

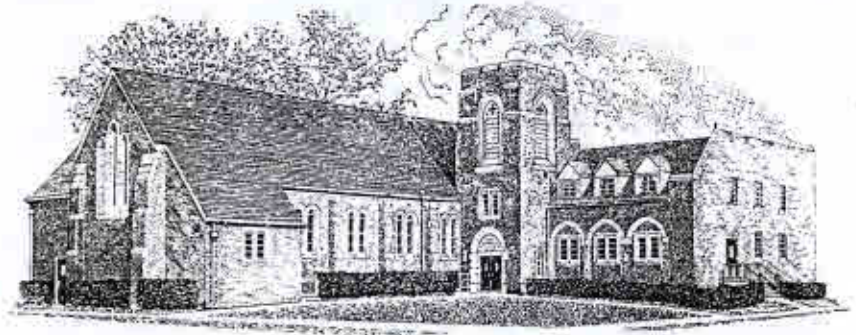
Palo Alto U. P. Church
Newton, Iowa



Est. 1870

The United Presbyterian Church

NEWTON, IOWA



Centennial History
1870 - 1970

FOREWORD

The Centennial Committee arranged a calendar of events to celebrate our first hundred years.

A Children's Day - - - - - June 14, 1970

An Ice Cream Social - - - - - June 23, 1970

A Church Picnic - - - - - September 9, 1970

A Palo Alto Service conducted by James Bennett, Marion Welle lining out the psalms, and George Hill presenting the history of Palo Alto - - September 27, 1970

Special Services conducted by Dr. W. Robert Smith - - October 16,17,18, 1970

A Reception honoring Mrs. Leota Bickett, Dr. and Mrs. Ray Davis and former members attending the Centennial
- - - - - November 28, 1970
2 to 4:30 P.M. in the manse.

The Centennial Worship Service
Dr. Ray Davis speaking - - November 29, 1970
10:45 A.M.

The Luncheon of the Congregation in the Maytag Hotel. Greetings will be brought by Rev. Clifford Croxford, Clerk of Iowa Synod, Dr. Richard Chambers from Des Moines Presbytery, and Fr. Frederick Kramer for the Newton churches - - - November 29, 1970
12:30 P.M.

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS
1870 - 1970**

The United Presbyterian Churches of Palo Alto and Newton were formally organized by Des Moines Presbytery as one congregation on December 3, 1870.

Palo Alto in Wild Cat Grove

A number of United Presbyterian and Reformed Presbyterian families near Wild Cat Grove felt the need of a neighborhood Bible School and worship service many months before a church was formed. Mrs. Susie Greef of Eldora, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Hill, preserved a history written by her mother of the first 25 years of Palo Alto's life. This history states that five families near Wild Cat Grove took the lead in establishing a church there. They were the Robert M. Hill, Rees, McCartney, Matchett, and Keller families. Other homes in the area joined them in Wild Cat Grove school for Sunday School and "psalm-singing."



Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Rees

First settlers in what was to be Palo Alto township. Married in Ohio, March 4, 1845, they arrived in Iowa in 1848. Thomas died in 1865. Mrs. Rees married Isaac Badger in 1867 and they bought land for Palo Alto church.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Rees were among the first to dream of a church building near the Palo Alto township cemetery. They were the first family to settle in the area, coming from Hancock County, Ohio, in 1848. For four years they had no neighbor closer than four miles and Mrs. Rees did not see the face of a white woman in the first three months. Many Indians hunted through the Skunk River val-

M. & Mrs.
Thomas Rees

The committee also decided to compile a history covering the main course of Palo Alto and Newton from 1870 to 1970. This is submitted in the following pages. We do so with the hope this will be a lasting reminder of our heritage.

We regret that this written history suffers the weakness of all written accounts in centering upon leaders and large events and rarely deals with the quiet membership that makes history.

No one can review our history without gratitude to God for abundant signs of His grace. Nor can we leave it without a sense of obligation to share in the labor of the pioneers.

