

KENT CHAPEL AND CEMETERY IS A COMMUNITY AFFAIR

A good many years ago a road near the Kent school house which passed the log cabin now standing, was called Kent Street because most of the people on that road belonged to the Kent family. Their names have become associated with the whole district by Kent school, the Kent chapel and Kent neighborhood, which terms are used today when speaking of that part of Madison and Jefferson townships.

A school house long stood on the spot where the Kent chapel now stands. This school house is now a farm house and unless one is told of this he would never suspect that this farm house had once been the school house which has sent several generations of children out into the world the better for the time spent there.

Some of the other families who have been connected with Kent are the Bagenstos family, the Ehrichs, the Leonards, the Hilligas, the Johnstons, the Johnsons, and the Millers, the Dees and the Cunninghams, besides, of course, the Kents and many others. The father of John Bagenstos built the log cabin which still stands just east of



the little chapel. The cemetery was once upon a time beside the school house. We wonder if the children played upon the tombstones or if they were taught that it was sacrilegious to walk on the graves. Some of them who played there are perhaps resting now in the silent city graves.

School houses were built before most of the churches, and were often used for church services. This was the case at Kent, and there was a Ladies Aid made up of women living five and six miles around Kent who belonged to the Kent Ladies Aid.

In 1907, the school houses of the county were redistricted and the Kent school house had to be moved. This left the cemetery with no place to go in case of rain and the people had been so used to having a building right there that they began at once to plan for another building to take the place of the school house which had served as church and community building also.

The school was moved a mile northeast. Some years later Madison township built all new school houses.

In the records of the minutes of the Ladies Aid meeting of June 2, 1907, may be found the original plans for the present Kent chapel. They called themselves the Kent Cemetery Aid. They set to work soliciting funds for the new building and giving suppers and all sorts of money making schemes.

The little building cost \$1,595.58. The Light Lumber Yard furnished the lumber, Breckenridge the stoves and some hardware accessories, Will Pierson wrote the first insurance on the new building. Art Coburn was the carpenter and the B. E. Dayton furniture store provided some of the interior needs. This money was all raised by private donations and by the work of the Aid.

The dedication was held May 23, 1909. The collection was \$94.53. The little church holds about 150 to 200 persons. It is lighted by kerosene or gasoline hanging lamps. The seats are movable and there are an unusual number of windows which are of frosted glass. The platform is large and there is a vestibule at the front. The church is equipped with a nice organ. At difference times improvements have been added by the Ladies Aid who also keep up the insurance and other repairs. This Aid has no special time of meeting, but always has an ice cream social in the summer and a supper in the fall.

The Memorial Day services are the only regular services held during the year. They used to have Sunday School regularly and church services occasionally. The church is nondenominational and for this reason is more truly a community enterprise than most country churches.

There are eleven civil war veterans buried there and one world war veteran. For years they have held Memorial services on the Sunday nearest May 30. The G.A.R. used always to go in a body to decorate the graves of their fallen. The American Legion goes each year to honor their dead. Mahlon Gray, of the 101st infantry, Co. C. He was born May 24, 1894, and was killed in France October 27, 1917. His body was sent home by the government and services were held at Kent.

The civil war soldiers who are buried there are: David Hilligas, Nathaniel Mix, M. F. Gray, L. C. Shaver, Allen B. Reams, Moses Kent, Samuel Kent, J.G. Force, L. Starr, Daniel Helman and Emelin Coulson.

The first funeral to be held in the new chapel was that of Ruth Ehrich, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Ehrich of Whittier, Calif. Mr. and Mrs. Ehrich lived in the Kent neighborhood for a good while and later moved to Brooklyn and from there going to California quite a number of years ago.

While the construction of the chapel was

in progress Ruth, age eight and her sister, now Mrs. Frank Johnston of Chelsea, were walking about the building. Ruth died of blood poisoning soon after the chapel was dedicated, and the services were held there and she was buried there. The little cemetery has nearly reached its capacity. There are not many graves but those who have lived in the Kent neighborhood have a sentiment attached to the little chapel which was built and has been kept up with so much work by the Ladies Aid of Kent.

Louis Kent and John Bagenstos occupy the homes of their fathers in the immediate Kent neighborhood.

Some of the ladies who helped reorganize the Aid to swing this project were: chairman, Mrs. Allie Miller; secretary, Mrs. Carrie Flouck; assistant secretary, Mrs. Katie Shaffer; president, Mrs. Mary Johnston; vice-president; Mrs. Ella Blake; treasurer, Mrs. Crip Johnson. The meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Dolly Roudabush. The building committee was composed of Allie Miller, Dolly Roudabush, Mary Hilligas, Flora Kent and Crip Johnson.

The fence committee was composed of Carrie Flouck, Flora Kent and Allie Miller.

There are many women now who are giving of their time and energy to keep the Kent Chapel in repair. They have had the usual troubles. Once a valuable new rug was stolen, another time some hunters shot holes through some of the windows and occasionally the locks on the doors will be broken.

Mr. and Mrs. Andy Hansen have been particularly active in keeping the church going and keeping up interest in it.

Mr. and Mrs. Will Showalter, son and daughter of the Hansens are caretakers. The township pays for the upkeep of the cemetery, but the church is kept up by the Ladies Aid.

Whether the younger generation will maintain Kent chapel and the cemetery the way it is being kept up now is a matter of conjecture. At any rate it has served its place in a community when and where it was needed and if in time it should no longer be needed and should be abandoned there is no reason to regret that it was built. There may be a back swinging of the pendulum some day and interest be revived in country churches – and again they may all be permanently abandoned – who knows?

We are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Johnston of Chelsea, for time and interest taken in helping us find out some of the facts about the Kent Chapel.