

125 Years of Play and Praise

Idana, Five Creeks Township, Clay County, Kansas

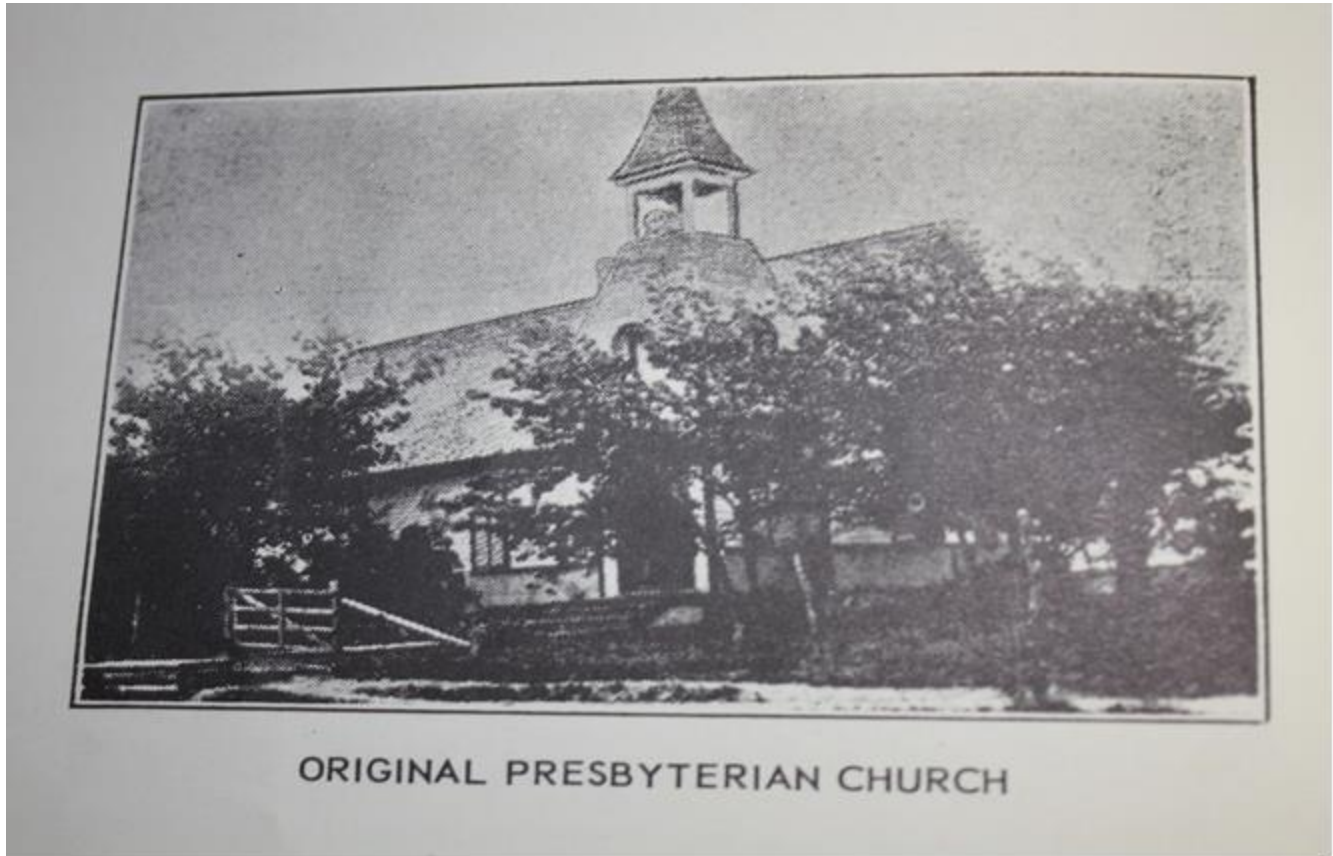


Figure 1. This is a photograph of the original church. Circa 1900. SOURCE: Idana Presbyterian Church: 1887-1987 centennial booklet. The building looks very similar to the church building today.

By Rachel Regier, Bridget Beran, Dani Golway
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Idana is a small community with a large heart for its church and people. In 1887, the Idana Presbyterian Church began and has remained strong ever since. The church's centennial in 1987 brought people from Idana back home, traveling from as far as Oregon. Now as they prepare for the 125 anniversary, the people of this town look forward to many festivities with the newly refurbished church building that has been a focal point in this community for over a century.

Idana, in Five Creeks Township, Clay County, Kansas, nine miles west of Clay Center, is a small close-knit community. Standing tall in the middle of this community is its heart and soul, the Idana Presbyterian Church. Founded in 1887, members came together to form a congregation that has held together for 125 years. Two years after the formation of the congregation, the building was erected in 1889 and called the First Presbyterian Church of Idana, pictured in Figure 1. Through the years, the building has been updated and undergone one name change, but its influence remains the same.

