

# Rockland County Journal News

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## Stony Point M. E. Church Is Hundred Years Old June 14; Plan Week Of Celebration

*{Editor's Note: The congregation chose to celebrate the church's centennial at the start of our 100th Year.}*

When the First M. E. Church at Stony Point on Sunday evening Inaugurates the week of festivities and special services which will celebrate its centennial, it also will be commemorating an outstanding event in the history of Rockland County, the founding of the second Methodist church to be established here.

Also the carefully planned events no doubt will commemorate the high Idealism and Intrepid spirit of the little band of men and women whose first meeting place was the parlor in one of their homes and who brought the church together member by member, dollar by dollar, until finally it was built and dedicated on June 14, 1833 (sic).

Today the church stands on a high hill west of Stony Point, an old-fashioned building, white and shining in the June sunshine against the surrounding trees, its spire raised like a beckoning hand for all the country round about to see. "God's Acre," as those sturdy church builders called their cemeteries, stretches along one side and upon the stones which mark the graves are cut many of the names of those whose hopes and dreams and best efforts went into the founding of the church.

Once it was known as the "Bell Church" because it was the first house of worship in that part of Rockland County to have a bell in its steeple. Later it became known as the "Creek Church" because of its position overlooking the deep ravine cut by the Stony Point Creek. Still later it was called "St. George's." But now it is just the Stony Point Methodist Church, beloved of its congregation of ninety or more.

Across the street and down the hill a bit is the home of the pastor, the Rev. William Aten, and Mrs. Aten, and here in an age-yellowed old ledger you may read something of the early history of the church as it was set down in his old-fashioned, slanting hand by the Rev. A. S. Compton, shepherd of the flock in 1873. Prior to this record, Mrs. Aten explained as she fingered the time-worn book, there had been no written chronicle of the church and the Rev. Compton wrote his story retrospectively, after gathering what information there was to be gathered of the early days.

Sixty-nine years before the time of his writing, he began, Daniel Phillips had been moved "to receive the gospel of Jesus and to publish in to his neighbors." There was at this time no Methodist church in the region. But Mr. Phillips met the Rev. Mr. Fowler, a circuit rider of those days, who sided with advice and suggestions to such effect that Mr. Phillips opened his home and invited his neighbors to hear a sermon. Among those who accepted the invitation was a Mr. Wandall who lived in Garnerville, and from this evening the Phillips and the Wandall homes were entered upon the circuit of the Rev. Fowler and the Rev. William Hibbard, who came to preach once in every four weeks.

A class meeting was established and Daniel Phillips appointed the leader and, according to the Rev. Compton's story, "his house became the resting place for the preacher to have his washing and ironing done, after which he went on his way rejoicing."

Shortly another name became the prominent in the group, that of Mr. Thiel whose "head, heart, pocket and house all felt the regenerating power," according to the Rev. Compton. Mr. Thiel's doors were opened and his table spread not only for the ministers but for many men and women who traveled miles to attend the services. Eventually his house became the preaching home since it was more centrally located than that of Mr. Phillips.

"Among the first preachers after Fowler and Hibbard were James Sherwood, whose children's children we still have with us," the chronicler wrote in 1873. Others who joined the flock were Charles Pitman, a Mrs. Van Buskirk, a Mr. Finlay and a singer, Mr. Banghart.

At this time the organization of Rockland County's first Methodist church - the one at Haverstraw - was getting under way. The little congregation had found a barn in which to hold their meetings. The barn was on the Denoyelles property, this being in 1828 when Haverstraw was called Warren instead. It was five years later that the church at Stony Point was put up and that building forms a part of the edifice which now stands on the hill, on ground given for the purpose by Matthew and Delia Gurnee.

"The dedication on June 14, 1833 (*sic*), was a remarkable event in the community," the Rev. Compton stated. "People came from afar to attend. Mothers carried their children for miles to witness the ceremonies and some of those children now are among our oldest members." The Board of Trustees appointed at this time was composed of John T. (*sic*) Bulson, William H. Rose and Abram Knapp and these three had much to do with the building of the church.

Ministers serving after Fowler and Pitman were James Sherwood, the Rev. Messrs. Finley, Banghart, and Manning Force. After the dedication the Rev. Messrs, Felor, Brown, Loomis, Burroughs and Day Ashbrook were added to the list and first one whom the writer designated as a married man was the Rev. G. Van Horn. After him came the Rev. Messrs, Hurr. Chamberlain, Wolf, Stokes, Wiggins, R. Winans, G. Winans, Seran, Walters, Barrett, Johns, and then the writer, the Rev. Compton.

It was the last-named pastor who was serving at the half century celebration when the church was trimmed with evergreens and flowers and a large congregation sat down in a love feast in the evening following a day of services and rejoicing.

The ministers from that time to the present have been the Rev. Messrs, Henry Haler, Jacob. P. Fort, E. V. King, W. R. Kufes (*sic*), T. H. Landon, A. J. Craig, Andrew Henry, G. K. Doolittle, G. F. Apgar, J. H. Piper, D. W. Ryder, W. H. Burlly, L. G. Gunn, George H. Hill, E. H. Conklin, W. H. Fasset, R. W. Spencer, G. S. Harper, Alan F. Bain and William Aten. Rev. Mr. Aten has served the church for the past nine years.

A gala week in honor the centennial has been arranged by Rev. Mr. Aten and his committee. Events for every evening have been planned and the series will culminate on June 18 when Bishop Francis

J. McConnell, one of the heads of the Methodist church in the United States will preach the morning service.

Next Sunday at 10:30 o'clock the week will be opened with the sermon by the Rev. John Krantz of Paterson, N. J. At eight o'clock in the evening, Children's Day will be observed with a special program by pupils of the Sunday school and the baptism of infants. Each evening there is to be a musical program by an orchestra.

Monday, June 12, will be observed as "Community Night" when, at a service beginning at eight o'clock, pastors and congregations of the churches of Stony Point and vicinity will be invited to attend. Mrs. Harry Blanche will be the soloist.

At the service at eight o'clock on Tuesday evening, June 13, Rev. C. W. Wright, district superintendent, will make an address and Mrs. Edgar Compton of Belleville, N. J. will be the soloist.

"Patriotic Night" will be held on Flag Day, June 14, when members of patriotic orders of the community, and veterans of the Spanish American and World Wars will be invited to attend services. Rev. Wilber Westcott of Jersey City will be the speaker and Miss Rose Keesler of Tomkins Cove will be the soloist.

On Thursday evening, June 15, an outstanding service will be held at which the speaker will be Rev. Edward Betterton of St. Paul's church, Nyack.

The service on Friday evening will be devoted to former pastors of the church and their wives. Invitations have been sent to all of those living and a definite program will be arranged when responses to the invitations have been received. Mrs. Evelyn Ryder is to be the soloist.

There will be no service on Saturday night but on the following day, Sunday, June 18, Bishop McConnell will preach at the morning service and in the evening the celebration will be concluded with the Young People's Council of Religious Education in charge.