

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FLORA

When Mr. Smelster came to Flora he urged a few families numbering five to start a church and build the building. To build this church they had to get help. So they asked for help from all the people. They got enough money to buy the lot and build the building. They began to build this church in 1880 on the lot where Mrs. Ayres now lives (1934), in the northwest part of town. Although different church gatherings were held this was the first building. After this church building was finished the other church gatherings held their meetings here. Mr. Smelster was their first minister of the church---that is why he was interested in seeing one built.

When they had finished building the church they had a celebration. This celebration was held just south of Mr. and Mrs. David Cunningham's home, around which was a forest. The families, numbering about 125 to 150, went to the Cunningham home which was newly built and did not have any partitions. A large table was set across the room and the five families furnished the food for the dinner.

When the Sugar Creek Baptist church found out about a new church being built in Flora they decided to build one in
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1841. There were nine member which met and organized at the

home of George Hartman. The minister was Rev. William Moore; the nine members were George Hartman and Wife, Zenas White and Wife, Henry Dawson and Wife, Eliza Tedrick and Jacob Neff and Wife. In 1841 they built a hewed log house of worship on the farm of Thomas Hight, in section seventeen, Monroe township. Mr. Hight donated the land and the other men donated their work.

In 1856 they built another house of worship about one-half mile east of their former church, on land donated by George Moore, two and three-fourth miles west of Bringham. This was a frame building 36x40 feet, and was occupied regularly on all occasions of public worship. This church was torn down a few years ago.

Rev. William Moore was the first pastor of this church and served seven or eight years. Other pastors were: Rev. Dunham, Rev. Arzel Waters, Rev. I. N. Clark, Rev. Moses Kerr, Rev. James M. Smith, Rev. John Dunham, Rev. Hamilton Robb, Rev. Price Odell, Rev. William DeBolt, Rev. Philip McDade, Rev. T. J. Robinson, Rev. B. R. Ward, Rev. B. A. Melson. In 1882 it had a membership of about sixty persons.

The Sugar Creek Baptist church got enough money to buy a lot in Bringham, but not enough to build the building. When the Sugar Creek members began to come to Flora Baptist church they gave up the idea of building a church.

In 1909 Dr. F. P. Lyons bought a lot and wanted the church moved there. So the members moved the church to the lot where it now stands and the parsonage. They have continually been adding improvements to the church.

The Sugar Creek church then, after their members came to this church, discontinued. They gave what money and a piano they had to the Flora church. In 1927 they gave them the church building and they were to dispose of it any way the trustees of each church saw best.

In 1907 the first Young Peoples meeting was organized with Flossie Flora as president.

In July, 1903, it was decided to have Sunday School at nine-thirty on Sunday morning instead of in the afternoon at two.

The following pastors have served at the Flora Baptist church: Rev. Smelster, 1880-82; from this time up to 1903 I have not been able to learn the names of the pastors. Following were part-time ministers: 1903, Rev. Kendall; 1905, Rev. Lee Fisher; 1910, Rev. Tedford. Following were full-time ministers: 1912, Rev. W. E. Pool; 1914, Rev. Heitmeyer; 1917, Rev. B. H. Truman; 1920, Rev. Frank W. Cramer; 1921, Rev. A. E. Murphy; 1925, Rev. G. E. Dupree; 1928, Rev. J. W. Clevenger; 1933, Rev. J. B. Gleason; 1934, Rev. J. Edward Lehman.

The following people have served as superintendent of the church: 1903, Br. F. P. Lyons; 1911, Frank McCarty; 1913, Frank Overholser; 1915, Arthur Fife; 1916, L. V. Myer; 1919, Nelson B. Sharp; 1921, L. V. Myer; 1927, Manford Kelsey; 1929, Wayne Daggy; 1930, Howard E. Landis.

The church did have one of the largest memberships in town, but due to different splits in the church it began to lose members. At the present time it has a membership of one hundred and twenty-five.

The church under the present leader, Rev. J. Edward Lehman, formerly of Fort Wayne, is in excellent condition. It is small

but mighty.—

Jeanette Landis