THE CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

Mr. and Mrs. Tim Campbell, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Ersel Conine
Mr. and Mrs. Homer Denniston
Mr. and Mrs. Loren Loupee
Mr. and Mrs. Jim Tyler
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vance

ley. The Rees family had a friendly relationship with them, allowing them to sleep in front of their fireplace in very cold weather. The log cabin now placed in Maytag Park belonged to a son, Roland Rees. It is larger than any cabin his parents ever had. The first Thomas Rees cabin was 18' by 20' and the second cabin in 1853 not much larger.

Rees followed his trade of stonecutter in the summer and taught school in the winter. When the family moved from Ohio to Iowa, they went to Cincinnati where they took a boat to Burlington, finishing the journey to Jasper County by ox-cart. At the time of his death he owned 750 acres and was known as a good manager and an ardent Democrat.

Thomas Rees did not live to see his dream of a church for Palo Alto come true for he died in 1865. However, Mrs. Rees married Isaac Badger on May 1, 1867, and in 1870 they bought a piece of the Ryan property across from the cemetery for the Palo Alto church. They deeded the land to the trustees of the church when it had been built.

Interest in having a church home increased the more the Wild Cat families gathered, a feeling Rev. Johnston must have encouraged when he conducted services for them. Rev. William Johnston of Monroe had been engaged early in 1869 by the founding groups in Newton and Palo Alto to lead worship services for them.



Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Hill

Mr. Hill took initiative in the building of Palo Alto church. Mrs. Hill remained a firm member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church but shared fully in all services of Palo Alto.

In February of 1869, Robert M. Hill rode his fine horse, Black Jack, ten miles to Monroe across the Skunk River through mud and slush to see Rev. Johnston about what

Robert M. Hill

must be done to build a church. The preacher was not at home, of course, but Mrs. Johnston gave him enough information to get started.

On the way home Robert Hill stopped to see Anson B. Rees and they agreed that the time had come to build. Mrs. Anson Rees was Robert Hill's sister, Maggie. The same evening Robert Hill went to Wild Cat School "where singing was in progress" and announced that a subscription paper would be started the next day to build a United Presbyterian Church in the Grove. The next day, February 9, the first subscription paper was started and \$1,000 was subscribed. \$2,000 was pledged before the list was complete.

Robert M. Hill was one of a remarkable family having its origins in Tyrone County, Ireland. Our present George R. Hill explains how "the Hills in order stood." Hugh and Jane Hill were the parents of Robert M., William and George R. Hill. The daughters in the home were Mrs. Anson Rees, Mrs. J. W. Rhodes (mother of James Rhodes, publisher of the Daily News in Newton), Mrs. James Campbell and Mrs. David Matchett. Each one played a leading part in the development of both Palo Alto and Newton churches.

Robert M. Hill came to America in 1853 and to Jasper County in 1854. He married Annie Alexander in 1865. Kate Hill was one of their children. She went to India in mission work in 1896 and spent most of her life there.



Miss Kate Hill

Daughter of Robert M. Hill, she was one of two ladies from Palo Alto and Newton who served for a lifetime in India. Lauretta Dickson was the other. This shows Kate as administrator of Memorial Hospital, Sialkot City, Punjab, India.

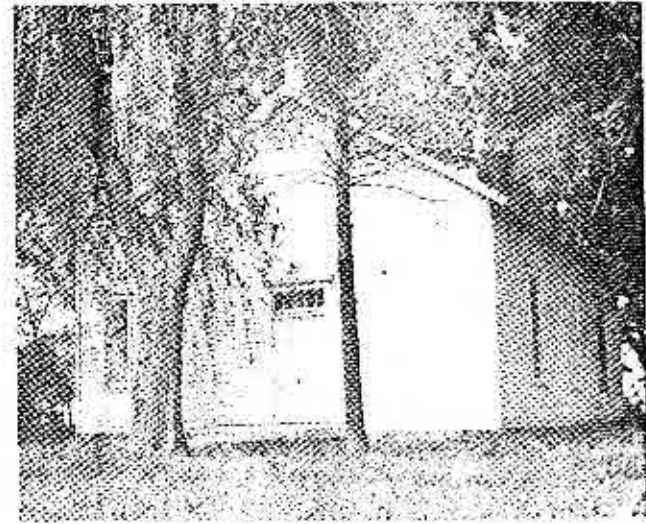
The whole Robert Hill family attended church services morning and evening. After one evening service noses were counted at home and Kate was missing. A hurried trip had to be made back to the church to retrieve her, asleep in a pew.