Idana was founded in 1882 as a smattering of small homesteads near a set of railroad tracks. The Howland and Broughton families settled the area and the heads of the families combined the names of their respective wives, Ida and Anna, and thus Idana was born, according to the Epodunk website, retrieved on May 6, 2013.

Just a short while after these two families settled in the area, the Meek family joined them. Hailing from Indiana, Capt. John A. Meek and his wife came to Idana after their marriage stirred up controversy in their home state. The state of Indiana did not recognize the marriage of Meek to his cousin and they were asked to leave. Capt. Meek was a Civil War veteran; he fought for the Union Army before settling down with his family in the small Kansas community. According to Tom Meek, John's great-grandson who now resides in Clay Center, Meek was largely responsible for erecting a Veteran's Memorial, which stands in front of the courthouse in Clay Center, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. A photograph of the veterans memorial in Clay Center, Clay County, Kansas. Photograph by Bridget Beran, spring 2013. This memorial honors all veterans in Clay County.

In 1885, Idana more than doubled in size with the arrival of this new family that bought up acres of land. The aspiring town grew around the Union Pacific Railroad, expecting to be a hub town for travelers to rest, shop and make connections.

After the introduction of the automobile around 1902, Idana suffered its first serious setback in growth. The railroad industry took a huge hit when families began buying personal vehicles and small railroad towns suffered major losses in revenue and foot traffic. Many of Idana's families left in search of other opportunities and, as generations passed, its population continued to decline, according to Taylor Meek, 76 and a retired farmer who lives in the country near Idana.

Despite the loss of population, Idana Presbyterian Church remained a steady fixture in Idana. The church and its congregation continue to thrive today, with services being held every Sunday since 1887. Currently, the church, pictured in Figure 3 below, has 56 members, a number which doubles the

population of the community.



Figure 3. Photograph of present day Presbyterian church. Photographed by Briget Beran, spring 2013. The building looks very similar to the original, but has been updated.

Many parishioners have known no other parish than Idana Presbyterian. “I’ve been coming here for 76 years,” Taylor Meek said.

About 15 years ago, the parish membership was beginning to age. Membership was on the decline and parishioners feared the end of their church was near. However, the church has recently gained new members, as well as retaining many of its older members. When a nearby Presbyterian church in Miltonvale closed, several of its parishioners chose to join Idana Presbyterian. These families brought several small children to Idana while many children who grew up there are now bringing their own children to Idana Presbyterian as well.

“I think people come back for the small-town feel, especially kids who were raised in it,” Taylor Meek said.

Children breathe new life into Idana Presbyterian each summer, according to Pastor James

Byers.

“We had about 80 kids here for Bible school last summer,” Byers said. The influx of children prompted parishioners to add on a large section to the church in 2012.

Many of these children do not regularly attend Idana Presbyterian, but Byers said many have their roots there. Many former town members still send their children back to the church for Bible school each summer, even after they have moved away.

Independence Day is also a major holiday that centers around the church. Each July 4, members gather outside the church building for a picnic and fireworks display.

“Nowadays, the 4th of July party is kind of a big deal,” Byers said, “We recently had to limit it to only letting two guys set off fireworks because it was getting a little big.”

At the centennial, parishioners from all over the country came back to their home church to celebrate its history. Members of the parish made a commemorative quilt, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 4. A photograph of the quilt the church members made. This is a 2013 picture of the commemorative quilt. Photographed by Bridget Beran. Notice the small marking of each of the family names in the parish.



Figure 5. Photograph of the belt buckle from the church's centennial. Photographed by Bridget Beran, spring 2013. Notice the detail and history displayed through the engraved images.

Each family member created their own block, including their family members' names.

The quilt features family members of the parish.

“We had people coming from as far as Oregon for this event,” Byers said, “It was really cool to see that even though they had not been in the church for quite some time, it still meant something to them all.”

A group of former children choirs' members, which Taylor Meek's daughters were involved in, prompted the centennial. Many members wished to have a reunion, just to meet up and reminisce about their time spent together.

However, it evolved into something much bigger. A celebration was held and people came from across the country to visit their roots and reconnect with family members and friends. Commemorative belt buckles were made depicting the church's roots and history, as shown above in Figure 3.

During the summer of 2013, Idana will host its biggest celebration yet. After the completion of

renovations, they will be celebrating the 125 anniversary of their church. Many visitors and past members were eager to revisit their roots in Idana.

“We had a lot of people asking about it, wondering what the plans were, getting ready to come back,” Taylor Meek said. The event also serves as a family reunion for families that have become spread across the country.

“The actual 125 was last year, but since we were in the middle of renovations we put it off a year,” Byers said.

The celebration, set for June, will gather together past and present parishioners. Details are yet to be decided, according to Byers but a cookout is being planned.

Bibliography

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