

Westfield Church has 96th Reunion

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

How devoted are you to your church, and particularly to its building? Suppose the last regular Service was in 1956. Would you still be celebrating and supporting it now? Some folks in the Westfield area are, yet some of them may not have even been born in 1956!

So what is it about the little Westfield German Methodist Episcopal Church building, dating from 1877, that they reopen it every summer for a meeting and Service? Why does this little yellow brick church on a windswept hill west of Rock Springs command such attention?

Some of its present day supporters are neither German nor Methodist, nor are they all Westfield area residents. Yet a large crowd will gather at County D and Schanke Road on Sunday, July 19 for the observance. There will be a business meeting and an old fashioned bountiful church pot luck picnic with all the trimmings. This custom dates back 96 years, to 1913.

And speaking of business meeting, there will be a dedication of the new windows, a multi-thousand dollar project designed to help preserve the sturdy brick structure where a full house of German Methodists once worshiped. The previous windows had served for 131 years, and were said to be held in place by little more than many coats of paint.

Replacing windows is a costly project, in this case about \$2500 per window. Fund-raising began last summer and sufficient funds were quickly raised with many four figure donations. Handshake agreements were made on various bids last September.

A huge boost to the project came with the announcement by John Alexander of Ozone, Arkansas, that he and his four brothers would produce and donate the frames, including a special wood said to last 200 years. This was a multi-thousand dollar in kind donation, their memorial to the many members of the Alexander family associated with the church, especially Jacob Alexander and his descendants.

The brothers are nephews of Mildred Alexander of Chicago. In an additional show of generosity, one of the Alexander men delivered the frames personally, saving some shipping costs. All five Alexander men and their wives are expected to be present for the dedication. By a fortunate coincidence, the Alexander men are in the historic building renovation business, and were well equipped to tackle this project.

Perhaps the nearby church cemetery tells part of this remarkable story of devotion, for many of today's participants are descendants of the



**John Alexander prepares a frame in his shop in
Ozone, Arkansas**

**Opposite: Butch Parr installs a frame with the help
of Jerry Luther inside**



The South side of the Westfield Church, showing the condition of the original brick walls and the window treatments.

sturdy pioneer farmers who once populated the area, names such as Alexander, Gaetzke, Uecker, Biege, Stackhouse, Kelly, Fleming Vertein, Schwartz-Black and Herbel. The church was founded in 1852, meeting in a log cabin, and burial on the church grounds began in 1857.

The official name of the present governing association is Westfield Cemetery Association, headed currently by Tom Biege, with Don Pierce as Treasurer, and Bob Biege as Secretary. Serving as Trustees are Betty Repka, Fran Kelly, Susan Haney, and Al Zipse.

Like many other country churches Westfield closed because of the enhanced means of transportation brought about by the automobile and hard surfaced roads. A declining farm population also affected membership. Both it and the Baraboo German Methodist Church eventually merged into the First United Methodist Church on Broadway in Baraboo.

Marring the sterling history of this religious organization was a shameless robbery in 1971. The church doors had never been locked up before that time, and the not so innovative robbers simply opened the door, so free and welcoming. They ransacked religious and historically valuable objects, many dating from the early days. Some items have been replaced.

Not many organizations have a 96th Reunion. Sunday, July 19 promises to be an especially significant one. Previous meetings have featured new paint, graveyard work, and such other upkeep over the years as is required in preserving a significant structure. Those ancestors would be proud of their descendants and the many friends of the church.