Hill was an active man. He went to Kansas in May of 1856 when the Pro-Slavery skirmishing broke out. He crossed the Missouri River with his team and wagon at St Joseph, just before the ferry was captured by Pro-Slavery forces. They robbed him of \$210 gold and his team and wagon and left him bound and gagged. Somehow he escaped and recovered his team and wagon but not his gold. He was gone so long that his neighbors at home felt he was dead. A funeral sermon was preached in his absence, which he often declared to be unfair. An interesting sidelight is that local people might not have known much about what had happened except that eastern newspapers printed the story and it was finally picked up by the Jasper County paper.

As the subscription paper was passed about, the location of the Palo Alto church became the subject of discussion. The cemetery had been located a few years before, and it was the general opinion that the church building should be near the cemetery. The lot most of them favored was the one Thomas Rees had talked about many years before, directly west of the cemetery. Conrad Keller offered a lot south of the graveyard free of charge. The lot across from the graveyard was owned by Martin Ryan, a member of the Catholic Church. He placed a price of \$60 on the plot of land provided he could harvest the good timber first. Robert Hill stated that this plot might be worth as much as \$15.

It might have remained at an impasse except for Mrs. Isaac Badger, the former wife of Thomas Rees. One morning Mr. Hill met Mr. and Mrs. Badger looking over the possible two sites near the Palo Alto graveyard. Mrs. Badger was interested in the Ryan land and Mr. Hill declared he also was favorable to that but that the price of \$60 was a hold-up. Mrs. Badger quietly told Mr. Hill that if she paid for the Ryan land it was no one else's business. To which Mr. Hill cheerfully said "Amen." Ryan got his price and the oak timber on the acre and Mr. Rees's dream was fulfilled.

On February 14, 1870, the work of building began. Anson Rees, William Hill, and Charles Keller were the building committee with Robert McCartney and Robert Hill ex-officio members.



Palo Alto Church

The church building is much the same today as on its dedication day, December 3, 1870. The bell tower was added and later removed. The bell was saved and is placed as a memorial near the front entrance. The pulpit was moved from the west end to the north side in early days.

Mrs. Robert Hill's account reads: "On the 18th day of February, 1870, the first stick of timber was cut and hauled from Adamson's Grove. The whole foundation is hewn and native timber. The rock came from Hay's quarry, now known as Albee's. Mr. Martin of Reasnor did the masonry work. Everyone set to work with determination and, after subscribing money, donated labor. Among those prominent: John R. Bain, James Wasson, Robert D. Blizzard, J. J. McCartney, and George R. Hill. When the contract was let to a Newton carpenter, Mr. Connelly, the building committee had spent in money only the price of two barrels of lime. All the hauling of rock, sand, timber, and hewing lumber for foundation and mortising ready for the studding had been donated."

Mrs. Badger fed the men who hauled rock and sand and Mrs. Jane Hill and Mrs. Robert Hill fed those who hauled timber. By the 4th of July the building was enclosed, lathed, and ready for plaster.

The Honorable David Rankin, Treasurer of the State of Iowa, was invited to be the orator of the day at a 4th of July celebration and dinner. One report gives it that he could not be present to speak but sent \$30. Another account gives it

as \$20, but either way they got what counted. "Quite a number of Newton folks came to the dinner and left a liberal donation."

Organization of the Churches

Preliminary organization of both congregations had been made in October, 1870. One minute exists for a meeting in the courthouse in Newton on October 15, 1870. It reads in part — "It was agreed by members and adherents of the U. P. Church in the neighborhood of Newton and Wild Cat Grove (Palo Alto) to form for the present one organization to be called the United Congregation of Newton and Palo Alto, a part of the officers to be elected from each locality and preaching to be divided between the two points shall best subserve the interest of the general cause and as shall be most satisfactory and equitable to all concerned."

