

Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

Mt. Hebron United Methodist Church 144 Mt. Hebron Road, Strasburg, VA 22657



A Brief History

The residents in what is now the Fisher's Hill area of Shenandoah County were of mostly Germanic descent, and following their immigration to the area, often gathered to hold religious meetings when visiting United Brethren preachers made their rounds. They often met in schoolhouses and private homes, but by 1846, the consensus of the faithful was that there needed to be a new building dedicated to their faith. Henry and Hannah Funkhouser donated a small parcel of land, trustees were elected, and work commenced on the building of their church. The building was to be located in a mature grove of trees so that both the building, and participant's horses, would be shaded from the worst summer heat. The

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structure was finished by the next year, and was formally dedicated on October 31, 1847, with a sermon in German followed by a sermon in English. The structure was simple, being of a 30 by 40 foot oblong shape, with 2 entrance doors on one of the short sides to allow male and female congregants to enter separately. The frame building was covered with whitewashed wood boards, and lacked both bell tower and ornamental windows. Candles were used for lighting when the glassed-in windows didn't permit enough natural light, and a wood stove gave what heat could be had in the large room.

The community quickly established a Sunday School and a "Missionary Society" (for male members), and by 1850, hosted the annual United Brethren Conference. The first funeral mentioned being held at Mt. Hebron was on March 19, 1851; an adjoining church cemetery would not be established until 1882, when additional land was purchased from Franklin Sibert and David and Georgia Stickley. During the Civil War years a local member and diarist, Levi Pitman, noted that Rebel soldiers encamped nearby attended services at Mt. Hebron several times, and stories passed down through local families indicated that the church building served as a makeshift hospital during the Battle of Fisher's Hill, although this story has not been corroborated. The years following the war saw the church members involved with "all-day meetings", camp meetings, a "singing school", "protracted meetings" (which was their term for what we know as revival meetings), and the establishment of a "Women's Missionary Society".



Levi Pitman

The church required frequent repairs and the usual upkeep, as members repaired the roof, repainted, replaced fencing and steps, bought lamps and new Bibles, and made new pews as needed. (Much of this is documented in great detail in the aforementioned Levi Pitman diaries). There was some reconfiguration of the interior in 1870, carpeting was added by at least 1883, and some rebuilding was done again in 1897, but the structure remained essentially the same until 1915, when a forward-looking pastor, Rev. F. B. Chubb, persuaded the congregation to commence a major renovation. At that time, a portion of the long back wall was extended to make room for a chancel area, the doorways were restructured, a bell tower was added, and the plain glass windows were replaced by stained glass ones. A sliding interior "wall" made it possible to set off part of the building for Sunday School activities. New pews replaced the plain ones that had been in the building since its establishment, and the installation of an embossed metal ceiling completed the transformation of the church. The re-made building was dedicated on March 28, 1915.

The church continued to be a focal point of the community, and saw the usual meetings, services, baptisms and funerals. Yard parties and Ladies Aid meetings involved lots of spirituality - and food! The building itself continued to change, albeit in less structurally significant ways than in 1915. July, 1941 brought electrification to the church, the white picket fence out front was replaced by a beautiful stone wall shortly after World War 2, and central heating was installed in 1964. At the same time, a cistern was added for water collection for church-goers. The attic was insulated in 1976, and vinyl siding was applied during 1985. Steps were taken to preserve the by-now venerable stained glass memorial windows in 1992. And finally, just after the year 2000, parishioners were able to see to their needs inside, as indoor plumbing came to Mt. Hebron!

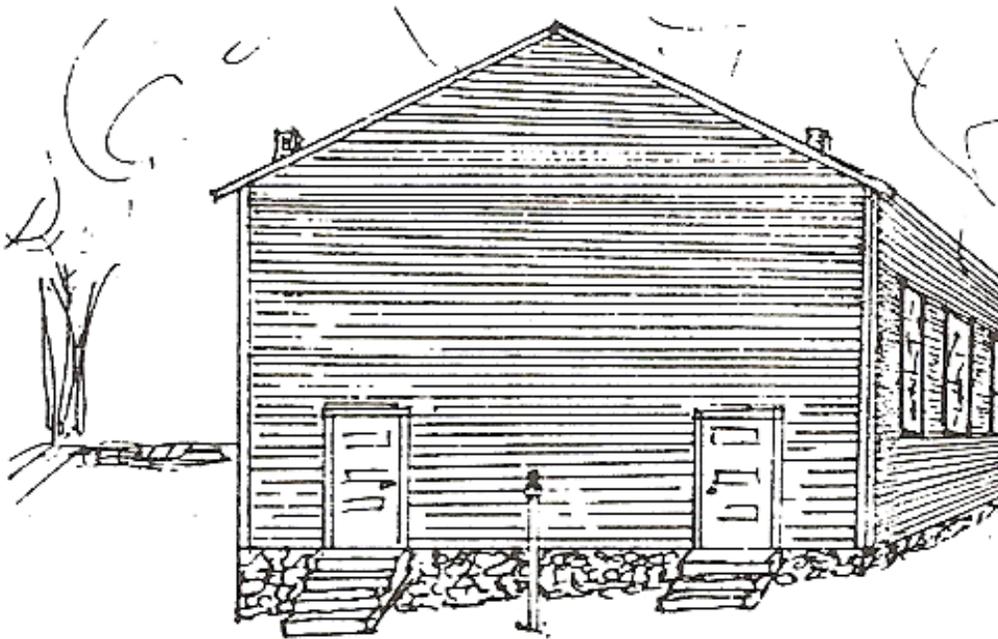
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As well as cosmetic and structural changes, the people of the church found their church renamed in 1946, as the United Brethren in Christ denomination joined with the Evangelical Church, which was another denomination founded by worshippers from a German background. The melded denomination became known as the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB), but few changes were made in the services and core beliefs of the church members. A further re-naming happened following the merger of the EUB church with the Methodist Church in 1966, whereby the United Methodist appellation became part of the name of every church in the new denomination. The present church continues to house a small congregation of locals, and is remembered fondly by many others who have called Mt. Hebron their church home throughout the years.

Submitted by Carolyn Jones, condensed from the book "A History of Mt. Hebron Church" by Martha Baker Jones



Sketch of the early Mt. Hebron

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Preparing for lunch during the all-day meeting in 1946



New fence installed



Homecoming 2012

Note the stained glass window to the left of the picture

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