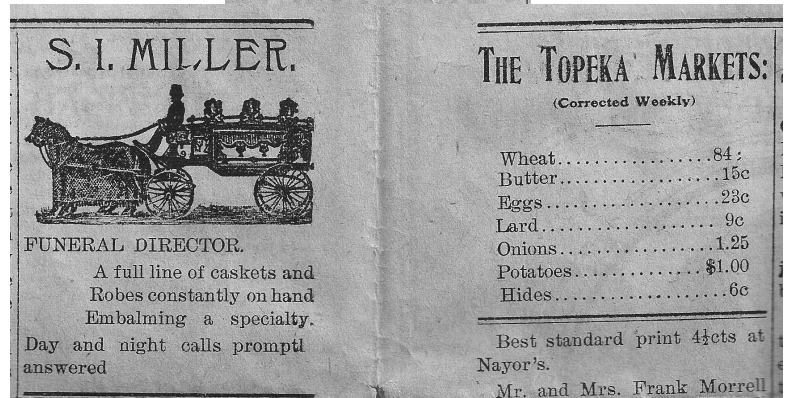
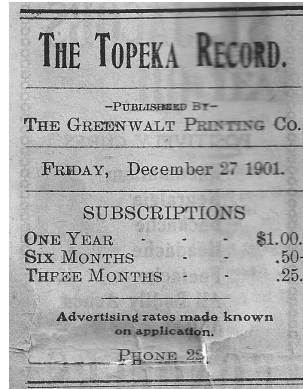


Doris is the vice president of the historical society, the Board decided to keep it a secret, and keep it they did. Haggard was totally surprised at the unveiling.

It was Haggard who found and adapted the Topeka Rose quilt block pattern which has become the symbol for the Topeka Quilt Show & Sale held annually in late June.

Doris, along with Genevieve Lehman and quilt show founder Sue Christner were the driving force behind the quilt show which will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2014.

"Things couldn't have worked out better," observed Gingerich. "Doris was honored, we have the first barn quilt in Topeka, and Cindy Bontrager painted it making it something that is truly Topeka."



Answers:
1) Reverend (Nathan) Bishop
2) J. Norman Babcock
3) Kenneth L. Beilby
4) Cindy Bontrager
5) Stan Miller

Topeka Area Historical Society

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Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

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Hawpatch History Detectives

Investigative Report

Three Generations on the Wabash

Harley Blake, Jr. (THS Class of 1943) was the third generation of men in the Blake family to work for the Wabash and Norfolk Southern Railroads. Following in the footsteps of his father Harley, Sr. and grandfather Charlie, young Harley started working for the railroad while he was still in high school. By the time he would retire he put in over 43 years.

Harley may have retired, but since his house was across the yard from the Topeka depot many of his co-workers and train crews would stop by to reminisce. His wife Delorma, (Class of 1947) who still lives in the house, says the stories would go on for hours.



Harley E. Blake,

Delorma, who's maiden name was Carlson, was raised about a mile and a half west of Topeka on what many know as Perry Lehman's farm. She remembers that during the rationing years of World War II, it was Stan Miller who signed the permit for her to be able to have a bicycle.

Harley passed away on March 31, 2009, and was laid to rest in the Eden Cemetery.

100 Years of History Comes Down

Constructed in 1910, the building that was once home to such businesses as the Mier Bank, J.J. Yoder's general store, Tustison's Hardware and Miller's IGA was reduced to rubble and the lot has been cleared. Also coming down was Mr. Ed's bar that was at one time home to Ben Lemmings bakery and cafe. However, by the 1960s it was primarily a bar.

In the summer of 2011, the building was declared unsafe, but what followed were months of haggling between the owners of both buildings, and county and town officials. At one point demolition had begun, but the work was stopped because both buildings shared a common wall. The common wall was the result of the bar's expansion years ago when they "tied into" the wall of the IGA.



Ultimately Roger Diehm purchased both properties. On August 27th and 28th both buildings came down. The Hometown Treasure magazine has posted numerous photos and a video of the demolition. Those can be viewed by going to www.thehometowntreasure.com/topeka-demolition.

Typical of a small town, there are numerous rumors about what will be built on the vacant site. Diehm has said that he hopes to build a locally owned general store similar to the Save-A-Lot that was built on the old Sycamore Hall site.



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