There is another minute of a meeting in Newton, October 25, 1870 (one account gives the date as October 26), when charter members of the Newton church were received. Tim Campbell, Sr. made a thorough study of available records and gives the following as charter members:

- John and Janet Leeper (from U.P. Church, Monroe, Ia.)
- Mrs. Sarah Campbell (from U.P. Church, New Salem, Ohio)
- Mrs. Lydia Wilson (from U.P. Church, Bethel, Pa.)
- John C. Herron (from U.P. Church, Low Point, Ill.)
- Mrs. Jane Arthur (from Presbyterian Church, Newton, Iowa)
- Mrs. Isabelle D. Vaughn (from Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)
- Mrs. Margaret Miller (from U.P. Church, Cedar Creek, near Monmouth, Ill.)
- Joseph Miller, on public profession of faith.

Miss Jessie Herron gave a charter list similar to this in her history, except that she names both Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Herron.

In the Oct. 25 meeting John Leeper was elected the first elder and Joseph Miller the first trustee of the Newton church. The second Newton elder, Alexander Dickson, was not elected until 1876. His daughter, Laurella Dickson, devoted her life to mission work in India.



Mr. and Mrs. John Leeper

Mr. Leeper, the first elder of the Newton church, brother of Sarah Campbell. They were all members of the New Salem, Ohio, church where the Rev. William Johnston had been pastor before coming to Monroe.

Wednesday, November 30, 1870, the meetings preliminary to organization began in the new Palo Alto building and other meetings were conducted during the week.

On Saturday, December 3, the Commission of Des Moines Presbytery conducted the meeting for formal organization of the joint congregation and dedication of the building. Rev. William Johnston and two elders of the Monroe church, David Mateer and T. L. Shaw, were the members of the commission.

The list of charter members of Palo Alto given here is one given by Tim Campbell, Sr. and checked with the official membership roll furnished by George R. Hill, at present elder in the Newton church.

- Mrs. Jane Hill (from Reformed Presbyterian Church, Brookland, North Washington, Westmoreland County, Pa.)
- Mrs. Mary Keller (from Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)
- Robert M. Hill and A.J.A. Hill (Mrs. R.M.)
- Henry C. Richardson and Lydia, his wife (Henry from Meth. Episcopal Church, Lancaster, N. H. and Lydia from Reformed Presbyterian Church, Ryegate, Vt.)
- David J. Matchett (received on examination Dec. 4, 1870 and baptized Jan. 16, 1871)
- Mrs. Jane A. Early (from Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)

Palo Alto
Charter
Members

James Early (formerly of Newton Presbyterian Church)
 James and Sarah L. McCracken (from Presbyterian Church, Colfax, Ia.)
 Anson Rees and Margaret Rees (Anson from the Brethren Church and Margaret by profession of faith)
 Robert and Mary S. McCartney (from Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)
 Mrs. Levi McCracken (formerly Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)
 Mrs. Eleanor Kirk (formerly of Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ia.)

Fifteen of the charter members were received on the Dec. 3, 1870, day of organization, the rest on the Sunday following, Dec. 4. Mr. Campbell speaks of this list as "evidently making up the first roll of the Palo Alto church."

In the December 3rd organization meeting, Robert McCartney was elected the first elder from Palo Alto to serve with the Newton elders and Anson Rees and Henry Richardson were the first trustees elected. At this time the two sets of officers joined to govern the two churches as one congregation.

Another note given by George R. Hill tells of membership additions in the early years. "Mrs. Isaac Badger, F. P. Rees family, Spencer Rees family, James McCartney family, George R. Hill and Nannie Hill (later Mrs. James Campbell). The names of Riley, Bish, Bain, French, Charlesworth, Hall, Wilson, Gosford, Thomas, Sandusky, Raisbeck, Dickson, Springer, Murdock, Peters, Little, Wasson, McCracken, Lynn, Lyon, Reed, Bovaird, Garry, West, Bayless, Ryan, Spearing, Snook, Harlan, Fales, all appear and reappear in baptisms and church memberships and many of these names appear again in the Newton church rolls. The Kellers, Harlans, and Atwoods were all related by marriage, as were the Charlesworths, Frenchs, and Vances. Mrs. William Hill was a Charlesworth and a sister of Mrs. James Vance. The Hills and the Rees families were also related by marriage. Mrs. W. E. Denniston was a Wilson."

