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Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

SEP 04 2015  
by SHPO

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery

other names/site number Richwoods Methodist Protestant Church, Richwoods Church

## 2. Location

street & number 1936 Franklin Avenue

N/A	not for publication
x	vicinity

city or town Trenton

state Iowa code IA county Henry code 87 zip code 52641

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this x nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

   national    statewide    x local

*Shuck*  
Signature of certifying official/Title

4 SEPT 2015  
Date

State Historical Society of Iowa  
State Historic Preservation Office

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register  
 other (explain:)

*Jon Edson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

10.23.15  
Date of Action

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
 Name of Property

Henry County, Iowa  
 County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only one box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
1		objects
3		<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION / religious facility

FUNERARY / cemetery

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER

FUNERARY / cemetery

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

MID 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

OTHER / two-door church

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE / Limestone

walls: WOOD / Weatherboard

roof: METAL

other: \_\_\_\_\_

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

Benjamin Chapel and Richwood Cemetery are located at 1936 Franklin Avenue in the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 24 in Trenton Township, in rural Henry County, Iowa, about three miles southeast of Trenton and five northwest of Mount Pleasant, the county seat (Figure 1). The setting is rural, with the church surrounded by agricultural land. The topography is gently rolling in this section of Henry County, with the church sitting on a hill and thus visible from a distance away. Franklin Avenue (historically Trenton-Salem Road) is a main north-south road through the west portion of Henry County, historically leading from Salem to Trenton and Wayland and then continuing north to Washington. Benjamin Chapel is a gable-front frame church with a bell tower that was built in 1877 through the efforts of Benjamin Allender and other members of the Richwoods Methodist Protestant Church (Figure 2). The design of the church includes two separate entry doors on the west façade, three four-over-four-light double-hung windows on each side elevation, and a chimney on the roof on the east/rear elevation. The church retains its original wood siding and pilasters. The interior is oriented to the west, with the pulpit on a platform between the two entries. The original wood pews remain in the church, with the divided center section and two side sections. The church has no modern updates (electricity or plumbing) and no additions. The bell was removed historically from the bell tower and currently sits in front of the church. Richwoods Cemetery stretches to the east of the church, including a section on the original church property, a section added in 1882, and a section added in 1910. Grave markers from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century are found in the cemetery.

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### **Narrative Description**

Benjamin Chapel is a gable-front frame church clad in wood siding, and it sits on a stone foundation. It has a red steel roof installed in 2007 on top of the earlier metal roof, which was installed on top of the original wood shake roof. The gable-front church faces west, with a bell tower on the west end of the roof. The original wood structure of the bell tower was clad in vinyl siding in 2012 to address issues with water infiltration into the roof structure and interior of the church. The spire was rebuilt in 2005 after the old one was split by a storm, and it is clad in metal. The church retains two separate single-door entries on the west side. This feature is a key architectural characteristic of the church, as noted within the Statement of Significance. Both doors (7' by 3') have transom windows with oval glass and original wood surrounds with shoulders. The north entry retains its original wood door, and the south door was rebuilt in 2007 to match the original. The corner boards of the church retain simple yet refined capitals, and a wide frieze board extends under the eaves around the church. The north and south sides of the church retain three windows with original wood surrounds with shoulders. The four-over-four-light double-hung wood windows were installed in 2007 to replace the original deteriorating wood windows of the same style. The only noted difference between the original sashes and the new windows is that the vertical muntin was historically wider than the horizontal muntin. The east side of the church has no openings. A brick chimney is located on the roof at this end. The bell was stolen from the bell tower in the 1960s and returned three years later. It was later mounted on a concrete pad in front of the church, dedicated in 1983 to the memory of Andrew Ernest Farrier (1960-1981) (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). The bell is counted as a contributing object on the property.



Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

Henry County, Iowa  
County and State

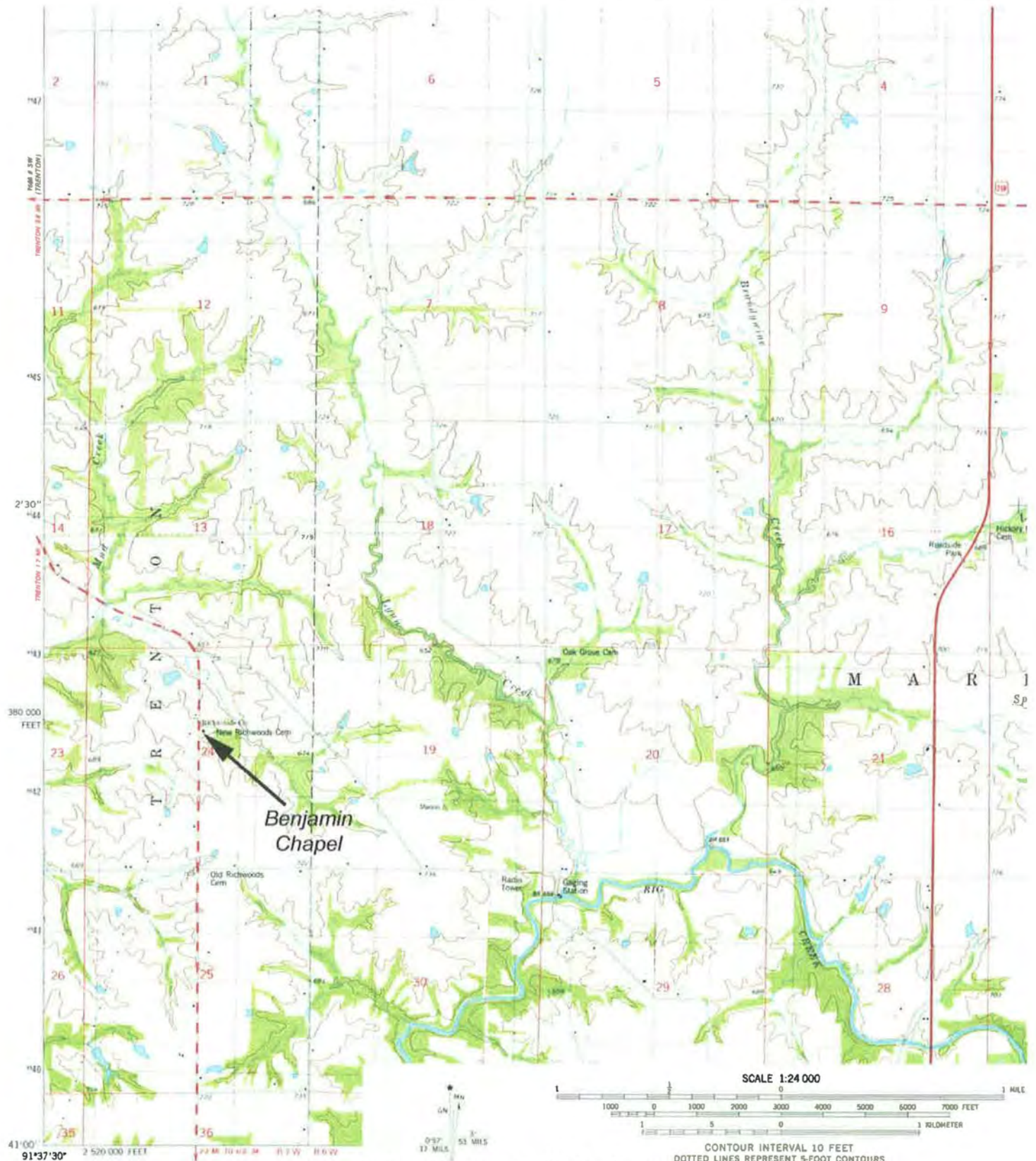


Figure 1. Location map for the Benjamin Chapel.  
(Swedesburg, USGS topographic quadrangle map, 1981)



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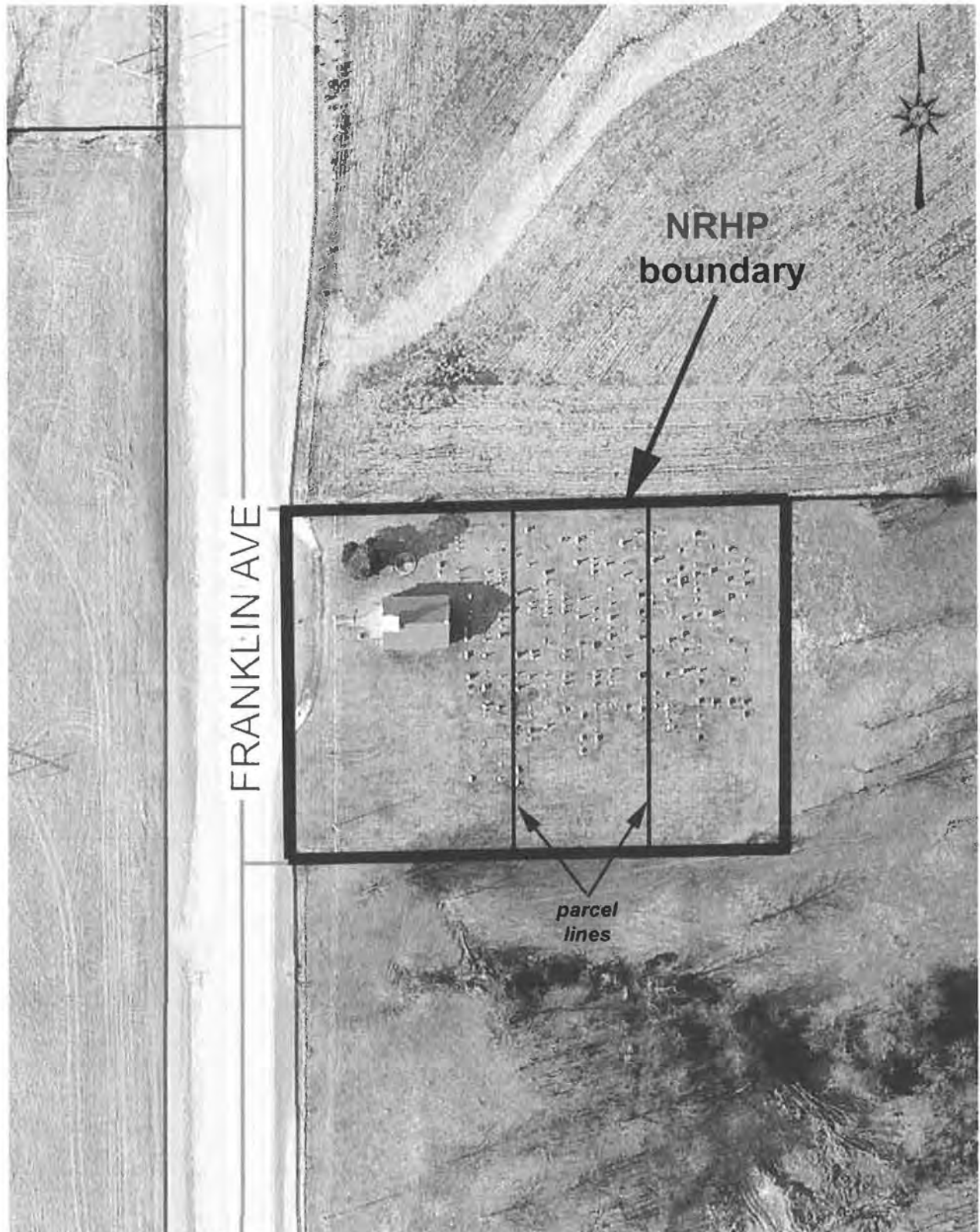


Figure 2. Site plan of Benjamin Chapel property, with National Register boundary indicated (McCarley 2014).  
Map scale – 1"=100'  
(Base aerial photography from April 2013 from Henry County Planning/GIS)

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The interior of the church is simple with historic features intact (Figure 3). The church has plaster walls and ceilings, and it has a wide wood floor. Wood wainscoting extends around the interior of the church on the lower section of the walls at a height of three feet. The front of the church is at the west end, with the pulpit located on a low platform between the two entry doors. Aisles extend into the church to the east from each entry. The wood pews include a divided center section and two side sections. The pews in the center section are 12 feet in width, and the side pews are six feet in width. The pews have straight sides that wrap around to the back with a turned/rounded top as the only decorative detail. Each pew is roughly two feet and seven inches in height, with a seat height of one foot and six inches and a seat depth of one foot and one inch. Two moveable 12-foot pews are found along each side of the front half of the church, with one section used for the choir historically. Church history notes that men used the south door and women used the north door, then sitting on those respective sides of the church. The piano sits in the southwest corner. Historic wood trim around the windows and doors remains intact as well. The brick chimney at the east end terminates high on the wall, with an old stove pipe hole visible. The church has never been modernized or updated (no electricity, plumbing, or additions). Historically, a stove sat in each aisle, with stove pipes extending to the ceiling and then running along the ceiling to the east. Two kerosene lights on the ceiling were used to light the interior historically (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). Oil lamps were also found on the windows historically, with brackets remaining (Sommerfeld 2014). Any water used on the property was and is hauled to the site.

A relatively large and still active cemetery sits to the east of the church, serving as the cemetery for the rural "Richwoods" community from the late 1870s to the present (Figure 4). This cemetery is known simply as Richwoods Cemetery. Originally, a cemetery was established in the 1840s at the northwest corner of the northeast quarter of Section 25 about .6 miles to the south, in conjunction with the Richwoods Methodist Episcopal Church. This cemetery is known as Old Richwoods Cemetery, with burials primarily extending from the 1840s to 1880s, as well as some later graves of family members. The original plat for Benjamin Chapel for Richwoods Methodist Protestant Church included limited space for the cemetery. The church was located on the north half of the one-acre property, perhaps leaving space to the south for the cemetery. However, burials began to the east of the church, and an additional one-half acre of land was acquired to the east in 1882. The grave and marble marker for Benjamin B. Allender (name sake for the church who died on June 22, 1882) is located in row 5 as one of the earliest markers in this cemetery. An additional one-half acre was then acquired to the east in 1910. Over 350 burials of residents of the rural Richwoods neighborhood from the 1870s to 2010s are found in the cemetery. Large lots were sold as family plats, and thus markers throughout the cemetery are mixed in terms of period and style. Generally, markers in the west half of the cemetery are older than the east half of the cemetery, though older markers are found in the east half and some newer markers are found in the west half. A small aisle extends through the center of the property, with most spaces on the north half to the east of Benjamin Chapel filled and additional spaces available further to the south. Richwoods Cemetery includes an excellent collection of funeral markers from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early markers follow the simple tablet form, with obelisk marble markers starting to be utilized by the 1890s. Polished granite markers then became common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, continuing to be used through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

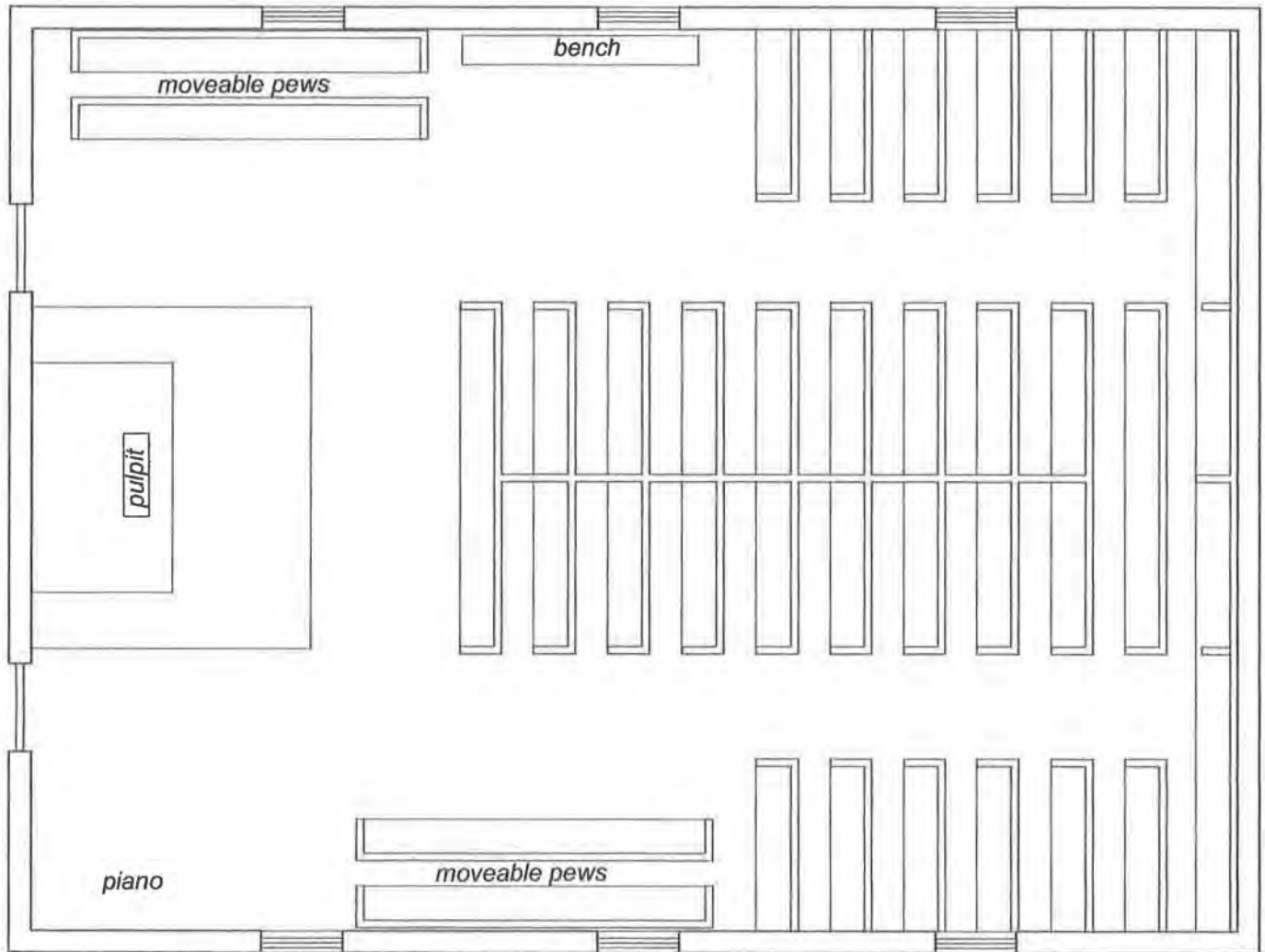
The frame outhouse/privy in the 1974 and 2005 photographs to the north of the church was destroyed in a wind storm in 2010, and it has not been replaced to date. Future plans may include construction of a similar outhouse on the property.

