

# It Was A Community Affair

By CLEO SYMONS  
Special Writer

The Community Congregational Church, only church in Lathrup Village, was established as a community project in February, 1947. However, the ground work was started several years before the church came into being.

At the May, 1944, meeting of the Comitty Department of the Detroit Council of Churches, the Rev. A. M. Meikle, superintendent of the Congregational Association of Detroit, asked for the privilege of surveying Lathrup Townsite, as it was known then.

The request was granted, and the survey completed during the summer of 1944.

In October of that year, the Comitty Department agreed to assign Lathrup to the Congregational denomination for the development of religious work. A board of trustees of the Congregational Association of Detroit voted to assume this responsibility.

PERMISSION was obtained to use the Annie Lathrup School, located on Southfield Road in the heart of the village, as a temporary place of worship.

The Congregational Association then proceeded to have the area declared "High Potential" by the denomination's Board of Home Missions in New York, thus assuring substantial financial aid for future developments.

During the following two years, Rev. Meikle tried to arouse interest among Lathrup residents. But his efforts failed to bring about a general meeting at that time. Meanwhile, considerable time was spent before the association was able to purchase a building site. In June, 1946, a plot 145 feet by 220 feet was acquired just north of the Lathrup School.

ENLISTING the aid of Rev. Dr. John Rose, Rev. Meikle finally arranged a meeting which took place

at the school in November, 1946. A handful of 12 attended, and a sum of \$405 was subscribed. Other meetings followed, officers were elected and the first worship service set for Feb. 2, 1947.

Later 104 charter members were received and the Church Covenant was read.

Considerable effort was required to transform the school auditorium into a sanctuary. But stalwarts such as Charles Fey and Thomas H. Myers went early Sunday morning and worked miracles before the congregation arrived.

A platform was devised by bolting together two sections of the stage, and a pulpit, similarly put together, was bolted to the platform. Chairs were set up, blackboards and windows covered with drapes and a carpet was laid down.

After the service, all church paraphernalia had to be removed and the auditorium cleared for school activities.

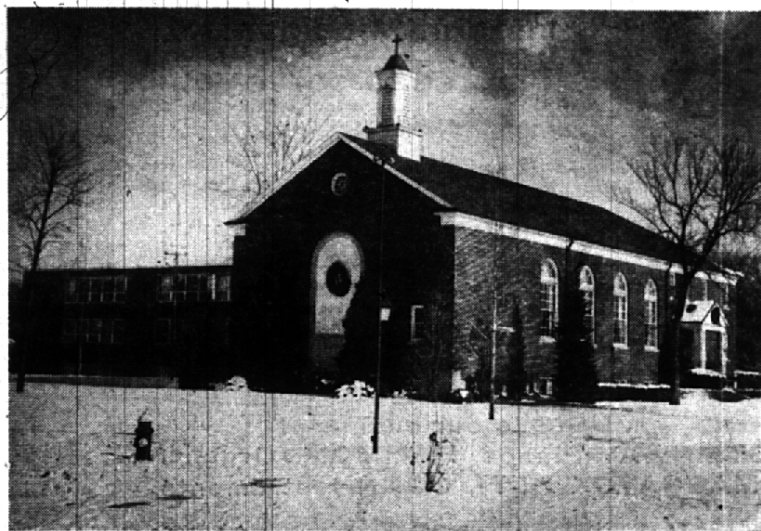
RAISING FUNDS for a proposed church building of their own became everyone's responsibility. The ladies of the congregation labored as only dedicated church women can, putting on suppers, strawberry festivals and bazaars to bring in money. But it was not enough.

Letters were sent out announcing a special fund-raising program. Guest speaker Rev. DeWitt Jones, minister emeritus of Central Woodward Christian Church of Detroit and past president of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, inspired several hundred listeners to "stretch their giving muscles" to the utmost.

The goal was finally reached and on Sunday, Oct. 9, 1949, the cornerstone of the present building was laid. The red brick structure with a white cupola, harmonizing with other buildings at the Townsite, was erected at a cost of \$500,000.

THE FIRST service was held on May 6, 1950, although the building was not yet fully completed. It was formally dedicated Oct. 22, 1950.

In 1954 another step forward



COMMUNITY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

First service in present building took place May 6, 1950.

was made. The present sanctuary became a reality, and the rest of the block of land was secured for future needs.

The church plant—building and grounds—now cover an entire block, surrounded by Southfield, Goldengate, Monterey and E. California.

Two additions have been made since 1954. The first, in 1957, provided administrative offices and class rooms for small children. The second, in 1961, completed classrooms for all grades through high school, plus a church office. Plans are already made for further additions and facilities.

UNDER THE leadership of Rev. John A. Rose, organizing minister who served 15 years, the church grew from the original 104 charter members to the present 800. A total of 400 nonmembers drawn from 28 denominations also attend.

The present minister, Rev. Philip Gentile, is assisted by a staff of

10 people who give full or part-time service to the church. They include Darryl Pedersen, director of music; Phyllis Loveless, secretary; Margaret Swanson, financial secretary; Florence Dobie, records; Lucena Caster, director of nursery school; Ila Smith and Virginia Lamb, teachers in nursery school; Lee Whitman, custodian; and Dorothy Whitman, housekeeper.