The Rev. William Johnston was pastor of the Monroe United Presbyterian Church, established in 1861. He had been pastor of the church in New Salem, Ohio. Mrs. Sarah Campbell was the sister of John Leeper and they had been members of the New Salem, Ohio, church served by Rev. Johnston. As Mr. Campbell points out, it could hardly be coincidence that the new church in Palo Alto and Newton

became United Presbyterian. However, the majority of the charter members of both churches were not United Presbyterian, indeed came from a variety of denominations, one of the characteristics of the congregation throughout its history.

The Newton Church

The Newton half of the new United Presbyterian Church wandered from place to place in its early years, "wherever a place could be had," as Rev. W. O. Chisholm, a later pastor writes. "The court house, the hall of what is now Clark's Bank (just north of the alley on the east side of the square) and afternoons in the Presbyterian Church were not strangers to the tuneful Psalmody of the pioneer worshippers." Mr. Tim Campbell, Sr. also lists "a hall in the second story of a building in the 200 block in the south side of First Avenue East."

The Universalist Church building on the present corner was rented and finally purchased on March 11, 1886, for \$1,500. Universalist Church purchased

Early records of the Newton church are scarce. From 1870 to 1890 little or nothing exists except the "tradition of the elders." The first list gives a wavering reference to the fact that Gershom Vance and William Hill were elected elders and served with John Leeper and Alexander Dickson



Gershom Vance

Session records speak of Gershom Vance as an elder of the Newton church, serving with John Leeper and William Hill during difficult early years when the church was often without a minister.

to the end of their lives. The first definite session record is of a meeting April 23, 1898, and signed by William Hill, Clerk, and John Ferguson, Moderator.

It is clear that the prime movers of the Newton church were Mr. and Mrs. John Leeper, Mrs. Sarah Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Miller and Mr. and Mrs. John C. Herron. They were soon joined by Vances, Mays, Crawfords, Larimers, McKinleys, Kirks, Dicksons and many others.

Pastors

Pastoral services for Palo Alto and Newton were furnished by the same minister from the time of organization through the ministry of Rev. Ralph Jamieson, 1911 - 1913. None of the six ministers who made the four-mile trip to Palo Alto and back each Sabbath had an automobile. They cared for services in Newton in the morning and drove horse and buggy to Palo Alto to conduct the afternoon service.



The Rev. E. F. Gillis family.

Rev. Gillis was pastor from 1903 to 1910 and is referred to as "a hard worker". He helped both churches organize strong Bible Schools and left them with good congregational structure.

The pastors of the Newton church who also served the Palo Alto church are:

Rev. E. S. McMichael, 1872-1879
Rev. J. A. Ferguson, 1879-1882
Rev. J. A. McCalmont, 1886-1890
Rev. John Ferguson, 1896-1903
Rev. E. F. Gillis, 1903-1910
Rev. R. A. Jamieson, 1911-1913



Rev. W. O. Chisholm

Pastor from 1914 - 1924, during years of rapid growth in the Newton church. The move from country to town had begun. Pastors of Newton church no longer served Palo Alto. The Chisholms were the first family to live in the old manse, S. 3rd Ave. E.

Pastors serving the Newton church only are:

Rev. W. O. Chisholm, 1914-1924
Rev. S. A. McCollam, 1924-1928
Rev. Willard Wylie, 1928-1933
Rev. John W. Bickett, D.D., 1933-1938
Rev. W. W. Johnson, 1938-1943
Rev. Ray Davis, D.D., 1944-1950
Rev. W. W. Johnson, D.D., 1951-

The Palo Alto church was served by Rev. Joseph McNab from 1914-1915, Rev. W. N. Leeper from 1915-1916 and Rev. Fred S. Bull in 1917.