There are no immediate future plans for Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery. The current non-profit association plans to continue to maintain the church as an original 19<sup>th</sup> century church on its original site, with no plan to install modern plumbing or electricity. The cemetery continues to be used for members of the Richwoods community and relatives of those residents previously buried here.



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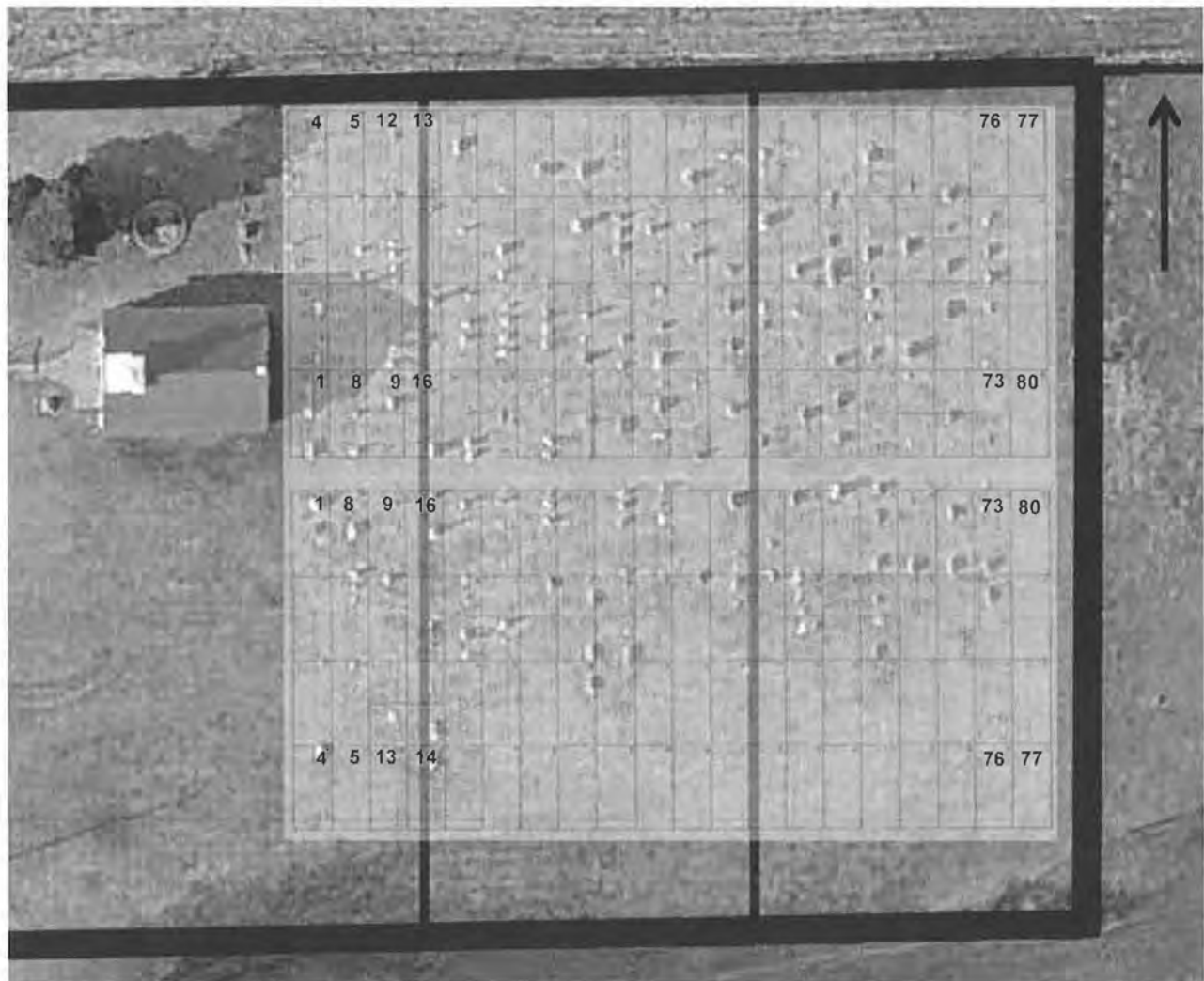
Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods  
Trenton Twp, Henry Co  
1/6"=1' (sketch of general layout)  
R.L. McCarley, SPARK Consulting  
November 2014



Figure 3. Floor plan of Benjamin Chapel.

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Burials of key early leaders:  
north, plot 2 - Elias Black (1919)  
north, plot 3 - Hiram Jerrel (1902)  
north, plot 9 - B.B. Allender (1882)  
north, plot 10 - L.W. Jay (1923)  
north, plot 15, Robert J. Kinney (1918)

*Map scale – 1"=50'*

**Figure 4. Plat of Richwoods Cemetery roughly overlaid on aerial photograph, with plot numbers noted for north half and south. Plots with burials of key early leaders also noted (McCarley 2014).**

*(Base aerial photography from April 2013 from Henry County Planning/GIS, plat from Sommerfeld collection)*



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Benjamin Chapel retains very good historic integrity. Few alterations have been made to the church over its 138 year history, and no modern updates have been made or additions constructed. The building remains on its original site and located within the rural agricultural setting of the Richwoods neighborhood in Trenton Township. The overall integrity of design, workmanship, and materials is excellent. It retains its association to operations as a church serving the Richwoods neighborhood and the overall feeling of a rural church property, including both the church building and associated cemetery. Specific aspects of the integrity of the property include:

Location: Benjamin Chapel remains on its original site on the east side of Franklin Avenue (historically Salem-Trenton Road) in Section 24 of rural Trenton Township in Henry County.

Setting: The setting of Benjamin Chapel historically and currently is agricultural, with the church serving the residents of the rural Richwoods neighborhood living on the farms within a few miles of the church. The topography is gently rolling in this section of Henry County, with the church siting on a hill and visible when approached from both the north and south.

Design: The overall design of Benjamin Chapel remains intact, particularly the significant feature of the two separate entry doors on the west façade. The architectural detailing is simple yet distinct, with wood corner pilasters and wood entry and window surrounds as the primary architectural features. The church has wood four-over-four-light double-hung windows that reflect the design of the original windows. The interior retains its original design, with the pulpit on the platform on the west end and two aisles extending to the east. The wood pews are original as well, including the divided center section reflecting separated seating for men and women and the two side sections.

Materials: Wood is the dominant historic material for Benjamin Chapel, with the building sitting on a stone foundation. The building retains excellent integrity of its historic materials, including wood siding, wood cornerboards, wood entry and window trim on exterior and interior, wood floors, wood pews, wood wainscoting, and plaster walls and ceiling. The newer red metal roof was installed on top of the older metal roof, and the original wood shake roof remains in place under both roofs. Likewise, though vinyl siding clads the bell tower to prevent water infiltration for the church, the original wood structure and details remain intact under the siding.

Workmanship: The historic workmanship of the building continues to be strongly reflected in the overall historic design elements and materials of the building, as noted above.

Feeling: The overall feeling of Benjamin Chapel is that of a rural church with an associated cemetery.

Association: Benjamin Chapel retains a strong association to its original function as a church serving the rural Richwoods neighborhood, remaining on its original site and reflecting its original form and design.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_

Social History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1877-1965 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1877 \_\_\_\_\_

1882 \_\_\_\_\_

1910 \_\_\_\_\_

1921 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

unknown \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery is nominated at the local level of significance for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance within the social history of Henry County and under Criterion C for its architectural significance. Benjamin Chapel and the associated Richwoods Cemetery are significant within the social history of the township, specifically this area known as the "Richwoods" community or neighborhood. Rural churches once dotted townships throughout Henry County, and they served as the centers of activities for rural neighborhoods throughout the county. Benjamin Chapel served this role as a Methodist Protestant church originally, continuing to serve as a community church for the Richwoods neighborhood into the 1950s. This church is the oldest extant rural church on its original site in Henry County. The Richwoods Cemetery associated with the church reflects burials for members of the congregation as well as residents of the rural neighborhood, including those that lived here when they died and others that returned to be buried with family. Additionally, Benjamin Chapel is significant for its architecture, specifically the design of the façade with two separate entries. While this two-door church type was utilized for at least nine other Henry County churches from the 1840s to 1870s, Benjamin Chapel is the only church of this type that remains on its original site. The period of significance spans from the construction of the church in 1877 to through the continued usage of the cemetery by the Richwoods community in 1965, the 50 year cutoff date per National Register standards. Significant dates include the construction of the church in 1877, expansion of the cemetery in 1882 and 1910, and sale of the church to the Benjamin Chapel Association in 1921. The period of significance may be extended in the future to include the initial restoration work in 1974, with this as a significant date in the history of the property. Benjamin Chapel meets Criterion Consideration A for churches as it derives its significance from its architecture and the social history of Trenton Township. The property does not need to meet Criterion Consideration D, as the cemetery is included as part of the overall church property.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery is significant under Criterion A within the social history of Henry County, particularly the rural Richwoods neighborhood in eastern Trenton Township and western Marion Township. Benjamin Chapel is one of a handful of rural churches remaining in Henry County, and it is the oldest identified one on its original site. The gable-front church was built in 1877, with Benjamin B. Allender providing leadership in its construction and contributing both money and time to ensure the success of the construction of the church. Though incorporated as Richwoods Methodist Church, the church was locally known and referenced in newspapers from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Benjamin Chapel at Richwoods, named after Benjamin B. Allender who then died in 1882. The church served the rural Richwoods community as a Methodist Protestant Church from 1877 into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, officially sold by the Methodist Protestant conference to the Benjamin Chapel Association in 1921. The goal of the association was to maintain a church to serve the Richwoods neighborhood, with the Richwoods Cemetery on the church property likewise serving as the burial ground for rural residents of the area. Both the church itself and cemetery played a key role in the Richwoods community throughout this period. Sunday School classes and church services were held through 1940, with various church services periodically until 1952. In 1948 a long time resident of the area noted: "Richwoods church has not ceased to be the civic and religious center of the community just as the Richwoods school is the social and educational center of the community" (C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the County and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, July 24, 1948, 4). After church services ceased, the cemetery continued to be utilized and maintained, primarily by and for current and past residents of the Richwoods neighborhood. The Benjamin Chapel Association revived efforts to maintain and preserve the church in 1974. The church had not been modernized with any plumbing or electricity, and the association continued to maintain and preserve the church in its original form. Since then, this association has continued to occasionally hold funerals, sing fests, community events, and even a wedding at the church, with

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the non-profit Richwoods-Benjamin Chapel association formed in 2005 to maintain both the church and cemetery. A county history from 2005 notes that Benjamin Chapel continued to stand as a landmark in the area northwest of Mt. Pleasant and marker of the historic rural Richwoods community (HCHPC 2005: 345).

Benjamin Chapel is also nominated under Criterion C for the significance of its architectural design. Benjamin Chapel is an excellent example of a typical gable-front rural church. The integrity of the church is remarkably high, with original materials and features found throughout the exterior and interior of the church. The church retains its original pews, with the center section designed to separate men and women. The specific design of Benjamin Chapel with two separate entry doors is also significant for its reflection of social ideals of the period. This church type has been noted in the Multiple Property Document titled *Rural Church Architecture of Missouri, 1700-c.1945* listed in 2010, with no further specific context developed. A context entitled "Two-Door Churches of the Inner Bluegrass" was developed for similar churches in central Kentucky in the form of a Multiple Property Document in 1986, though not listed. This context notes that the two-door church – while seeming to segregate men and women – actually reflected an increase role and prominence of women in the church in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, religious revivals had become prevalent, particularly among Protestant congregations. Women were increasingly viewed as key within the religious upbringing of the family (Willis 1986: 8:5). The two-door church corresponded to two sections of seating within the church. Rather than regulated to lesser seating, women were thus given equal seating on their side of the church, essentially architectural equality in the church (Willis 1986: 8:4-8:5). By the 1850s, regardless of doctrinal beliefs, the two-door church then entered the architectural vocabulary of central Kentucky as a "traditional" church architectural design (Willis 1986: 8:6-8:8). Though found in Baptist and Presbyterian denominations as well, Methodist Episcopal doctrine required separated seating for men and women through 1852, permitting each gender to focus on their religious experience. This practice and requirement sparked a large debate in Ohio in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Many Methodist congregations continued to choose this traditional practice well into the 1860s and 1870s, rather than mixed "promiscuous" seating. Thus, with settlement patterns moving west to Iowa in the 1840s and 1850s from Ohio and Kentucky, the architectural vocabulary of the two-door church appears to have spread into Iowa along with the settlers. The strong Methodist settlement of Henry County in Mount Pleasant likely brought the church type first as a typical and required form and then likewise as part of the architectural vocabulary of church design in the county. From 1846 to 1879, ten two-door churches have been identified as built in Henry County, with only Benjamin Chapel remaining extant and on its original site.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)**

***Methodism and early church architecture in Henry County, Iowa***

While Benjamin Chapel was not built until 1877, the history of the church and its architectural design dates to the early settlement of Trenton Township and early history of Methodism in Henry County. While the Society of Friends (Quakers) were prevalent in southern Henry County around Salem and to the east/south, the town of Mt. Pleasant grew with a strong Methodist element. In 1837, Methodists were already noted as outpacing other religions, not only within the growing town but also in the surrounding countryside. New London grew in eastern Henry County along the road to Burlington, with the Methodist Episcopal Church organized there in 1838. Revivals held locally in 1841 increased membership of the churches, and two circuits were set off in Henry County from the Burlington circuit, the Mt. Pleasant circuit and the New London circuit. Circuit riders for the Methodist church thus served multiple congregations within a rural area, bringing the message to various rural neighborhoods. The first Methodist Church was then built in Mt. Pleasant in 1843, with the first Quarterly Meeting for the Mount Pleasant circuit, Burlington district, held on September 30, 1843, and the church dedicated at the Quarterly Meeting in December (*History of Henry County 1879: 517*). In New London, the first frame church was built in 1846. The church history describes the church as facing east with two doors on the



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front and the pulpit at the west end, with men and women sitting on opposite sides of the church. This church was used until the new church was built in 1887-88 (*New London Methodist Church, 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, 1959*). This is earliest confirmed example of the two-door church form in Henry County identified to date.

