

Looking Back #11

The Methodist Church in Charlevoix

By David L. Miles, Curator

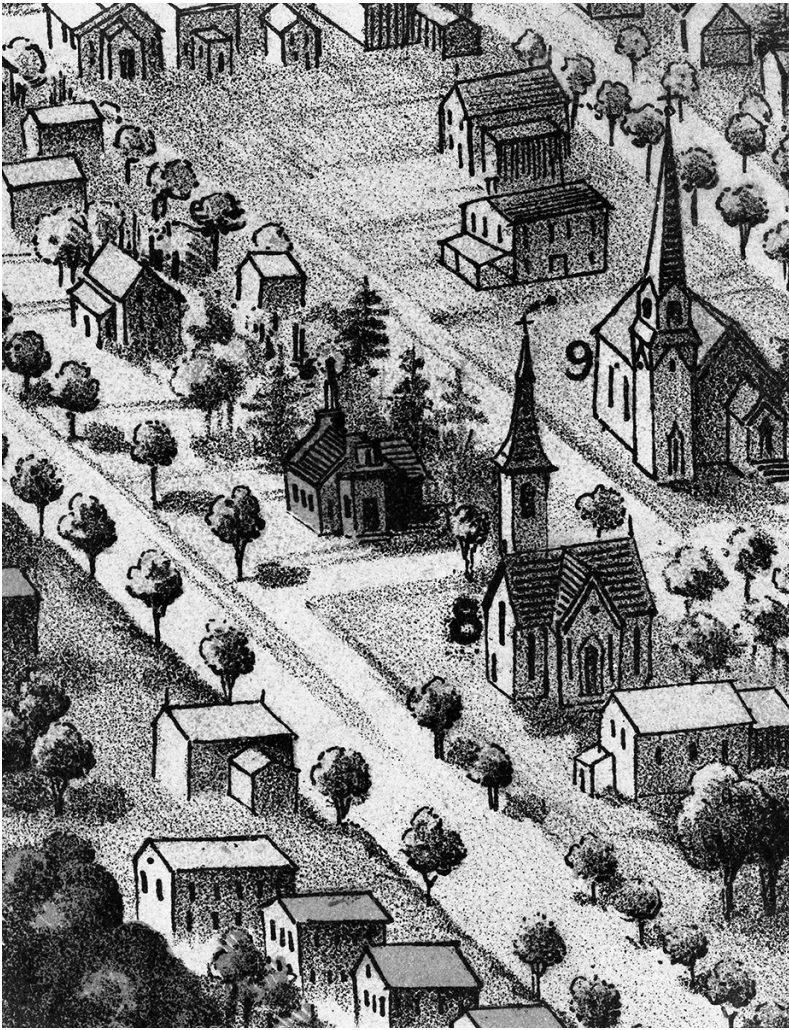
Museum at Harsha House

Charlevoix Historical Society

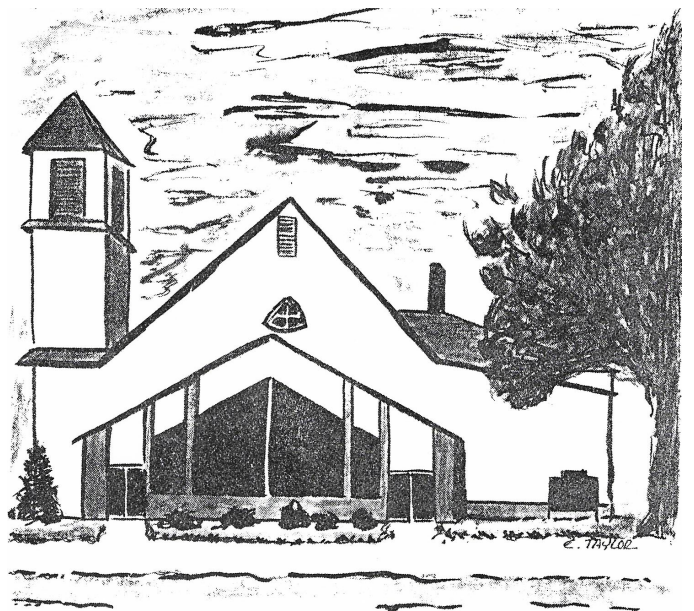
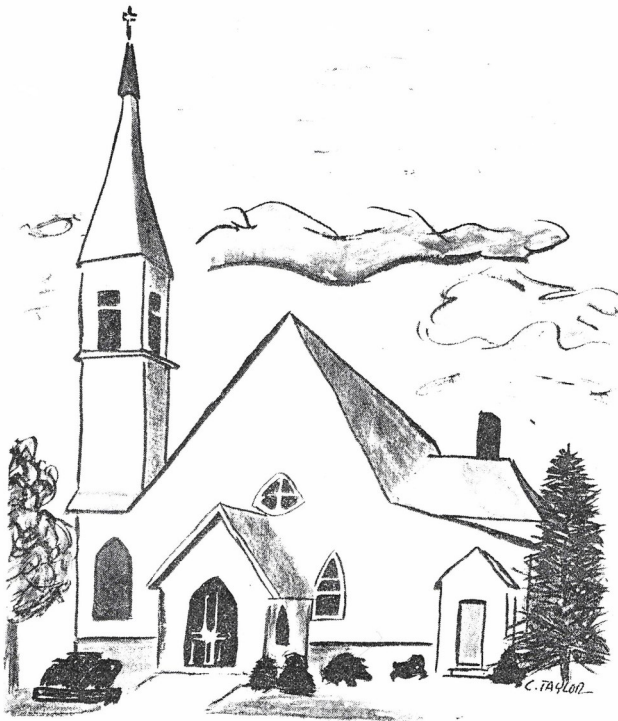


Methodist Church at center distance. Baptist Church at left, currently the site of Charlevoix's fire station. Between them is the Congregational Church. Antrim Street is at bottom.
Photo taken approximately 1891 from bluff above today's Oleson's grocery store.