Minutes from Palo Alto give some insight on pastoral services previous to the call of Rev. McMichael in 1872. "At the April meeting of Presbytery, 1871, a grant of \$300 was obtained for preaching all the time. Accordingly, H. F. Wallace, R. C. Wyatt, A. J. Graham, A. McCartney, J. Taylor, J. T. Tate, G. F. McCaughie, J. F. Martin, S. M. Black, H. M. Walton, R. Gray, S. MacArthur, and E. S. McMichael occupied the pulpit as supplies from April 1, 1871, to October 1, 1872, while W. Johnston, J. Boyd, and R. Turnbull occupied the pulpit occasionally during the winter of 1870 to 1871. A unanimous call having been moderated for Mr. McMichael the Presbytery was convened in the church November 19, 1872, and he was ordained and installed pastor of Newton and Palo Alto."

So the Rev. E. S. McMichael came to be the first minister of the two churches in 1872. Mrs. McMichael served as Superintendent of the Bible School, at that time meeting at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in the Presbyterian Church. This was a time of growth.

In the early years there were extended periods when no minister was on the field and services depended on supply preachers. The families in both churches worked and sacrificed to establish their places of worship. In times when there was no minister, John Leeper, Mary Miller, and Robert Hill led the people in great efforts to maintain the two churches.

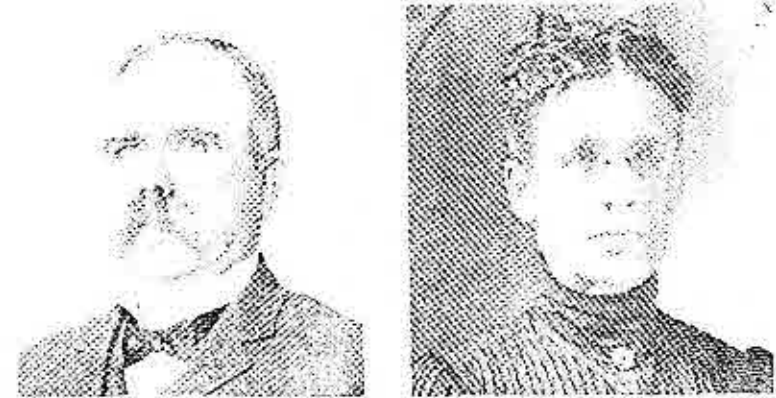
Rev. J. A. Ferguson had a brief ministry from 1879-1882, years of growth for the Bible schools of both congregations. There was a four-year interval until Rev. J. A. McCalmont took up the work in 1886, working in Palo Alto until 1889 and in Newton until 1890.

Miss Jessie Herron writes in her "History of Our United Presbyterian Sabbath School from 1872-1930," "Then came the most discouraging time in the history of our S.S." There was a vacancy in the pulpit in Newton from 1890 to 1896, and since the same minister worked in Palo Alto, that church also felt the lack. "Members moved away, the young people scattered to other schools."

The situation was so discouraging that a meeting was called to consider disbanding the Newton congregation. The motion was made to disband but before it was put to a

vote Mary Miller stated that she felt "God still has a work for the United Presbyterian Church in Newton and will send help." They did not vote on the motion and decided to try again.

Mary Miller



Mr. and Mrs. William Hill

Mr. Hill served as elder, clerk of Session and Superintendent of the Bible School of the Newton church for many years. His efforts in the 1890s kept the church from disbanding and filled the church with new members.

Then comes a remarkable time of progress. William Hill assumed the responsibility of reactivating the Bible School. He had a winning personality and was so consecrated that he drove his horse and buggy up and down the streets and invited every man, woman, and child into the Bible School who had no church home. The children responded and through the children the parents came in. Families now in the church are descendants of those who gratefully acknowledge their debt to William Hill. It is likely the church would have disbanded without his leadership.

William Hill

Rev. John Ferguson accepted a call to minister to the two churches in 1896, just at the time when William Hill's leadership turned the tide and attendance increased to the point of crowding the church. It was truly "a missionary field" as Miss Herron writes and Rev. Ferguson and Mr. Hill continued to work together to increase and consolidate the gains.

Rev. John Ferguson

In 1897 the cornerstone was laid for the brick building replacing the earliest frame building. The church remained on the same corner. The lot and construction of the church came to \$4,500 and the building was paid for by the time of dedication on April 3, 1898. Some contributions were made

New Brick Church in Newton

Rev. E. S. McMichael

Vacancies

Rev. J. A. Ferguson

Rev. J. A. McCalmont

A discouraging time