Rural churches were then formed, initially served by one of the Methodist Episcopal circuit riders. One of the earliest known rural churches was in the Richwoods neighborhood in eastern Trenton Township and spilling into western Marion Township. The town of Trenton is located about three miles to the northwest and Mt. Pleasant is about five miles to the southeast of the area known as Richwoods. While Benjamin B. Allender was significant in the construction and early history of Benjamin Chapel, his parents played a key role in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church that stood one-half mile to the south. John Allender was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on September 7, 1789. John and Naomi Allender moved to Ohio and then west to Trenton Township in 1838, two years after the earliest settlers arrived in the township. He owned and farmed land in Section 25 in Trenton Township. John died in 1866 and is buried in Old Richwoods Cemetery (or South Richwoods Cemetery) (HCBC 1982: 106). Benjamin and Mary Allender then moved to Henry County from Ohio in 1839. On May 25, 1846, one acre was purchased from John and Naomi Allender for a brick church at the northwest corner of his property, then reserved as such in deed when the property transferred from his family to William Sharp in 1867. A cemetery was established in connection with the church, located in the northwest corner of the northeast quarter of Section 25 at the southeast corner of the intersection of the Trenton-Salem Road (Trenton blacktop) and a gravel road (HCPHC 2005: 345). This church was noted as the Richwoods Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, with trustees in 1849 that included John Allender. The minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church Conference recorded membership of this Richwoods Church as 40 in 1877 and 50 in 1880. The church was destroyed by the Grinnell tornado of 1882 that travelled through the Richwoods neighborhood (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002; C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the County and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, 4). No known images or descriptions of this early church are known to exist.

While Benjamin B. Allender initially joined the Richwoods Methodist Episcopal Church, he reserved the privilege to transfer his membership to a Methodist Protestant (M.P.) church when there was opportunity ("Allender," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, July 27, 1882). The Methodist Protestant Church was formed in Baltimore in 1830 by a group of Methodists that were not satisfied with the power of the episcopacy and lack of lay representation in conference of Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) church. Over the next century, the Methodist Episcopal church increased participation of laymen at conferences and decreased the hierarchy and authority of bishops, and thus it became more like the Methodist Protestant church by the time of the merger of the two bodies in 1939 (Nye 1986: 81). The Methodist Protestant Church was predominantly a rural church, and it was never well established in cities in Iowa (Nye 1986: 90). There was less distinction between the M.E. and M.P. church on the frontier, as both were less connected to the hierarchy of the church and eastern politics (Nye 1986: 83). The first Methodist Protestant churches were established in Iowa in 1841, with the Iowa Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant church formed in 1846. The denomination was identified with the interests of the American Sunday School Union by 1849 (Nye 1986: 84-87).

Benjamin Allender's obituary and later church history note that Rev. R. Miller organized the Richwoods Class of the Methodist Protestant Church sometime after 1843 in southeast Trenton Township, and Benjamin Allender then transferred his membership to this more conservative branch of the Methodist church. This frame church was located a mile to the north of the brick Methodist Episcopal Church, in the northwest corner of the east half of Section 24 ("Allender," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, July 27, 1882; 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). No known images or detailed descriptions of this early church are known to exist. A church is indicated here on the 1870 map of Trenton Township, as well as the Methodist Episcopal Church to the south (Figure 5). The annual meeting for the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church was held in nearby Marshall (Wayland) in Jefferson Township in Henry County in 1853. The annual conference is then noted as held at Richwood (Henry County) in 1859, under John Mason as president (Nye 1986: 297). Thus, the Methodist Protestant church at Richwoods appears to have been a strong congregation in this period.



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While the Methodist Protestant Church in New London was organized in 1857, they met in homes until buying the old Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1867 (and built new in 1873). In 1866, discussions for a union with all non-episcopal Methodist churches (M.P., Free Methodist, Independent Methodist, and Wesleyan Methodist) resulted in the denomination becoming simply known as the Methodist Church statewide until 1877 when the name again became the Methodist Protestant Church (Nye 1986: 90).

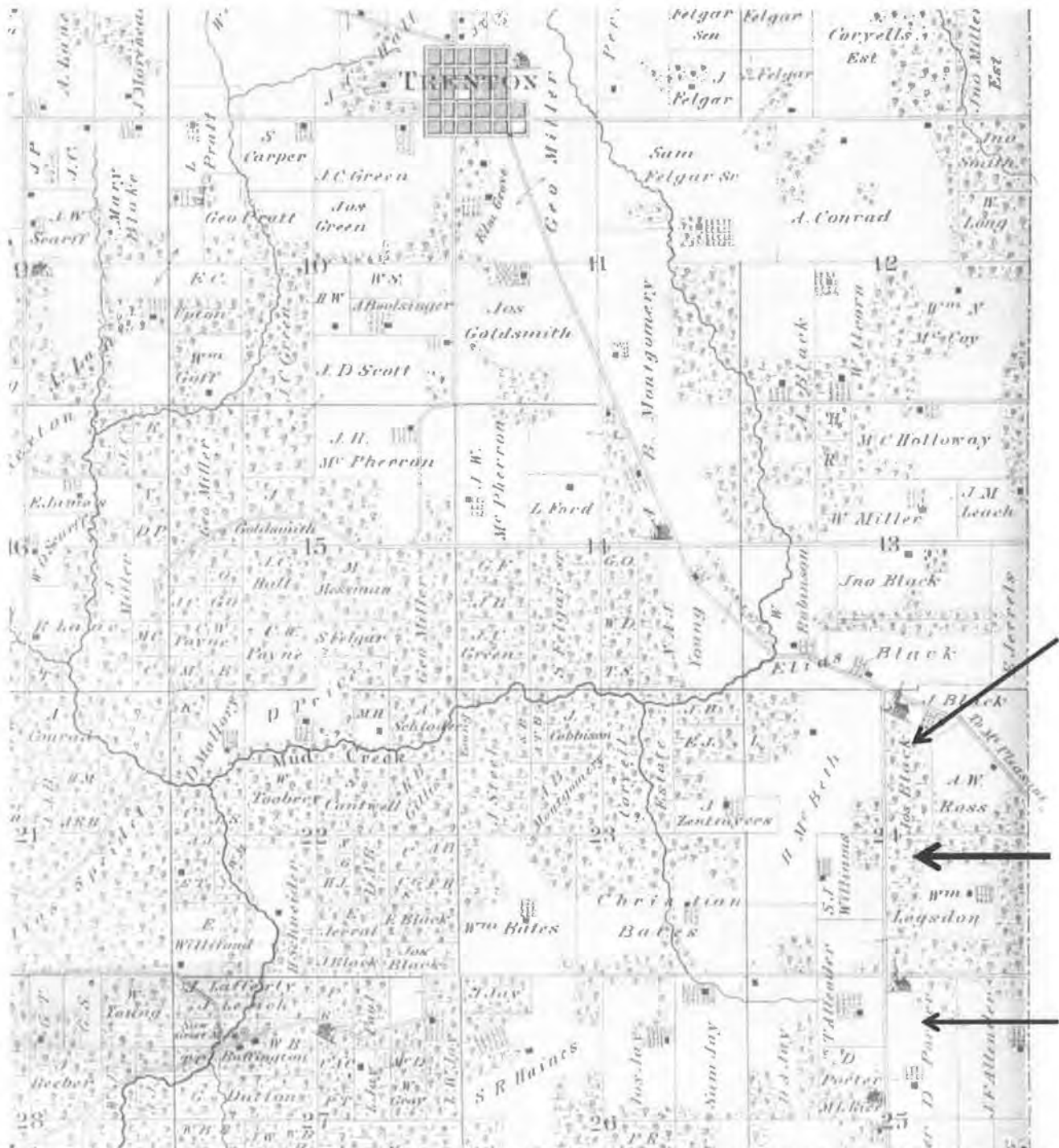


Figure 5. 1870 map of Trenton Township, with future site of Benjamin Chapel indicated in middle as well as the Methodist Episcopal Church indicated with Old Richwoods Cemetery to south and the Methodist Protestant Church indicated at corner to north (Thompson and Everts 1870: 13).

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As settlement increased in Henry County and churches grew in numbers, additional church buildings were constructed throughout rural Henry County to serve residents of rural neighborhoods. These churches were usually built through cooperative efforts of local farmers, who worked together to create a place of worship that often also served, along with the rural school, as a place for other activities and gatherings. While the architecture of all rural churches built in Henry County from the 1840s to the 1860s is not known, eight two-door churches have been identified among church organizations that survived through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These two-door churches include six Methodist Episcopal churches, one Baptist church, and one Congregational church. The two-door church type appears to have been directly related to the interior seating arrangement, with men and women sitting separated each on their own side of the church. Later history of Benjamin Chapel notes that men entered the south door and women entered the north door, sitting on their respective sides of the church. The only other identified two-door church in Iowa listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the Methodist Episcopal Church of Milford Township, which was commonly known as the Pleasant Grove Community Church, built in 1874 in rural Story County in central Iowa (listed in 2010). Similar to Benjamin Chapel, this church was built by farmers in the Pleasant Grove neighborhood, and it reflects this rural community effort to provide religious services for the residents of the area. No specific reason for the two-door design was noted in the nomination, with simply a reference that it must have reflected eastern types (Jacobs 2010). Additional two-door churches were historically found in Iowa related to other religious organizations, such as the Society of Friends (Quakers).

The rule for separated seating for men and women in the Methodist Church originated from founder John Wesley, who asked and answered in his *Book of Discipline*: "Is there any exception to the rule, 'Let the men and women sit apart'? There is no exception. Let them sit apart in all our churches." Wesley also directed: "Let all our churches be built plain and decent, and with free seats" (Boase 1957, 33). The Book of Discipline for the Methodist Protestant church did not include a specific seating policy, perhaps letting individual congregations have the authority to determine their own policy. In each Book of Discipline for the Methodist Episcopal Church from the 1780s to 1847, a clause under Chapter II, Section I, "Building of Churches: Of Churches and Church Property" noted that women and men must sit separately. By 1848, the regulation that men and women sit separate was moved from an architectural section to the chapter on Public Worship, though remaining as a rule (Books of Discipline, Drew University archives). The question of segregated seating vs. "promiscuous seating" was vigorously debated in Ohio from 1847 to 1852, involving prominent circuit rider James B. Finley and Dayton minister John S. Inskip. An Ohio delegation then read a paper resulting in a motion passed at the General Conference in 1852 recommending that the Book of Discipline be revised to give individual churches the right of choice in type of seating used, and the rule was removed in the 1852 book (Boase 1957, 46; Books of Discipline, Drew University archives). In Ohio, it was noted that the love for separate seats died slowly, with many churches retaining the traditional policies and arrangements for subsequent decades (Boase 1957, 47). The circuit riders on the frontier were further concerned about the loosening of this traditional policy (Boase 1957, 48).

The precedent and concerns of the Methodist Episcopal circuit riders from Ohio on the policy of separated seating appear similar to those noted in a study of two-door churches in the Inner Bluegrass region of central Kentucky, which also notes a relationship between the architectural design and the increasing role of women in society. This context notes that two-door churches are significant under Criterion C for their architectural design and under Criterion A "in that they reflect the unique position accorded women in the Protestant revivalist denominations during the early years of Kentucky's settlement" (Willis 1986: 8:0). There was a concern noted during the revivals of the early 1800s about potential physical interactions under emotionally stimulating conditions, with inclusion of physical rituals based in the Bible such as the laying on of hands and washing of feet, extending the right hand of Christian fellowship, and embracing after testimonials. With loose rules already operating on the Kentucky frontier, separated seating maintained social rules and protocol within the church. With laymen playing an increasing role in these churches and an emphasis on personal religious experience over church hierarchy and formal education, women found increasing roles as educators as well as leaders of the church (Willis 1986: 8:1-2). Rather than regulated to lesser seating, women were thus given



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equal seating on their side of the church. Thus, they were granted an identical experience as men, marking "a very real improvement in status at that time" (Willis 1986: 8:4). Parallel roles of men and women within the church were also noted within the Shaker community in Mercer County, as well as other religious colonies (Willis 1986: 8:3). Willis argues that these two-door churches are the remaining evidence of prevailing attitudes toward the participation of women in public religious life (Willis 1986: 8:4). By the 1850s, regardless of doctrinal beliefs, the two-door church then entered the architectural vocabulary of central Kentucky as a "traditional" church architectural design. While early two-door churches often had Baptist or Presbyterian roots, the increasing social role of women resulted in two-door churches for multiple denominations, particularly after 1850 (Willis 1986: 8:6-8:8).

The survey of two-door churches in the Inner Bluegrass region of Kentucky reveals interesting information about this church type on a broader scale, though within the context of Kentucky rather than Iowa. A total of 31 two-door churches were included in the draft thematic nomination, with ten two-door churches previously listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 31 churches were typically gable-oriented (29) and rectangular in form. The majority of these extant churches were brick construction, about 40 by 60 feet. About half had some Greek Revival features. Six were simpler vernacular churches, more similar to Benjamin Chapel. The Kentucky survey tied the church form to Protestant denominations, particularly those with strong revivalist activities in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of the 31 churches, 11 were Baptist, 11 were Disciples of Christ (Kentucky originated derivative of Baptist), five were Methodist, three were Presbyterian, and one was Cumberland Presbyterian. The survey also identified primarily rural two-door churches. The 29 rural churches included three built prior to 1830, seven built from 1830 to 1849, 12 built from 1850 to 1859, none built during the Civil War, and seven built from 1866 to 1874. Two churches were built for African American congregations in towns from 1866 to 1874 as well. It did note that earlier town churches were built following the two-door form in some instances, though these early town churches were then typically replaced by later churches in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Willis 1986: 7:4-7). The two-door churches survive as "evidence of a period in religious history when men and women were separated during worship services," with men and women entering separate doors and sitting on opposite sides (Willis 1986: 7:0). With separated but equal treatment for women, Willis also notes that "These churches are significant in that their treatment of women signified an important extension of the democratic principle into the religious institutions" (Willis 1986: 7:1).

A recent survey of rural church architecture in Missouri also identified a number of two-door churches in this state. The survey resulted in the M.P.D nomination, *Rural Church Architecture of Missouri, c.1819-c.1945*, in 2010. Gable-oriented churches were the most common type of rural churches, characterized by a front-facing gable façade with symmetrical fenestration, rectangular footprint, and three or four windows per side. These churches were typically small buildings, constructed from the 1820s to the 1940s. Gable-oriented churches with a central entry (single or double doors) often had a window to either side. Gable-oriented churches with two separate entries did not usually have ground level windows on the façade, though sometimes had a small round window in the gable. This type also often had a short steeple with four-sided spire on the peak of the roof. Both types of entries typically also had a transom window above the door. Two-door churches were more uncommon, but there were a number of examples identified built from the 1840s to 1870s. The M.P.D notes that there did not seem to be a direct correlation to period, region, or religious denomination (Patterson 2010: F1, F3). The M.P.D states: "Gable-end churches are significant features of the rural landscape. They represent the settlement patterns of rural Missouri and were important religious and cultural centers" (Patterson 2010: F3). In addition to the church, other significant resources associated with a rural church were often a cemetery and a privy. Both were noted as an important part of the setting and historic function of the gable-oriented rural church. Cemeteries were typically located behind or to one side of the church, with grave markers facing east (Patterson 2010: F2). Rural gable-oriented churches with high degrees of integrity exhibit a gable roof, original entries, rectangular footprint, original siding, wood windows, original decorative features, and large open sanctuary space on the interior. Common alterations noted were the addition of a modern steeple or spire and addition of a basement under the church to provide additional space, with neither precluding listing (Patterson 2010: F4). Integrity of location was also noted as important for rural churches, as they typically were associated with small



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rural communities. Cemeteries and privies were considered to be nearly characteristic of the type, and noted to be considered contributing in rural church nominations (Patterson 2010: F5).