Organizations within the church include the Women's Association; Men's Fellowship; three social groups known as Mariners; Senior and Junior High Youth Fellowships; Scout groups; and three choirs.

TWO SERVICES for both adult worship and church school are held each Sunday morning except during the summer months. A crib-nursery, with registered nurse in attendance is provided for babies all year.

The church also conducts a registered day nursery five days a

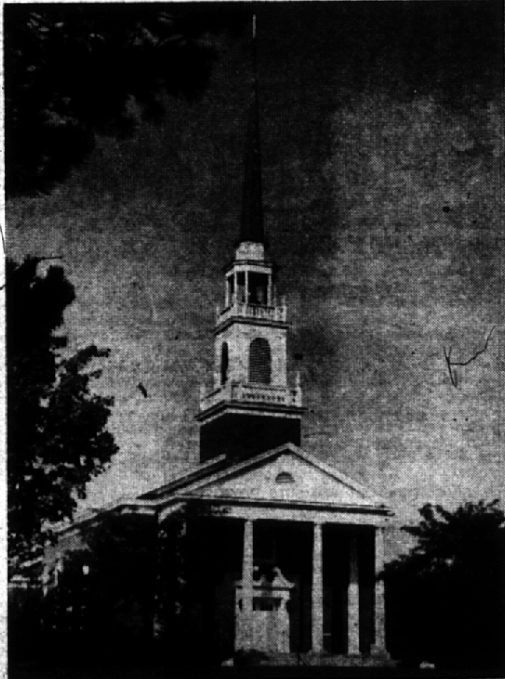
week for preschool children of the community.

Special activities over the years include helping to establish Pine Hill and two other Congregational churches in Birmingham.

Although the establishment of Lathrup's Congregational Church was a community affair to which everyone contributed, many individuals merit special mention. Some of the charter members were Leslie Brisebois, Thomas A. Myers, Charles Fey (only charter member left who attends regularly), Kenneth Thompson, Wendell Holmes, Joseph Rankin, Richard H. Stone and Charles W. Zink.

Mrs. Richard H. Stone served several times as president of the Women's Association.

This church is a member of the Detroit and National Council of Churches and the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches of U.S.A. In organization it is completely independent in nature and seeks to serve all Protestants in the community.



THE NEW Franklin Community Church was built on the Village Green in 1966, two blocks west of the original site. First regular service was conducted there on July 15, 1966. Construction is slated to start next month on a new educational wing and fellowship hall.

## Old Gives Way to New

### SAME BUILDING; DIFFERENT CONGREGATION

By MARILYNN DICKERSON  
Special Writer

In a log house on the Sly farm near Wing Lake, the first church in Franklin was organized. The year was 1831, barely three years after Franklin was officially named.

Begun as a Presbyterian church by the Rev. Hornell and Eliza Bull, the congregation occupied its first church building in 1848. The church stood north of the village on the west side of Franklin Road, near the Pickering tool house.

Preachers were supplied by the Pontiac church for several years. Deacon Bull was a pillar of the church until sometime in the 1870's when it was discontinued.

MEANTIME in 1840, a Methodist Protestant Church was organized with eight charter members. Laban Smith and Oliver Earl became pastors of the Franklin Circuit which included, in 1858, churches as far away as Redford and Lapeer County.

This church, now known as the Franklin Community Church, is the oldest continuous organization in Franklin and the first church of its denomination in Michigan. Its first church building still stands on German Mill Road where it has been the church home of the Frank-

lin Baptist Church for the past year.

Built in 1863 at a cost of \$210, it was a one-room frame structure.

THE ADDITION in 1906 included a belfry and a furnace and the building acquired a new cement block exterior. There was another addition in 1950. This building served until the congregation had grown to over 300 members.

After several year's planning, a red brick colonial styled church was built two blocks west on the Village Green. The Rev. Robert Searis held the first regular service in the new church on July 15, 1956.

Membership has now grown to over 800, and construction is expected to start in June, 1964, on a new educational wing and fellowship hall. The Rev. Kenneth Callis and the Rev. O. Price Taylor serve Franklin Community Church at this time.

Rev. Searis is retired and living in Cass City. Rev. Hugh White, pastor from 1960-63, is serving First Methodist Church in Plymouth.

MEMBERSHIP in Franklin Community Church has just been renewed by Mrs. Edward Dunlavy, widow of Rev. Edward Dunlavy who served the church in 1912-1921. Mrs. Dunlavy now resides in

the Chelsea home, and one of her daughters, Mrs. James Bowden, still lives in Franklin.

The white painted, hundred-year-old building on German Mill Road is serving a brand new congregation, organized March 24, 1963, under the sponsorship of the Galilean Baptist Mission which has organized 33 churches in the past 10 years. Rev. Lawrence Mattias began with a nucleus of three families and is conducting membership classes at the present time. The charter membership rolls have not been closed yet. The first baptism was held Palm Sunday.

This historic old church will see a new generation mature in "the town that time forgot."

### Round-Trip Ticket Across State—\$2.25

Many Birmingham citizens took advantage of the bargain offered by the local railroad in 1978. An excursion to Grand Rapids was promoted and folks from Birmingham could travel all the way across the state in only six hours—for only \$2.25.

This special price, which included the return trip, was ¼ less than the usual fare. "I said that the car from Birmingham was filled.