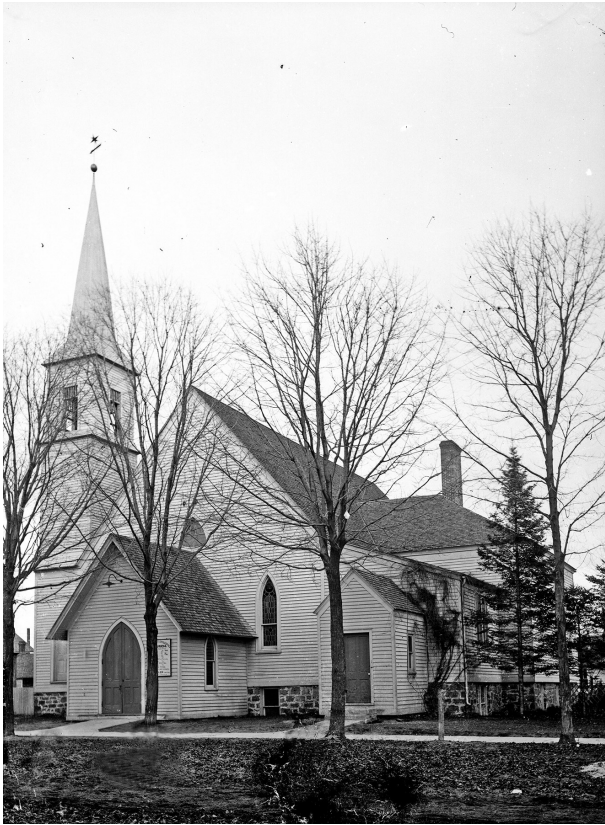
Charlevoix's Methodist Church was the first structure in town built solely for worship. The idea was broached in 1867, when a parcel of land at the northeast corner of the State/Clinton Streets intersection was purchased. The congregation consisted of only a handful of future parishioners. Nothing more was done to the property until 1874, when the church's Ladies Aid Society raised \$65 to obtain the lot directly to the north, on State Street. The plan was to put their future church there, and construct a parsonage on the corner. By that time the congregation numbered into the 20s. They raised enough beyond the second lot purchase to obtain a granite cornerstone, brought into Round Lake by boat and laid on August 12, 1874. After that, construction could proceed only as the collection of funds allowed. Bit by bit, board by board, the Methodists had themselves a church by February 12, 1878. Dimensions; 32 x 70 feet. Height of steeple: 100 feet. Estimated total cost: ca. \$4000, about \$126,000 today. By the time all the bills were paid, the congregation said they had approximately \$12.37 left over. The parsonage followed in 1880. Electric lights were installed in 1901, six years after electricity arrived in town.



On a stormy January day in 1885, the Congregational Church across the street at Park Avenue (#8 at left) was dedicated. For decades, a friendly rivalry existed between the two churches as to which one had the highest steeple. Neither would concede to any measurement that indicated theirs might be a few inches shorter. But it didn't matter for several years because the Methodists had to remove the topmost steeple section after it had become structurally unsound. Below are two drawings done for the Methodist Church's centenary observation that show the difference.



Methodist Church 1878-1978



Above: Close-up of the original Gothic-arched entry, with the church's barn appearing behind it on the alley.

Left: the total church. Both photos from the 1920s.

Right: The Methodist parsonage on the Clinton Street corner, built 1880. It survived well past the middle of the 20th century.



Left: This remodeled entry appeared in 1972. The lengthy, 10,000 sq. ft. fellowship hall addition, with kitchen, restrooms, and five classrooms, would appear to its right, on the parsonage land, in early 1997. Another pointed steeple, still there, also made its appearance around the same time as part of a massive, year's long renovation and restoration job.



1890s



1909



1900-1909

But the times they were a-changin'. Organized religion has become a moot point for many younger people, and the local church experienced difficulty attracting youthful members. They had once been the future of the church, as seen above. Within the last several years, the membership unfortunately dwindled substantially, to the point it would have been economically impossible to continue. There was considerable worry that Charlevoix might also lose the historic building.

But Paul Silva, who redid the Lodge Motel into the upscale Hotel Earl a few years ago, has stepped in to retain both the vintage sanctuary building and fellowship hall. Much remodeling has turned the structures into offices, long needed affordable short-term housing for seasonal workers, and a downtown meeting place for receptions, conventions, and other social gatherings. Thanks to Mr. Silva's foresight and initiative, this historic treasure continues to live on to the benefit of Charlevoix.

Ye Great New England Feaste

—AND—

OLD TYME SUPPER

—GIVEN BY—

YE METHODIST FOLKS

In Ye Church Dinning Room

TOWN OF CHARLEVOIX

Commonwealth of Michigan

—ON YE—

22nd day of ye second month of ye 131st
year of oure independence

The Charlevoix Methodist Church in its heyday as a community gathering place,

February 22, 1907