As noted, through the research for this nomination, eight two-door churches have been identified in Henry County as constructed from the 1840s to 1860s, prior to the construction of Benjamin Chapel in 1877 (Figure 6). The earliest identified two-door church was built in New London as the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1846, replaced in 1887. Later histories describe this frame church as facing east with two doors on the front and the pulpit at the west end. Men and women were noted as sitting on opposite sides of the church (*New London Methodist Church, 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, 1959*). This construction would have fallen within the period required by Methodist Episcopal Church doctrine for men and women to sit separately, likely resulting in a two-door church design for this building. Three churches were then built in the middle of the 1850s with this design, responding to growth of Henry County after the arrival of the railroad through Henry County. Finley Chapel was built as a Methodist Episcopal church in Jefferson Township in 1856, replaced by a new church in 1901 (Figure 7). Later church histories describe it as a plain rectangular frame building with two doors with transoms spaced equally on the front, three windows on the sides, and a chimney in the center of the building. The pulpit was in the center of the north end with an Amen section to either side, and members sat in short straight pews. The origination of the name of the church is unknown, with later historians noting that the only local Finley was a William Finley, an early doctor in Trenton (*Centennial History of Finley Methodist Church, June 3-4, 1951*). It is possible that this church was named for the prominent Ohio circuit rider James B. Finley. Wesley Chapel, built in Marion Township in 1856-57, was clearly named for Methodist founder John Wesley in 1860, after originally it was known as Big Creek Church. The original church was a frame building, 46 by 36 feet, with separated seating for men and women. Long-time member C.R. Willits later explained "It was felt by segregating the sexes, the audience as a whole, would be in a more receptive mood to receive the pastoral message." The partition extended a few inches above the back of the pews. The two doors on the south end each led into aisles that extended to the pulpit platform at the north end, with a stove in each aisle. The church was significantly remodeled/rebuilt in 1901 and later remodeled again in 1940 (*Centennial of Wesley Chapel, 1857-1957, June 23, 1957*). The residents of southeast Marion Township were split over the construction of this church, and the group divided in 1856. The other group then built their own Methodist Episcopal church about a mile to the south, named Ebenezer Church. C.E. Carnahan described the church as facing west with two doors on the west end and a bell in the belfry. Membership at this church declined through the 1880s, and the church was then demolished (*Mt Pleasant News, June 11, 1949*). The Oak Grove Baptist Church was organized in the Oak Grove neighborhood in western Marion County in 1839, raising sufficient funds to construct a 20 by 40 brick church in 1863 (Figure 9). A historic photograph shows two spaced doors on the gable façade of this church. This church was closed in 1923, and the building was demolished in 1970 (Young, 1998 calendar).

Two Methodist Episcopal churches were then built in central Henry County after the Civil War also with the two-door form. The Prairie Gem class was original around 1860, with the Hickory Grove class to the south then united with Prairie Gem in 1863. They then built Prairie Gem Chapel in section 9 of Marion Township in 1866-67. Historic photographs show a frame church with the two-door configuration, four windows per side, and center chimney (Figure 8). Church histories note that it originally had a small belfry tower but no bell. Shutters on the church were removed in 1905, and the belfry was removed in 1910. The church was modernized with electricity in 1921. As part of the 1938 remodel, the two doors were covered with siding, a centered entry vestibule built, and partition wall built in the sanctuary (Figure 11). In 1946, a basement addition was added (*Centennial of Prairie Gem Church, Methodist, 1866-1966*). The church closed, and the building was moved to the south portion of the Old Threshers grounds in Mount Pleasant in 1974, restored to its two-door appearance. The interior reflects later remodeling with pews from the Chapel Building at Iowa Wesleyan College. This is the only other extant two-door church in Henry County. Pleasant Hill M.E. Church was built a few years later in 1869. It is noted as the oldest church on the Mt. Pleasant M.E. circuit at the centennial in 1937, organized in 1849 and later followed by Wesley Chapel, Prairie Gem, and Beulah. The original 1849 church was replaced by a larger building in 1869. Photographs of this second building show a

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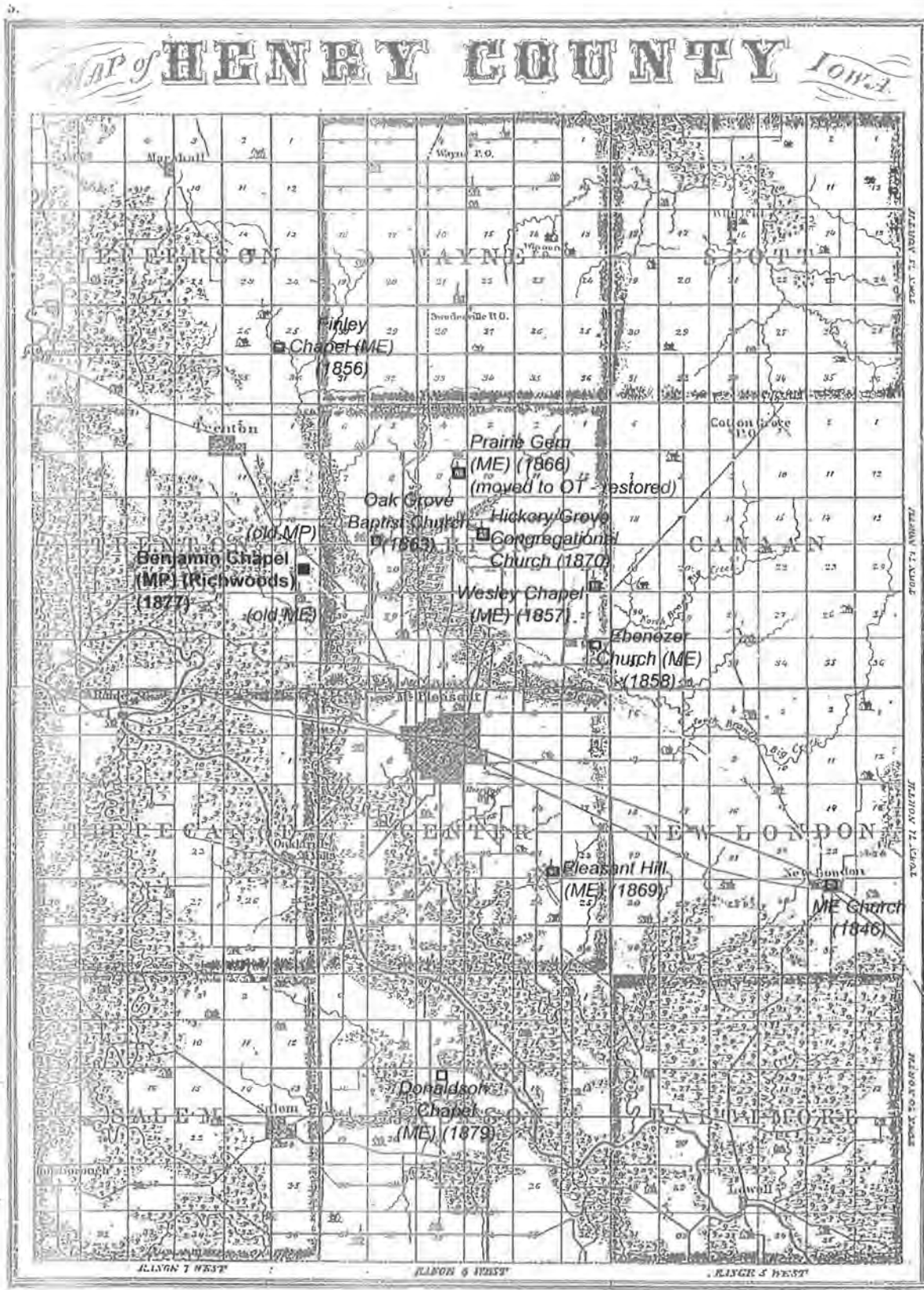


Figure 6. Identified two-door churches in Henry County built from 1846 to 1879, mapped on 1870 atlas map of the county (Thompson and Everts 1870: 5)

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**First Finley Chapel**

**Figure 7. Finley Chapel (M.E.), 1856, Jefferson Twp.  
replaced by new building in 1901  
(Centennial History of Finley Methodist Church, June 3-4, 1951)**



**Prairie Gem Church — 1931**

**Figure 8. Prairie Gem (M.E.), 1866, Marion Twp.  
(Centennial of Prairie Gem Church,  
Methodist, 1866-1966)**



**Figure 9. Oak Grove Baptist, 1863, Marion Twp.  
demolished in 1970  
(Young collection, 1998 calendar)**



**Figure 10. Donaldson Chapel (M.E.), 1879, Jackson Twp.  
demolished in 1983  
(Young collection, 1972 slide)**



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**Figure 11. Prairie Gem Church in Marion Twp in 1966 after 1938 remodel (see also Figure 8), current appearance in 2014 after moved to Old Threshers Grounds in Mt. Pleasant in 1974 and restored (Centennial of Prairie Gem Church, Methodist, 1866-1966; McCarley 2014).**



**Figure 12. Pleasant Hill Church, 1869, Center Twp, original appearance and 1955 photograph after 1927 remodel. (Iowa Methodist Conference Archives).**

historic two-door appearance, and it seems likely that the earlier church followed the same design (Figure 12). In addition to the two doors on the gable façade, the church has gable returns, a steeple on the roof, and a half-circle ornamentation in the front gable. The church was remodeled in 1927, including conversion of one door to a double-door entry with pediment and conversion of the other door to a window. Pews were also

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installed from the Chapel Building at Iowa Wesleyan College. A basement was then added under the church in 1959. Though once the largest church on the Mount Pleasant circuit, membership dropped and the church closed in the 1970s. The church was donated to Old Threshers in Mount Pleasant and moved in 1975. Minimal maintenance occurred for this building on the grounds, and it was demolished in 2012.

Three other churches built over the next decade continued to reflect the two-door church, though other churches built in the 1870s featured a single centered entry. In the heart of Marion Township, Hickory Grove Congregational Church was built with two doors on the east end, three windows on each side, and the pulpit at the west end in 1869-70. This church closed in 1910. Benjamin Chapel was then built in 1877 in eastern Trenton Township, as further discussed below. In southern Henry County, Donaldson Chapel was built a few years later in 1879 in Section 16 of Jackson Township. This church was an outgrowth of the rural ministry of Rev. David Donaldson, pastor of M.E. Church in Salem, who died unexpectedly in the 1870s before a church was built to serve the combined groups meeting at Center School and Oak Grove School east of Salem. Rural residents banded together to build the church. Money was raised for materials and labor was donated by men after they finished with the harvest in August 1879 and completed in December 1879. A photograph of the church shows the two-door configuration, with four-over-four-light windows, four per side, and a chimney in the center of the roof (Figure 10). The last services were held here in 1939, and then it served as a rural community center into the 1960s before being sold in 1973 and demolished in 1983 (SHBC 1996: 134-135).

Thus, when efforts began to construct a new Methodist Protestant church at Richwoods in eastern Trenton Township, the two-door church form was well-known to the local residents of the rural neighborhood. Based on the construction of this church and the identified earlier two-door examples, it seems likely that the original Methodist Protestant located a half mile to the north was also a two-door church. This church, about 80 rods (1/4 mile) to the north of the current building, was later noted by local rural resident Cassius E. Carnahan (1864-1951) as moved to the White Oak neighborhood in western Trenton Township, located in conjunction with White Oak cemetery in 1948 (new M.P. church built here in 1882-83). Benjamin Allender had apparently been a member of the Methodist Protestant church at Richwoods since its formation in the 1840s, and he was one of the church leaders. His obituary in 1882 notes that the church was "now the oldest continuous organization in the Iowa Conference of the M.P. Church" ("Allender," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, July 27, 1882). The eldest son of nine children, Benjamin B. Allender, was born in Baltimore on August 11, 1816 and moved west to Ohio and Iowa with his family. In 1838, he married Mary Guyton, and they had 11 children. He was prominent among the residents of southeast Trenton Township, or the Richwoods neighborhood, known to help out neighbors in years of poor crops and regarded as a pillar of the rural community (HCBC 1982: 106). The 1870 census lists Benjamin Allender as a 54-year-old farmer with \$9,960 in real estate and \$2,307 in personal property. His household included wife Mary M. (age 50), son Asbury (21), son George (16), son Samuel (14), son Wilson (12), daughter Martha (10), and son Benjamin F. (7). Mary Allender died in 1874, and Benjamin remarried. The 1880 census lists Benjamin (age 63) with wife Lydia (age 38), son Benjamin F. (17), daughter Anna (4), and a domestic servant Iowa McCullon (22). The 1879 history lists the Allender families as farmers and residents of Sections 24 and 25 in Trenton Township (*History of Henry County* 1879: 603).

As the Richwoods Methodist Protestant Church grew, Benjamin B. Allender took the lead on construction of a new building. New articles of Incorporation for the "Rich Woods Methodist Church in Trenton Township" were drawn up on February 6, 1877, noting that "the object of the society shall be the promotion of the interests of religion in our midst and the spread of scriptural witness throughout the world." The name appears to reflect the broader united Methodist churches from 1866, with the old name of the Methodist Protestant Church readopted for the denomination later in 1877 (Nye 1986: 90). The articles stated that the organization would be governed by the Discipline of the Methodist Church, with trustees for the first year including B.B. Allender, R.J. Kinney, Hiram Jerrel, L.W. Jay, Elias Black, J.E. Allender, and J.M. Mitts (Sommerfeld collection). On February 17, 1877, Joseph Black deeded one acre of land in Section 24 to The Rich Woods Methodist Church in Trenton Township. Benjamin B. Allender's obituary notes: "Among the many instances of his liberal use of time and means we will mention but one. When the old church building became unsuitable for worship, he



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took the lead in the erection of a new edifice at a cost to the society of over \$1,600, Brother Allender giving about \$350 in money and labor" ("Allender," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, July 27, 1882). The church is noted to have then been built in 1877, and it was given the name of Benjamin Chapel in his honor (C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the Country and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, July 24, 1948, 4; 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002; HCHPC 2005: 345).

The design of Benjamin Chapel reflects several similarities and a few key differences in comparison with the identified earlier two-door churches in Henry County. The church remains clad in wood siding, and it sits on a stone foundation, without any basement. Similar to gable-front rural churches, the church has a rectangular footprint, measuring approximately 32 by 42 feet. Thus, it falls among the smaller churches. The size is also reflected in three windows per side, rather than four found on several other churches. Similar to other rural churches built from the 1870s to early 1900s, Benjamin Chapel has four-over-four-light double-hung wood windows, and the original sashes had a wider vertical muntin than horizontal muntin (giving the appearance of a more expensive two-over-two-light double-hung window from a distance). The two entries are widely spaced on the façade (west), thus leading into two aisles on either side of a center section. Both doors have transom windows, with a more refined detail of an oval window. The entries and windows have simple wood surrounds with a slightly arched top. While other churches have gable returns reflecting a Greek Revival characteristic, Benjamin Chapel has straight eaves but cornerboards that reflect pilasters with simple capitals. Historic photographs show that earlier two-door churches in Henry County appear built without a belfry or steeple, though *Prairie Gem's* was removed in 1910 and this may be a similar case with other churches. Benjamin Chapel retains a belfry on the gable roof with a spire, though currently clad to prevent further moisture penetration and damage. While other churches are noted with entries opposite the pulpit, Benjamin Chapel is oriented towards the west on the interior, with the pulpit between the two doors. This is noted within local history as being designed to prevent late arrivals, and it may have served that purpose even without that intent. Benjamin Chapel retains its original divided interior pews, with a center section between the two aisles and two side sections. Historically, stoves sat in each aisle to heat the church, with stove pipes running to the chimney at the east end (rather than a centered chimney). As noted, Benjamin Chapel is the oldest rural church in Henry County on its original site, and it is the only two-door church on its original site, as well as retaining a high degree of integrity.



Figure 13. Benjamin Chapel, 1877, Trenton Twp (McCarley 2014).



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***Benjamin Chapel as the Methodist Protestant Church at Richwoods, 1877-1920***

After its completion in 1877, Benjamin Chapel functioned formally as a Methodist Protestant Church through 1920, also serving as the Richwoods community church particularly in the latter two decades. Rural schools and churches are noted throughout many counties in the Midwest as providing a center for social and cultural activities for rural residents beyond their strictly educational or religious functions. As the *Rural Church Architecture of Missouri* context notes "Gable-end churches are significant features of the rural landscape. They represent the settlement patterns of rural Missouri and were important religious and cultural centers" (Patterson 2010: F3). Integrity of location was noted as important for rural churches, as they typically were associated with small rural communities, and they were significant within these communities (Patterson 2010: F5). In addition to the church, an associated cemetery was noted as an important part of the setting and historic function of the gable-front rural church. Cemeteries were typically located behind or to one side of the church, with grave markers facing east. The study notes that cemeteries and privies are considered to be nearly characteristic of the rural gable church type, and they are to be considered contributing in rural church nominations (Patterson 2010: F5). Benjamin Chapel exemplifies these qualities of a rural church, with its associated cemetery remaining utilized by residents of the rural Richwoods neighborhood into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Minutes of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church provide some basic information on the early operations of Benjamin Chapel. It was one of only a handful of Methodist Protestant churches in Henry County, which had a larger number of Methodist Episcopal churches. The Methodist Protestant Church in New London in eastern Henry County was strong into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the annual meeting of the Iowa Conference held there several times including in 1877 (1869, 1873, 1877, 1892, 1907, 1915, then as Iowa-Missouri Conference in 1930 and 1939) (Nye 1986: 298-299). In addition to the New London circuit, the Lowell circuit also operated in southeast Henry County. Both included parts of Des Moines County to the east and Lee County to the south. The Richwoods circuit then operated in the northwest portion of Henry County, with the Rome mission established in west-central Henry County at the 1877 conference ("circuit" indicates a more established church organization, with "mission" noting a new or small organization). The Rome mission then included the former Oakleaf society that had been attached to the Richwoods church, as well as the section of Henry County west of the Skunk River and the unoccupied territory of Jefferson County to the west (Rome is located on the west side of the Skunk River in northern Tiptecanoe Township, about five miles southwest of Benjamin Chapel, northeast of the river). Thus, by their organization, Methodist Protestant churches were designed to serve a broad rural community. More than one church could also fall within one circuit, and boundaries were discussed at each annual meeting. Two lay delegates from Richwoods are noted in attendance at the September 1877 conference in New London, B.B. Allender and J.M. Mitts. B.B. Allender served on the committee on "unfinished business" for the conference, reporting that there was none.

The minutes of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church in September 1878 include a resolution from the second day addressing the role of women in the church, a question left by the Book of Discipline for the Methodist Protestant Church to the Annual Conferences (state/regional organizations). The Iowa Annual Conference adopted the policy that any male or female at least 15 years in age and in full communion and fellowship shall be entitled to vote in all cases. In terms of delegates to the General Conference (national organization), any males at least 25 years old were eligible, as well as persons 21 or older in certain cases. Additionally, "believing that the interests of the Methodist Protestant Church may, in certain contingencies, be most efficiently served by the election of females to the offices of class leader, steward and delegate to the annual conference...that this annual conference regard females, having the requisite qualifications, as eligible to said offices respectively" (*Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church 1878: 2*). Thus, women were permitted to play a significant role in the denomination.

Pastors for Benjamin Chapel, the only church noted on the Richwoods (or Richwood) circuit from 1877 to 1882, were appointed each year by the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. A.W. Wiggins was initially appointed as pastor to Richwoods in 1877, thus serving the new Benjamin Chapel.

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Josiah Sanders then served the church in 1879 and 1889, followed by S.A. Talbott. Church and Sunday School statistics were not included in the 1877 minutes, but then were included in subsequent years. The Richwood Circuit noted one church edifice from 1878 to 1882, valued at \$1,500. Membership was initially reported in 1878 as 90, with membership in the 50s for the next few years. The increase and decrease of members were also reported, though not seeming to always correlate with the gross numbers. Two Sunday Schools operated as part of the Richwoods circuit for most of these years, with a wide range of associated teachers and scholars. Through this same period, the New London circuit steadily grew from 117 members in 1878 to 200 members in 1883, while the neighboring Lowell circuit (without a church edifice) shrank from 159 members in 1878 to 50 members in 1883. It is unknown if these members shifted from Lowell to New London. The Rome mission is not listed separately in this period, with the exception of a Sunday School noted in 1883.

The original one-acre parcel bought by the Trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church in Trenton Township in February 1877 was a rectangular parcel that stretched along the east side of the road (currently Franklin Avenue). Benjamin Chapel was built on the north half of the parcel, leaving ample space to the south side for a cemetery, though it is unknown if this was the intent. The first two burials in the new cemetery were for the Black family in the 1870s to the rear/east of the church, Daniel Black (July 15, 1878, age 77, row #2) and Mary Ann Black (December 8, 1879, age 45, row #4). The decision to expand the cemetery further to the east or rear of the church was apparently made with the acquisition of an additional one-half acre of land on February 2, 1882 from Joseph Black and his wife for \$90 by the Trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church in Trenton Township, adding about 90 feet to the east side of the original parcel. During this period from 1877 to 1882, the Richwoods Methodist Episcopal Church also continued to operate about one-half mile to the south in Trenton Township, with the "old" Richwoods Cemetery associated with this church. Burials in this older cemetery are concentrated from the 1850s to the 1880s with a few later exceptions of family members. The "new" Richwoods Cemetery at Benjamin Chapel then appears to have served this rural neighborhood for the subsequent decades.

Benjamin B. Allender died on June 22, 1882 after a lingering illness, and he was buried in "Benjamin Chapel Cemetery," per his obituary. His funeral was held on June 23 at "Richwoods Church now called Benjamin Chapel, conducted by Rev. W.F. DeGarmo assisted by Rev. S.A. Talbott." At this time, Richwoods was the oldest continuous church organization in the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. He was noted as a "pillar in the church," serving in every place with leadership and integrity. He had taken the lead in the construction of the church "now called" Benjamin Chapel, giving about \$360 in money and labor of the costs of over \$1,600. Also, "his presence in Conference as a delegate was so frequent that his absence was ever to be noticed" ("Allender," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, July 27, 1882; 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002; C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the Country and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, July 24, 1948, 4).

The ministers for Benjamin Chapel were drawn both from the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and from local sources through the early years, as noted in Benjamin Allender's obituary and within the official minutes. The minutes from the Iowa Annual Conference in September 1882 report that S.A. Talbott had been the official minister appointed to Richwood for the previous year. The minutes also note other ministers living on each circuit, often ministers that had simply settled in the area and may have offered their services. In the 1882 minutes, both David Judd and William DeGarmo were listed as ministers affiliated with Richwood. As noted in Benjamin Allender's obituary, his funeral was conducted by Rev. W.F. DeGarmo who was assisted by Rev. S.A. Talbott. Rev. William E. DeGarmo lived immediately to the east of Benjamin Chapel in section 19 of Marion Township. He had been licensed and ordained as a deacon in the Methodist Protestant Church while living in Ohio, moving to Keokuk and uniting with the Iowa Conference of Methodist Protestant Church in fall 1855. He married and moved to Mount Pleasant in 1857, serving as a preacher there and becoming ordained as an elder in 1859. He then settled in the Richwood neighborhood to the northwest of town. He continued to live in this neighborhood in 1888, engaged in teaching and preaching as he found opportunity (*Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry Co* 1888: 621). The 1885 Iowa census lists William E. DeGarmo as a farmer at age 66 in section 19 of Marion Township. David Judd was listed with his family in



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Salem in the 1880 federal census, and they then moved to Trenton Township by 1885. The 1885 Iowa census lists David Judd (age 43) as a minister living with his family in the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 27 in Trenton Township, about two miles southwest of Benjamin Chapel and about half way to Rome. At the September 1882 Iowa Annual Conference, Rev. J.J. Caldwell was assigned to the Richwood Circuit, replacing S.A. Talbott. Minutes from the September 1883 conference then note that Rev. Caldwell had been released from Richwood and Rome on November 8, 1882, as the local church did not feel able to support an assigned pastor and they had investigated the prospect of securing the services of Brother David Judd. Judd was agreeable to this arrangement, and thus Caldwell was released from his assignment (Iowa Annual Conference 1883: 10).

Interesting, the Richwood Circuit appears to have grown in 1882-83 with the addition of White Oak Church on the Section 20-21 line in western Trenton Township, about three-and-one-half miles due west of Benjamin Chapel. The 1883 report notes an increase in the value of the church/es on the Richwoods circuit, though only one church is yet noted. This appears to be associated with the construction of the new White Oak Church in western Trenton Township in 1882-83, as the later Iowa Conference statistical reports then note two churches with a combined value of \$2,500 on the Richwood Circuit into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later Sunday School notes list classes at Richwood and White Oak. The old Methodist Protestant church at Richwoods about 80 rods (1/4 mile) to the north of Benjamin Chapel was later noted by local rural resident Cassius E. Carnahan (1864-1951) as moved to the White Oak neighborhood in western Trenton Township, located at the White Oak cemetery in 1948. J.H. Scarff and wife deeded land to Forest Oak Methodist Protestant Church in 1877, later known as White Oak. This church was replaced by a new frame church in 1882-83. Historic photographs of this church show two entry doors flanking a center bell tower on the gable façade (demolished in 2001) (C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the Country and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, July 24, 1948, 4; White Oak Church history by Zell Scarff in files of Henry County Historical Society).

Benjamin Chapel served an increased number of residents of the Richwoods neighborhood by the early 1890s. Membership grew from 45 in 1888 to an average around 80 in the 1890s. Approximately 31 burials are noted through the 1880s in the cemetery, representing a combination of older members of the earlier and current Methodist Protestant church as well as a number of infants and children of adult members. Leaders within the church through this period appear to have continued to have been drawn from among the original trustees still living, who had included B.B. Allender, J.E. Allender, Elias Black, L.W. Jay, Hiram Jerrel, R.J. Kinney, and J.M. Mitts. L.W. Jay and Elias Black are noted most frequently as the lay delegates to the Iowa Annual Conference through this period. Two churches are listed on the circuit, with Benjamin Chapel apparently valued at \$1,500 and White Oak apparently valued at \$1,000. Sunday Schools appear to have been held at both locations through this period. Church histories note Richwoods and White Oak worked together to acquire property in the west half of southwest quarter of section 13, about one-half mile north of Benjamin Chapel, from Elias Black on April 15, 1893. The minister for both churches then lived here in a parsonage into the 1910s (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). Newspapers indicate strong attendance at Benjamin Chapel in the early 1890s. For example, "Benjamin Chapel at Richwoods was crowded in spite of the bad roads" for the Christmas service in December 1893, which included music and recitations as well as sacks of candy and oranges on the Christmas tree for the children ("From Richwoods," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, January 4, 1894, 1). The 1895 atlas of Trenton Township indicates a Methodist Protestant church at the location of Benjamin Chapel in Section 24, with the old cemetery also noted about .6 miles south in Section 25 and a school noted another .75 miles to the south of the cemetery (Figure 14). The residents noted as living and owning property around the church are primarily members of Benjamin Chapel. Names familiar in church histories and cemetery records include members of the Allender family, James S. Logsdon, Ernest Bates, Frank Miller, Elias Black, John Black, Elizabeth Jerrel, and L.W. Jay.

The 1895 atlas also depicts a number of other rural churches that operated in Henry County in this period, with only three remaining standing on their original sites and two moved to Old Threshers in Mt Pleasant (Figure 15). Construction dates of these buildings range from the initial churches in the 1850s and 1860s to the growth



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of religious bodies in Henry County in the late 1880s to 1890s. Nearly all of these churches originally had a cemetery, which in many cases now serves to mark the site of the demolished church. In addition to the early Methodists, the Society of Friends (Quakers) had several rural churches in southwest Henry County, and a handful of rural Baptist, Congregational, United Brethren, and Mennonite churches had formed in northwest Henry County. Methodist Protestant churches are found on the Richwood circuit in Trenton Township, as well as on the New London circuit and Lowell circuit in southeast Henry County. The minutes of the September 1895 Iowa Annual Conference note that the Lowell circuit has three churches with 159 members, the New London circuit has two churches with 100 members, and the Richwood circuit has two churches with 103 members. The extant Pickle Church to the west of Lowell, built on land donated by Joseph and Mary Jane Pickle to the trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1883, appears to have been one of the three churches on the Lowell circuit (Iowa Site Inventory #44-01767, new windows and interior currently gutted). A large number of Methodist Episcopal churches are indicated on this map, including two to the north in Jefferson Township (1856, 1870), three to the east in Marion Township (1857, 1858, 1866), three further east in Canaan Township (1870, 1886, 1889), one to the southeast in Center Township (1869), one to the south in Tippecanoe Township (1892), one further to the south in Salem Township (c.1866), and one further to the southeast in Jackson Township (1879). The extant Beulah Church was built in 1885-86 in southwest Canaan Township after revivals in the Beulah neighborhood in the winter of 1884-85 (remodeled into house in 1970s, new windows / interior walls). Ebenezer Chapel suffered from its proximity to this new church as well as its former rival Wesley Chapel to the north, finally closing in the 1890s.

Religious revivals continued into the 1890s in Henry County, resulting in increased numbers in existing churches and formation of new rural churches. These revivals may have led to the increased membership numbers in Richwoods noted particularly in 1894 and 1895, as well as the continued higher numbers through the end of the 1890s. The annual report of the State Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church noted in 1896 that four new Methodist Episcopal churches had been bought/built and dedicated from 1890 to 1896 in Henry County, in Wayland (1892), Highland (1892), Rome, and Trenton (1894), all in western Henry County ("Short History of the Trenton Methodist Church," 1976 typed history in HCHS files). Rev. W.W. Roberts of Mt. Pleasant preached throughout Henry County to the west and south of Mt. Pleasant in this period, resulting in the formation of at least two churches. Pleasant Point Union Church originally met in the Pleasant Point School, and they then built a new church in late 1895 (extant; good integrity of form, windows, interior; clad in vinyl siding with small side addition). The Oakland Union Church was then built at Oakland Mills in 1898, following a very similar design to the Pleasant Point church and moving services from the school into a church (extant; low historic integrity as moved to current site, large additions, vinyl siding). Both of these churches reflect a similar design as Benjamin Chapel, with a gable-front church with a bell tower on the roof, three windows per side, and four-over-four-light double-hung sashes with a wider vertical than horizontal muntins. The "union church" was designed to serve all rural residents of the area, regardless of particular denomination. Oakland Mills later became part of the Mt. Pleasant West Circuit for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 1910s, joining Trenton, Highland, and Donaldson Chapel. The Mt. Pleasant Circuit for the Methodist Episcopal Church continued to include Wesley Chapel, Prairie Gem, Beulah, and Pleasant Hill. The Mt. Union Circuit included Trinity Church and Canaan Church, while the Wayland Circuit included Center Chapel and Finley Church. The growth of Finley Church and Wesley Chapel led to the construction of new buildings for these rural churches in 1901. Each of these individual churches thus served a particular rural neighborhood, connected by shared ministers and sometimes events. The significance of these churches is thus tied to their original locations and role within these rural neighborhoods. Among these churches, Benjamin Chapel stands out for its strong historic integrity and ongoing association with the historic Richwoods rural neighborhood.

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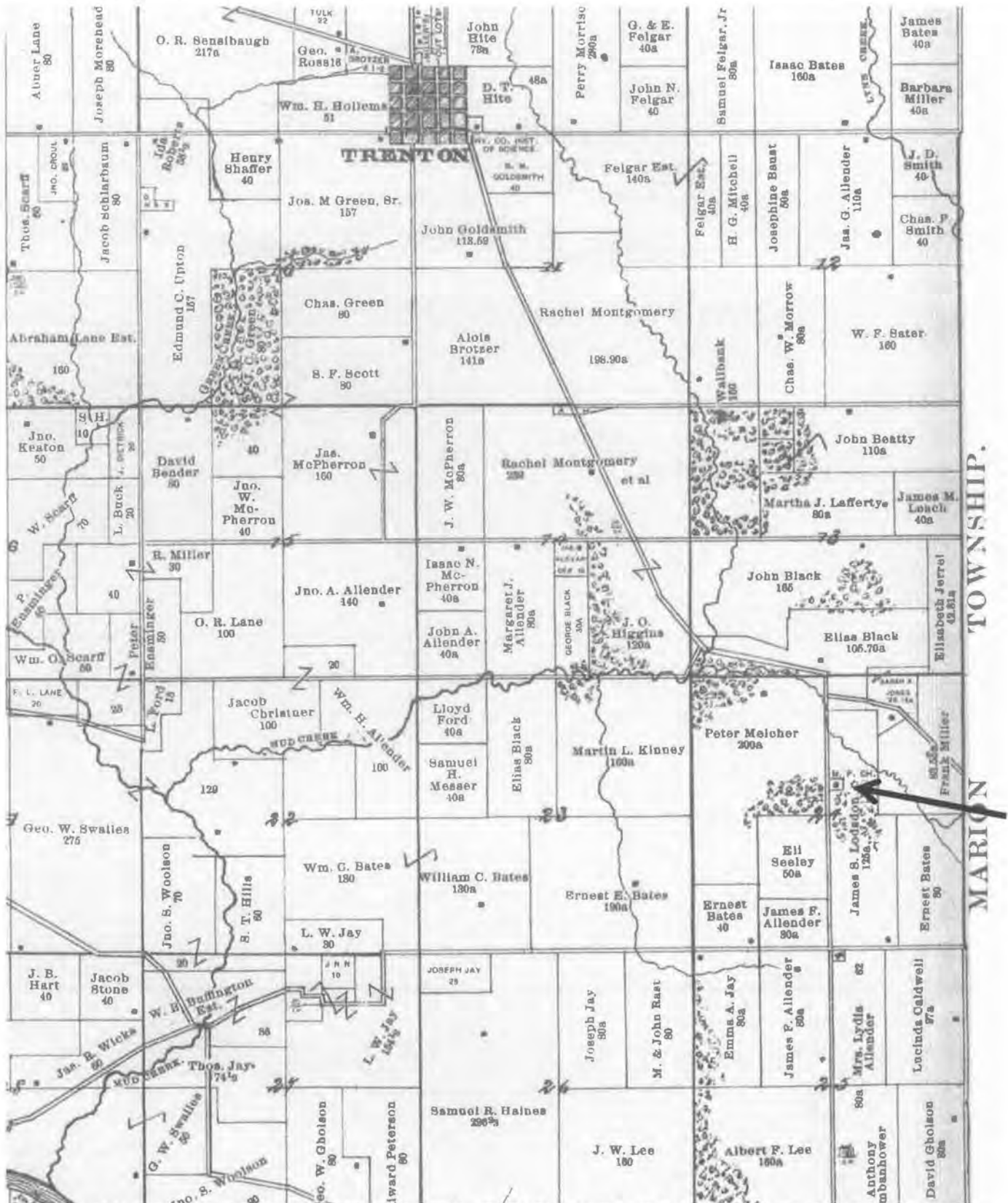


Figure 14. 1895 map of Trenton Township, with "M.P. Church" indicated (Brooks and Whiting 1895: 5).

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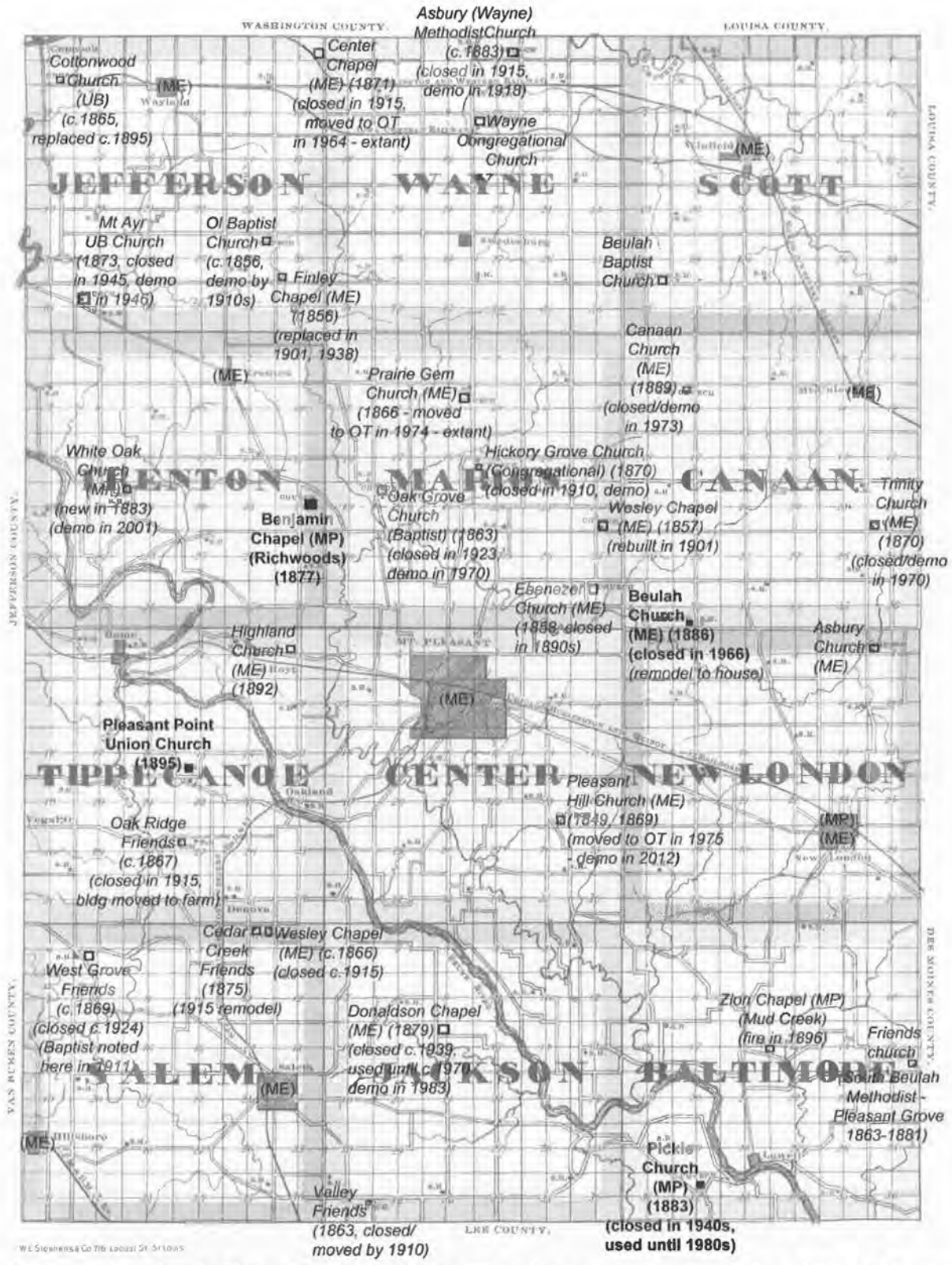


Figure 15. Rural churches in Henry County in 1895, with notes on construction dates, dates of closures, and demolition dates. Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) and Methodist Protestant (M.P.) churches in towns also indicated. Extant churches indicated by solid square. (McCarly 2014; base map from Brooks and Whiting 1895: 1)



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The church is referenced as Benjamin Chapel or Richwoods Methodist Protestant Church through the 1890s. The September 1896 obituary for Margaret Iowa Kean Allender notes that she was a member of the Methodist Protestant church and her funeral was held by James Elrick at Benjamin Chapel where she was buried ("Obituary," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, September 21, 1896, 4). In February 1898, the funeral service for Anthony Umbanhouer was preached in the Richwoods Methodist Protestant church by Rev. J. C. Porter ("Obituary," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 18, 1898, 4). The funeral notice of J.S. Kinney in March 1898 notes that his funeral was held at "Benjamin Chapel in the Richwoods neighborhood" ("Mt. Pleasant," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, March 25, 1898, 6). A Sunday School picnic was held at "Benjamin Chapel – Richwoods" on August 17, 1899 ("Local Department," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, August 7, 1899, 4). When the rural mail route was established to the northwest of Mt. Pleasant in summer 1899, Cassius Carnahan, John W. Lee and John R. Hughes were active in reviewing the route. The route intersected Trenton road "near Black's place, then down that to the road on which Richwoods church is situated, then south to the cemetery, and east past James Logsdon to Traxler," and continued on for a total of 26 miles overall. It served 193 families, with 206 residences within a mile of the route in nearly all of west Marion Township, northwest Center Township, and Trenton Township generally south of Trenton ("Rural Free Routes," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, June 29, 1899, 3). A similar number of burials occurred in the cemetery at Benjamin Chapel through the 1890s (34) as in the 1880s (31), again tied to a combination of deaths of older members and children of adult members. The cemetery developed in this period as a number of family plots throughout the platted area, with burials from several decades then found within a single area.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Benjamin Chapel congregation appears to have withstood its own set of local issues, likely resulting in decreased numbers. Membership for the Richwood circuit was reported at 65 in September 1901, falling to 30 reported in 1903 and 25 in 1906. Two churches continued to be noted in this period, so decreased numbers also are tied to decreases at White Oak Church as well as Benjamin Chapel. Rev. N.F. Vincent was sent to Richwood circuit in 1903, facing an issue of disruptions by youths in the neighborhood. Two particularly rowdy young men were then convicted of a physical attack on Rev. Vincent, pastor of Richwoods Methodist Protestant church, in August 1903. The article on the incident noted that it was "one of a long series of ruptures in church circles in Richwoods," as the church faced the issue of "threats of the gang and the lack of support of the respectable citizens, who preferred to see the church disturbed rather than run the risk of being sandbagged at night or having their property destroyed by fire or their cattle killed or maimed." Rev. Vincent was working to quiet this element, resulting in his attack ("Was Rather Costly," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, August 4, 1903, 1). Despite this incident, Rev. Vincent remained at his call, and his wife died and was buried at the cemetery while he was here ("20 Years Ago Today," *Mt Pleasant News*, March 10, 1924, 3).

At the same time, the Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa faced the issue of dwindling numbers and sustaining congregations at the statewide level at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the "conservative" Methodists, it had prospered in rural areas more than urban areas through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the growth of the more conservative Nazarene Church began to draw members away from it, as well as conflicts between the Iowa Conference and the national body (Nye 1986: 93-94). The Iowa Annual Conference in September 1903 considered the broader discussion on the union between the Methodist Protestant church, United Brethren church, and the Congregational church. These churches had similar theologies and faced similar issues of sustaining congregations. While discussions did not result in a union at this time, they did introduce a possible solution for future discussions on this growing concern.

The history of Benjamin Chapel over the next decade is then tied to the history of rural churches in northwest Henry County, further emphasizing its role and significance as a church for the rural Richwoods neighborhood. The discussions at the 1903 conference may have contributed to the evolving operations of Benjamin Chapel in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Iowa Annual Conference did not send a new minister to Richwood circuit in 1904, with minutes then noting in 1906 that the minister was supplied by the United Brethren church. The United Brethren Church had strong roots in northeast Henry County. Cottonwood Church in northwest

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Jefferson Township (north of Trenton Township) was organized as the Church of United Brethren in 1842 – the oldest congregation west of Mississippi. The first church built in 1865 was nearly all cottonwood, thus the name. The church required additional space around the same time that the U.B. church in Pleasant Plain disbanded, and the Iowa U.B. Conference gave this church building to Cottonwood Church and it was moved to the site to replace the older Cottonwood Church, which was moved into Coppock for a store. The growth of the United Brethren church in northeast Henry County resulted in the construction of the Mt. Ayr United Brethren Church in southwest Jefferson Township in 1873, and it operated as part of the Cottonwood circuit. A note from Coppock in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* on February 1, 1905 notes that Rev. Bradley was preaching at a revival in Mystic, but he had returned to fill his regular appointment at Cottonwood and Mt. Ayr churches. In addition to serving these churches, the “M.P. churches of Richwoods and White Oak have united with the U.B. churches of Cottonwood and Mt. Ayr for the coming year” (*Burlington Hawk-Eye*, February 1, 1905). The history of the Cottonwood Church notes that there was a shared ministry from Cottonwood U.B. Church with White Oak and Richwood Methodist Protestant churches from 1905 to 1907. In this period, W.D. Bradley served from 1903 to 1905, R.J. Allred served from 1905 to 1906, and J.B. Sulavan served from 1906 to 1908 (*Cottonwood UMC: Celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ*, June 2000). Interestingly, the Church of God congregation at Green Mound had worshipped at the Mt. Ayr United Brethren Church after their 1847 church was destroyed by lightning in 1877 until their new church was completed in 1901 in northern Trenton Township, further emphasizing the cooperation among these local rural churches (*Green Mound Church of God, 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet, 1847-1972*).

Though served by ministers of other church organizations, Benjamin Chapel continued to serve an important role within the Richwoods neighborhood through the 1900s. Burials in the cemetery were spread throughout the area, with older and younger residents of the Richwoods neighborhood buried on lots with family members. Around 28 burials are noted in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with approximately 100 total burials in the cemetery then from 1877 to 1910. Despite lower reported membership statistics, the Sunday School remained active through this period. A.B. Andrews, president of the Henry County Sunday School Association, held a meeting of the schools in Trenton Township and the vicinity on September 17, 1906 at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Trenton, attended by representatives from Trenton M.E. Church, Trenton Mennonite Church, Green Mound (Church of God), Highland (M.E.), and Richwoods (represented by Martha Allender) (“An Interesting Meeting,” *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, September 18, 1906, 3).

The members of Benjamin Chapel continued to be involved in promoting the church among the residents of the Richwoods neighborhood as well, drawing on Rev. Frank E. Weston of First Baptist Church of Mount Pleasant to preach at services. In January 1907, Charles Allender of Richwoods reported to the *Mount Pleasant Daily News* that they were “having a good revival up in the neighborhood and every evening Benjamin Chapel is filled with an earnest and interested audience to listen to Rev. Weston, who is conducting the revival. The meetings have been going on two weeks and the interest manifested justifies the prediction that great good will come to them.” He noted that Rev. Weston was very much thought of by the people of the community” (*Mt Pleasant Daily News*, January 17, 1907, 4). Rev. Frank E. Weston served as pastor at First Baptist Church in Mt. Pleasant from February 1, 1905 until his death on March 10, 1932. During this period, in addition to serving his Mt. Pleasant congregation and the Rome Baptist Church in Tippecanoe Township, Rev. Weston filled vacancies in numerous other rural churches in western Henry County, generally ministering to those without a pastor, conducting services on occasion, and conducting funerals. His funeral in 1932 was attended so heavily that it was held in the larger Methodist Episcopal Church in Mt. Pleasant, rather than his First Baptist Church (“Rev. F.E. Weston Has Passed On,” *Mt Pleasant News*, March 10, 1932, 1; “Rev. Weston Rites Are Held,” *Mt Pleasant News*, March 14, 1932, 1). Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the Richwoods community drew on the services of Rev. Frank E. Weston, who conducted numerous funerals at Benjamin Chapel in this period and was noted as a friend to the residents. He also appears to have led efforts for a 38-day revival in Mount Pleasant in January and February of 1916, in conjunction with the Methodist, Presbyterian, Christian, and Congregational churches. Union meetings were initially held at the Methodist Episcopal Church (largest facility), with evangelist Rev. Charles Goff preaching at numerous churches for regular and revival services



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throughout these months. The revival was commemorated at the close by a special edition of the *Mount Pleasant Daily News* on February 10, 1916.

With perhaps an eye towards decreasing numbers of official church members, additional focus was placed on the organization and maintenance of the cemetery at Benjamin Chapel in the early 1910s. At the same time, the church recognized the need for the cemetery in the Richwoods neighborhood, including considering the need for additional space. In November 1910, Frank and Alice Miller sold an additional one-half acre strip of land to the east of the existing cemetery to the trustees of the Protestant Methodist church of Benjamin Chapel for \$60. Notices then appeared in the *Mount Pleasant Daily News* for meetings of the cemetery association on March 1, noted as the Richwoods Cemetery association in 1911, the Benjamin Chapel Grave Yard association in 1912, the Richwoods Cemetery Association in 1916, and the Richwoods Graveyard Association in 1919 ("Notice," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 21, 1911, 2; *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 19, 1912, 4; "Notice," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 23, 1916, 3; *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 24, 1919, 4). Business was conducted at the annual meeting each year, and officers were elected. Approximately 37 burials took place in the cemetery through the 1910s, with several obituaries referencing the "beautiful burying ground" at Benjamin Chapel or at Richwoods. A historic photograph of Benjamin Chapel around 1910 likely depicts the church on a day of a funeral or event, given the membership numbers in this period (Figure 16). This photograph shows buggies parked on the south half of the church property. The two doors on the gable façade of the church, bell tower with steeple, chimney at the east end, and four-over-four-light double-hung windows with shutters are clearly visible features of the church in this photograph.



**Figure 16. c.1910 photograph of Benjamin Chapel (in collection of Virginia Sommerfeld)**



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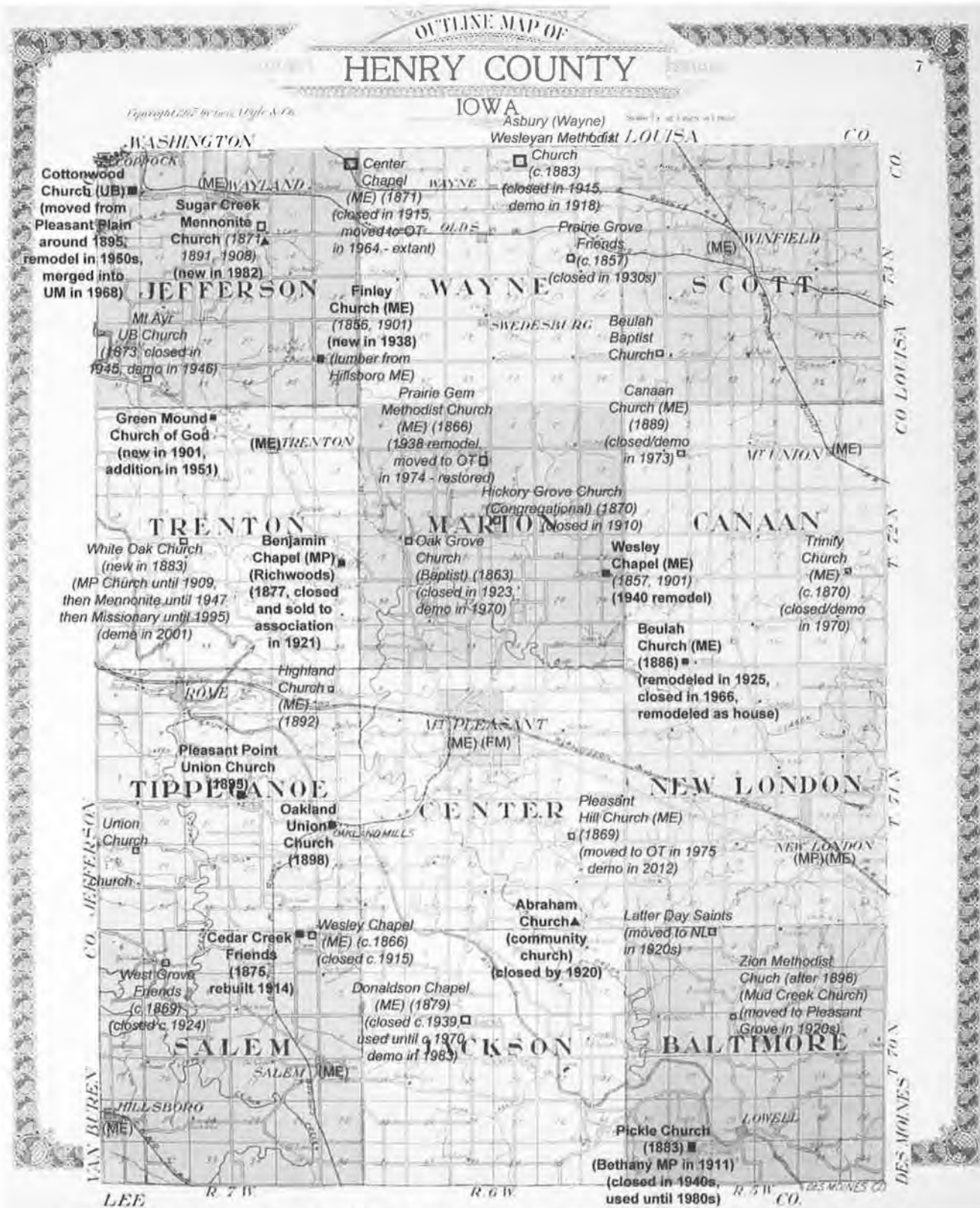


Figure 17. Rural churches in Henry County in 1910s, with notes on dates of construction, remodeling, closures, moves, and demolition. Extant historic churches indicated by solid square. (McCarly 2014; base map from Ogle 1917: 31)

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The 1911-12 county directory for Henry County notes a total of 23 rural churches in Henry County, plus an additional 22 churches in Henry County towns not including Mount Pleasant. In addition to these rural churches, at least half a dozen are noted in other sources as operating through this period. The 1917 atlas of Henry County likewise depicts the locations of these networks of churches throughout the county, with nearly all of the rural churches on this atlas identified by name with basic operational information through the research for this nomination (Figure 17). These churches were generally concentrated in the more rural townships, with rural churches largely absent in townships including the towns of Winfield and New London. Approximately one-third of these churches remain extant on their original sites, with Benjamin Chapel clearly retaining the highest level of historic integrity. While other extant churches continued regular operations through the middle or end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remodeled/updated their buildings accordingly, members of Benjamin Chapel continued to utilize their building in its original form, without adding electricity, plumbing, or a basement to the building. Thus, Benjamin Chapel exists as a remarkably intact rural church from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century on its original site in Henry County.

The directory provides insight into the rural circuits that operated within and among several church denominations within this period, as well as the struggle to support pastors in rural churches. One pastor supported multiple churches within various rural neighborhoods, with each rural church thus maintaining its significant role as a center of activities for that area. The Methodist Episcopal Church maintained its official circuits through this period, including Wayland (Wayland, Finley), Mt. Union (Mt. Union, Canaan, Trinity), Mt. Pleasant (Prairie Gem, Wesley, Beulah, Pleasant Hill), Mt. Pleasant West (Trenton, Highland, Donaldson, and addition of Oakland Mills), and Salem (Salem, Wesley). Rev. Frank E. Weston is listed as pastor for First Baptist Church in Mt. Pleasant as well as for Rome Baptist Church. No pastor was noted for Oak Grove Primitive Baptist Church in Marion Township or West Grove Baptist Church in Salem Township, and he may have served both of these churches as well. Pleasant Point Union Church in Tippecanoe Township is noted with no pastor, and Weston is later noted as conducting funerals here as well. Rev. A.C. Droz served as pastor at Mt. Union Baptist Church in eastern Henry County, as well as Beulah Baptist Church in southwest Scott Township. Rev. J. Hygema of the Trenton Mennonite was noted as holding services also at White Oak Church, and no pastor is noted at Richwoods M.P. Church. The United Brethren churches of Cottonwood and Mt. Ayr in Jefferson Township are likewise listed without any pastor noted. In southwest Henry County, the Society of Friends Church in Salem and Cedar Creek Friends Church in Salem Township were served by Revs. J. Melvin and Anna Smith. In southeast Henry County, New London remained a stronghold for the Methodist Protestant denomination, building a new church that was recognized at the 1911 Iowa Annual Conference as a "model for beauty and convenience and reflects great credit, not only upon the brethren and friends of our church in New London, but upon our entire Conference" (Iowa Annual Conference 1911: 14). The number of members on the New London circuit swelled to 228 as reported in the 1915 minutes, with a second church (Beulah in Des Moines County to the east) also on the circuit. At the same time, the Lowell circuit of the Methodist Protestant church was struggling, with no pastor noted in the 1911 directory at either Bethany M.P. Church (Pickle Church) or Mud Creek Church (Zion M.P.). Only 23 members were reported among three churches on the circuit in 1915 (Pickle / Bethany, Zion / Mud Creek, and Eden Chapel in Lee County to the south).

Through the 1910s, Benjamin Chapel appears to have largely been associated with the Methodist Protestant Church on paper only, without ministers supplied or delegates at the conference. The Richwoods residents appear to have been served at their church at the local level by the Trenton Mennonite Church starting in the 1910s, with Baptist minister Frank E. Weston also continuing to be involved at the church. The history of the Mennonite Church in Henry County is tied to Jefferson Township to the north, with the first Sugar Creek church built in 1871 followed by larger churches built in 1891 and 1908. By 1911, Mennonite churches also operated in Wayland and Trenton (organized in 1903). The local history of the White Oak church notes that the church became a Mennonite Church around 1909, and the 1911-12 county directory notes "services by Rev. J. Hygema of the Mennonite denomination." The *Mt Pleasant News* reported in December that very successful revival meetings were being held by Rev. Jacob Hygema, pastor of Mennonite church at Trenton at White Oak



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church north of Rome, with 50-60 conversions reported ("Local Matters," *Mt Pleasant News*, December 27, 1911, 4). It would remain affiliated with the Mennonite denomination through the evolution to the United Missionary church, closing as the White Oak Missionary Church in 1995 (demolished in 2001) (White Oak Church history by Zell Scarff in files of Henry County Historical Society). With the historic connections between the White Oak and Richwoods communities, as well as proximity of Trenton, Rev. Jacob Hygema then appears to have also spent some time in Richwoods. The funeral of Wesley Allender (brother of Benjamin B. Allender, husband of Ellen Mitts) at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, on November 10, 1912 was "one of the most largely attended funerals ever held in Henry County," with the church completely filled and additional people standing outside. The services were conducted by Frank E. Weston, pastor of First Baptist Church, who was assisted by Rev. Jacob Hygema, pastor of Mennonite church, Trenton ("Funeral at Richwoods," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, November 11, 1912, 3). However, Frank E. Weston appears to have remained strongly associated with the Richwoods community, serving as the lead minister. He also is listed as the only minister for the funerals of long-time Richwoods residents Eliza J. Haines in May 1913 and Elizabeth Jay in April 1914, with services held at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, and burial in the "beautiful cemetery adjoining the chapel" ("Aged Lady Passes Away," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, May 12, 1913, 3; "The Late Mrs. Lindsay W. Jay," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, April 15, 1914, 4). The joint Richwoods / White Oak parsonage was then sold in May 1916 by the Benjamin Chapel Society to C.W. Brewster, and it served as the home for Mark Brewster for several decades ("Real Estate Transfers," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, May 6, 1916, 2).

After several years with only one church (Benjamin Chapel) noted on the Richwood circuit in the official Iowa Annual Conference statistics for the Methodist Protestant church, two churches were then again noted in the later 1910s. Declining membership in both the Iowa Conference and North Missouri Conference of the Methodist Protestant church resulted in a merger in 1916 and creation of the Iowa-Missouri Conference. This merger may have led to a better effort to account for churches officially served within the conference. Official membership is low with only around 20 members, but Sunday Schools were reported at Richwood and White Oak in 1915. It is unknown if this references Methodist Protestant classes or simply a Sunday School being held at the church. It appears to have been the efforts of the Mennonite Church that led to a delegate and minister then noted for the Richwood circuit in the reports to the Iowa Annual Conference in 1916 to 1918 for the Methodist Protestant Church. Rev. J.A. Beery served as pastor at the Trenton Mennonite Church from 1913 to 1918. He was noted as holding the Children's Day services at Richwoods, which were well attended, in June 1915, and he was reappointed as pastor of the Trenton Mennonite Church in September 1915 ("Trenton Letter," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, June 15, 1915, 2; "Trenton Letter," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, September 14, 1915, 3). The pastoral role for Richwood Circuit, including both Benjamin Chapel and White Oak, was noted as supplied by J.A. Beery in the 1916, 1917, and 1918 minutes. The delegate, Ralph McClure, is noted as living three-and-one-half miles south of Trenton in the 1918 *Mt Pleasant* directory, and thus was located within the White Oak neighborhood. In December 1916, the *Mt Pleasant Daily News* noted that "Rev. Beery will begin revival meetings at Richwoods Sunday evening" ("Richwoods Letter," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, December 13, 1916, 2). Thus, there remained a strong effort to serve the religious needs of the Richwoods community, though less officially through the Methodist Protestant Church.

Regardless of the minister in charge, Benjamin Chapel remained as the Richwoods neighborhood church and cemetery through the end of the 1910s. The service of Thomas Leroy Ford was conducted at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, by Pastor Frank Weston of First Baptist Church assisted by Pastor Beery of Trenton in February 1916, and he was buried next to his wife and baby in Richwoods cemetery ("Passing of Leroy Ford," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 15, 1916, 3). Long-time Richwoods neighborhood resident and Methodist Protestant church member Foster Glenville Balderson died in July 1918, with his services conducted in Benjamin Chapel by Rev. Frank Weston of First Baptist Church and his burial in Richwoods cemetery ("Foster Glenville Balderson," *Mount Pleasant Daily News*, July 9, 1918, 2). One of the original trustees, Elias Black, died in July 1919, with his obituary noting that he was united with the Methodist Protestant church in Richwoods around 1860. His funeral was conducted at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, by Rev. J.S. Wood of New London Methodist Protestant Church, assisted by Frank E. Weston of First Baptist Church ("Mr. Elias



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Black Dies," *Mt Pleasant Daily News*, July 29, 1919, 3). The Richwoods residents also worked to maintain the cemetery through this period. The *Mt Pleasant Daily News* published a notice in February 1919 that the Richwoods Graveyard Association would meet at Benjamin Chapel on March 1 (*Mt Pleasant Daily News*, February 24, 1919, 4). The Richwood circuit once again was noted in the Iowa Annual Conference minutes as "unsupplied" and with "no report" in 1919 and 1920.

### ***Evolution of Benjamin Chapel within the Richwoods community, 1921-1965***

Without a sustained Methodist Protestant congregation on the Richwood circuit, the Iowa-Missouri Conference began procedures to sell the church buildings in fall 1920. In response, the Benjamin Chapel Association was organized in April 1921, acquiring Benjamin Chapel from the conference in May. Rather than resulting in the demolition of the church or marking the end of church operations, this move was designed to shift responsibility for maintaining church services at Benjamin Chapel from a particular denomination to the Richwoods neighborhood residents. The purpose of the organization was that there would be maintained at all times a place that might be used for public worship by all the people of the Richwoods neighborhood and community. Precedent for this strategy of a locally driven church had already been set through their cooperation with the local United Brethren churches in the early 1900s, subsequent services by Rev. Frank E. Weston of First Baptist Church, and further cooperation with the Trenton Mennonite church in the 1910s. Benjamin Chapel thus operated through more and less active periods as the rural Richwoods neighborhood church throughout the next four decades.

On April 21, 1921, the members of Benjamin Chapel Congregation met to organize into a voluntary association to be known as the Benjamin Chapel Association. Members of the congregation in attendance included Samuel Allender, Osbert Allender, C.U. Allender, P.F. Alter, I.E. Alexander, John E. Bates, C.W. Brewster, Louis Craff, Isaac McPheron, and John A. Scarff. The articles of incorporation state:

The object of this association shall be to maintain a church building at or near the location of the building and place described in section one hereof, and to support a church organization in said vicinity by the voluntary contributions of members and by such other persons as may desire to aid in Christian work; to foster and encourage clean and helpful association among the members of such Association, and to provide a place where religious services may be held, and which shall be suitable for and used for a community center open to the use of all people of the neighborhood, subject to such reasonable restrictions and guidance as the Trustees of the Association may make. It is the purpose of the organizers of this Association that any recognized Protestant Church organization may, first having permission of the Trustees of this Association, be allowed to hold religious services in the building and on the property of this association, at such times as will not interfere with regular or stated meetings of any other organizations for which permission has been secured. The broad purpose of this Association is that in said community and neighborhood there may be at all times maintained a place which may be used for public worship by all the people of the neighborhood, without distinction against any body of Protestant worshippers; and to that end it is declared that the conveyance of the property of the association to any particular denomination shall not be permitted, but it shall at all times be held for the general use of the community as provided above.

The trustees of the Benjamin Chapel Association were granted the authority to hold title to any real estate for the organization, as well as repair and improve the property as needed. Trustees were elected to their position without terms, with only resignation or death ending their service. The original trustees set were Samuel Allender, P.F. Alter, John E. Bates, John A. Scarff, and Louis Craff (Deed Book 123: 223).

The first order of business was then the acquisition of the Benjamin Chapel property from the Iowa-Missouri Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. On May 9, the Board of Church Extension of the Iowa-Missouri Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church (Des Moines) transferred the property to the Trustees of Benjamin Chapel Association for \$250 (Deed Book 142: 373). The articles noted that "Should the

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Trustees acquire by purchase or otherwise the Church property and grounds heretofore known as Benjamin Chapel or Richwoods church property, including the cemetery adjacent thereto, it is provided that the title to said cemetery tract never be alienated but it shall forever be held sacred for the purposes to which it was originally dedicated and has since been used" (Deed Book 123: 223). Thus, the cemetery was provided for through this organization as well. The *Mt. Pleasant Daily News* reported that "Benjamin Chapel up in the Richwoods district has been sold to Mr. Sam Allender who will reserve it for church purposes. Benjamin Chapel is a remainder of the pioneer days" ("Local Happenings," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, June 3, 1921, 4).

The members of Benjamin Chapel were not the only rural congregation in Henry County faced with issues related to church buildings, cemeteries, and membership in the 1920s. Rural congregations generally took two distinct paths in this period – disband or expand. In Marion Township to the east of Benjamin Chapel, the grounds of Hickory Grove Congregational Church were deeded to the Hickory Grove Cemetery Association in 1916, who maintained the cemetery until 1931 when the grounds were transferred to Marion Township trustees. Oak Grove Baptist Church closed in 1923, with the building deeded to the Oak Grove Cemetery Association and later demolished in 1950. Three rural Methodist Episcopal churches in central and eastern Henry County remodeled their buildings in the 1920s to meet modern needs. Trinity Church in Canaan Township was raised in 1923 to add a basement, and electricity was also added. A basement and Sunday School room were also added at nearby Beulah Church in 1925. The interior and façade of Pleasant Hill Church was remodeled in 1927, replacing the two-door design with a double-door entry and window. A basement was later added to provide additional space in 1959. Thus, Benjamin Chapel was in a somewhat unique position in maintaining church operations at their facility without any modernization programs undertaken in the 1920s or 1930s.

Operations at Benjamin Chapel continued in the 1920s on the path begun in the 1910s. Efforts were made to partner with other denominations to provide services and ministers in the Richwoods neighborhood. Rev. Mrs. M. Sutliff, an evangelist for the Church of God, was engaged by Rev. Grover to conduct revival meetings at Richwoods beginning on October 2, 1921. Services were held at 7:00 on Sunday evening by elder Rev. Scott ("Richwoods," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, September 29, 1921, 3). Funerals for J.L. Fickel in May 1921, Marjorie Harper in November 1921, and Lindsay W. Jay in February 1923 were all noted as held at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, with services conducted by Rev. Frank E. Weston of First Baptist Church in Mt. Pleasant and burials in Richwoods cemetery. Methodist ties were stronger for Ella May (Allender) Hauf, whose funeral in March 1922 was conducted at Benjamin Chapel by W.R. Keesey of the First Methodist Church assisted by Rev. F.E. Weston ("Mrs. Ella May Allender Hauf," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, March 15, 1922, 3). Samuel Allender likewise had joint services by Rev. S.F. Bishop and Rev. F.E. Weston in March 1923 at Richwoods church and was buried in the cemetery there ("Services for Old Resident," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, March 28, 1923, 1). Burials in this period include primarily residents of the Richwoods neighborhood, but also included family members of those previously buried here that had moved away or joined other churches. The Green Mound Church of God appears to have continued to have an outreach at Benjamin Chapel to serve the Richwoods neighborhood, with a note in September 1924 that Charles Hall and family, Elsie Bates, Cornelia Haines, Glenn Haines and family, Leslie Scarff and family, and all of Richwoods Sunday School attended an all day meeting at Green Mound on Sunday ("Richwood News of Interest Here," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, September 24, 1924, 3). Sunday School was noted as held at Richwoods every Sunday at 9:45 in this period ("Richwood News," *Mt. Pleasant Daily News*, November 30, 1923, 3). Children's Day programs were often held in June by members of the Sunday School class, such as on June 6, 1926 ("Comings and Goings at Richwoods," *Mt. Pleasant News*, May 25, 1926, 1). Notes in the Richwoods column of the *Mt. Pleasant News* included items such as "Don't forget Sunday school followed by preaching at the Richwoods church next Sunday morning," without further specifics ("News Items From Richwoods Vicinity," *Mt. Pleasant News*, October 10, 1928, 1). In this period, White Oak remained a Mennonite congregation, with evangelist Rev. J.A. Beery noted as preaching revival meetings at White Oak Church in the first week of July 1926 ("White Oak News Items of Interest," *Mt. Pleasant News*, July 1, 1926, 1). The funeral for long-time Richwoods resident and member Frank Miller was held in Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods, in April 1927 by Pastor Frank Weston of First



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Baptist Church, "an old friend of the family" ("Frank Miller Laid to Rest at Richwoods Saturday," *Mt Pleasant News*, April 5, 1927, 3).

Around 1930, Benjamin Chapel at Richwoods appears to have again shifted to a Mennonite church, perhaps linked to the assignment of Rev. J.K. Myers to the Trenton Mennonite Church, which continued to be linked to the church at White Oak as well. Pastor Frank Weston of First Baptist Church also continued to serve residents of Richwoods, as well as the broader Trenton Township. He is noted as conducting the funeral at White Oak of Brien Flanders, a member of Protestant Methodist church at White Oak, assisted by Rev. J.K. Myers of the Mennonite church, Trenton ("Brien Flanders Funeral Tuesday," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 1, 1930, 1). Items in the *Mt Pleasant News* in October 1930 noted that "There will be preaching at Richwoods church next Sunday at 11:00" and "There will be church services at the Richwoods church Sunday morning Nov. 2. Sunday school at 10 o'clock" ("Much Visiting in Richwoods Section," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 2, 1930, 5; "Richwoods News Notes of Interest," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 31, 1930, 3). In November 1930, several families gathered at the home of J.E. Bates to cut, saw, and haul wood to be used by Rev. Myers and the church. While men cut wood, the ladies spent the day quilting and sewing for Mrs. Myers. The Richwoods families included John Engerson, Chris Engerson, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Parker, Mr. and Mrs. John Lane, John Allender and family, Oscar Sandburg, Leslie Scarff and family, Emma Jay, Harold Jay and family, Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Smith, Chris Messer and family, Arthur Scarff and family, John Bates and family, and Levi Miller and family ("Wood Cutting Held at Richwoods Farm," *Mt. Pleasant News*, November 14, 1930, 3). On January 2, 1931, the newspaper noted that the "Richwoods Sunday School was reorganized last Sunday," and that "The next preaching service at Richwoods will be Sunday January 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sunday School every Sunday at 10:00." Rev. and Mrs. Myers and children had also spent Sunday at the John Lane home (son-in-law of John E. Bates, father of Virginia Sommerfeld) ("Entertain Relatives at Richwoods Home," *Mt Pleasant News*, January 2, 1931).

Efforts continued through the 1930s at maintaining services at Benjamin Chapel and strong involvement of the Richwoods residents, with the Sunday School meeting throughout this decade. Revival meetings were held in April 1931 at Richwoods church, bringing in additional members ("Happenings in Richwoods Vicinity," *Mt. Pleasant News*, April 10, 1931, 3). A lengthy account of the Children's Day program by members of Richwoods Sunday School under the direction of Rev. Myers on June 14, 1931 appeared in the *Mt. Pleasant News*, with children involved from the Allender, Lane, Miller, Messer, Scarff, Jay, Myers, Brewster, Beaber, Nau, Watts, Watson, and Wilson families ("Richwoods S.S. Presents Program," *Mt. Pleasant News*, June 18, 1931, 3). Several of these families were related to each other. In September 1931, Rev. Myers and family returned as the local Mennonite pastor again from the Mennonite conference at Shambaugh, Iowa, much to the pleasure of those at White Oak ("White Oak News Notes of Interest," *Mt Pleasant News*, September 2, 1931, 1). Services were announced in the Richwoods newspaper column again in September, with Sunday School at 10:00 and "everyone welcome" ("Richwoods," *Mt Pleasant News*, September 24, 1931, 10). While Rev. J.K. Myers appears to have conducted most of the activities, Rev. Frank Weston also continued to be involved in the Richwoods neighborhood, particularly with older residents. He conducted the funeral for Isaac McPheron at Benjamin Chapel, Richwoods in November 1931, assisted by Rev. Mr. Myers of Mennonite Church, Trenton ("Isaac McPheron Rites Held Sunday," *Mt Pleasant News*, November 11, 1931, 2). On March 10, 1932, Rev. Frank E. Weston died in Mt. Pleasant at age 68, after serving as pastor at First Baptist Church for 28 years. His obituary noted that "Rev Weston is probably better known in the homes of Henry County than any other minister who ever served here" ("Rev. F.E. Weston Has Passed On," *Mt Pleasant News*, March 10, 1932, 1). Richwoods then continued to be served by Rev. Myers, with a note in May 1932 that he "filled his regular appointment at Richwoods Sunday evening. Sunday school - 10 a.m." ("Richwood," *Mt. Pleasant*, May 3, 1932, 4). In October 1932, traveling evangelists of the Nebraska conference, Mr. and Mrs. T.J. Overholt of Shambaugh, held evangelistic services every evening at 7:45 at Richwoods church assisted by Rev. Myers ("Evangelistic Service at Richwoods Church," *Mt. Pleasant News*, October 5, 1932, 1). Rev. Myers conducted the funeral of Hazel Mae Scarff at Richwoods church in February 1934 ("Wayland News," *Mt Pleasant News*, February 8, 1934). Rev. Myers served the Trenton Mennonite Church from 1930 to 1935, followed by Rev.



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J.S.K. Wipf from 1935 to 1940. Children's Day programs continued to be held in June through the 1930s, and Virginia Sommerfeld recalls Rev. Wipf leading the classes and programs in this period. Throughout the decade, there continued to be fairly regular Sunday School programs and services at the church (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002; Sommerfeld 2014).

The 1930s were an interesting period in church operations, particularly for rural churches in Henry County as well as across the country. The 1931 map of Trenton Township continued to show Benjamin Chapel in Section 24, with the old cemetery and school to the south in Section 25 (Figure 18). A number of other rural churches are also noted on this map, nearly all of the churches found on the 1917 map. The Great Depression affected town and rural residents alike, as well as the traditional Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal churches. The issues affecting farms in the early 1920s after World War I and resulting in rural population loss thus affected remaining Methodist Protestant congregations. The number of circuits in the Iowa-Missouri Conference declined from 40 in 1918 to 24 in 1939, with the number of churches decreasing each year. By the early 1930s, the Methodist Protestant church began merger negotiations with the Methodist Episcopal church. On August 17, 1936, the Iowa-Missouri Conference voted to join the merged Methodist Church, with the final meeting of the Iowa-Missouri Conference held in New London (eastern Henry County) in 1939 (Nye 1986: 93-94). Merger between these Methodist church bodies was completed in 1939. The Methodist Protestant Church in New London remained the only one left in Henry County, and this church merged officially with the Methodist Episcopal Church at a union service on June 8, 1941. The old M.P. Church was sold to George Elliott, who used it as a funeral home and chapel for a number of years. The Methodist Episcopal Church in Hillsboro in southwest Henry County closed in the 1930s, with the Conference retaining title to the building. When Finley Chapel in Jefferson Township in northwest Henry County was destroyed by fire on December 18, 1936, the old Hillsboro building was then given to Finley Chapel for materials for their new church dedicated on May 1, 1938. Thus, rather than close or merge with the Methodist Episcopal church in Trenton, this congregation remained strong and rooted in their own building. The newspaper noted that it was "probably the finest strictly rural church in the county" ("At Finley Chapel Dedication," clipping in HCHS files). Other rural churches also remained strong in this period, remaining in their buildings and remodeling them to modern parameters. To the southeast in Marion Township, Prairie Gem Methodist was remodeled in 1938, including covering the two original separate entries and creating a center entry with vestibule. A basement was then added in 1946. Wesley Chapel Methodist was also remodeled significantly in 1939-1940 and rededicated on April 28, 1940.

While Benjamin Chapel remained the setting for some Sunday School meetings, services, and funerals in the early 1940s, it became less frequently used through this decade, a trend that would then continue for subsequent decades. Around 40 burials had occurred in Richwoods Cemetery in the 1930s, primarily older residents of the Richwoods neighborhood including early members of the Methodist Protestant church in Benjamin Chapel. The number of deaths and burials decreased in the 1940s, with only 14 in the first half and five in the second half of the decade. Burials continued to be within older family plots throughout the cemetery, with additional family lots sold in the west and south sections of the cemetery. Services transitioned in this period from being held in Benjamin Chapel to being held at a funeral home with burial in Richwoods Cemetery. For example, the services for Richwoods resident John M. Smith was held at Crane Funeral Home with Dr. George G. Hunt, pastor of First Methodist Church, officiating, and he was then buried in Richwood cemetery ("Funeral Held for John M. Smith," *Mt Pleasant News*, May 21, 1948).

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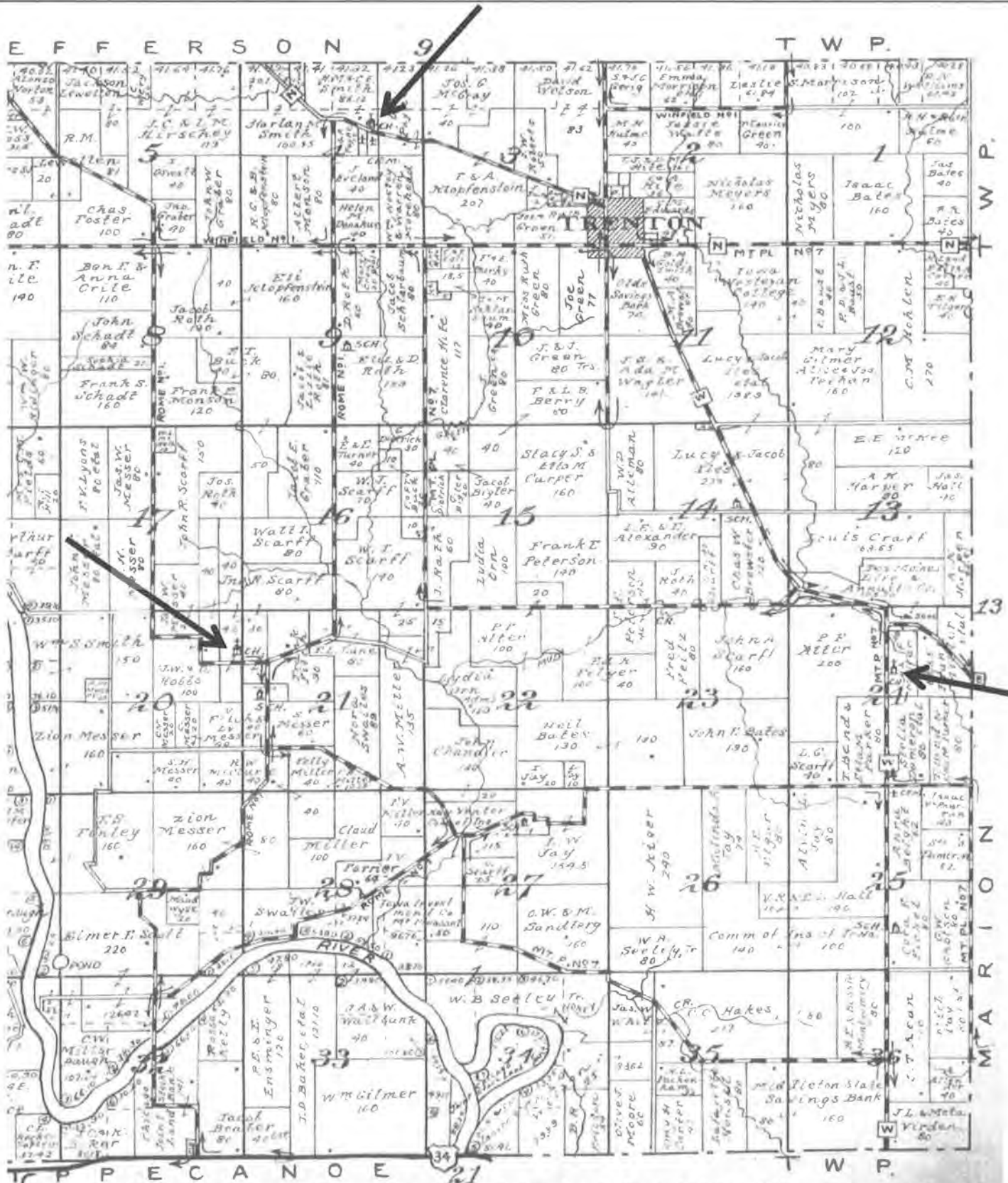


Figure 18. 1931 map of Trenton Township, with rural churches indicated (*Atlas of Henry County 1931: 11*). Benjamin Chapel at right, White Oak Mennonite at left, and Green Mound Church of God at top, churches also in Trenton



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Attempts were made to revive regular Sunday School meetings at Benjamin Chapel in the 1940s following World War II, with limited success (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). While the other two rural churches (White Oak, Green Mound) in Trenton Township were more active in this period, connections continued to be made to Richwoods, particularly by the Trenton Mennonite Brethren in Christ church. The *Mt Pleasant News* in April 1946 notes that Rev. and Mrs. Jacob De Koning of Washington, Iowa, missionaries of non-denominational American Sunday School Union would hold services at both the Pleasant Point Church southwest of town and the Richwoods Church northwest of town on Sunday ("Union Services at Pleasant Point and Richwoods Churches," *Mt Pleasant News*, April 2, 1946, 1). Trenton Mennonite Brethren in Christ church conducted revival services in summer 1945, led by Rev. and Mrs. Orvan J. Keller of Logan, Kansas, perhaps invigorating the members. Rev. James Hoskins served the Mennonite Brethren in Christ churches at both Trenton and White Oak in 1943 to 1946, followed by Rev. S.F. Walter from 1946 to 1948. Church listings included morning and evening services at Trenton, with Sunday School also held at White Oak. In October 1947, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ listings included the services in Trenton, with Sunday School held also at 10:00 at both White Oak and Richwoods. The denominational name then changed from Mennonite Brethren to United Missionary Church. Church listings in June 1948 reflect this change, with Rev. S.F. Walter holding services at the United Missionary Church at Trenton and White Oak. Sunday Schools continued to be held at 10:00 in both locations, as well as at Richwoods ("Will Conduct Evangelistic Services," *Mt Pleasant News*, June 22, 1945, 3; "Mennonite Brethren in Christ," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 12, 1945, 3; "Mennonite Brethren in Christ," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 17, 1947, 5; "United Missionary Church," *Mt Pleasant News*, June 25, 1948, 5). From August 12 to 18, 1948, meetings of the Missionary American Sunday School Union were held at the Richwoods church each evening by Mr. and Mrs. De Koning of Washington ("Meetings Aug. 12-18 at Richwoods Church," *Mt. Pleasant News*, August 8, 1948, 2).

Interestingly, Benjamin Chapel was cited in July 1948 for its continued activity among the many other rural churches that had closed. In a series of several articles on rural churches in Henry County, long-time resident Cassius E. Carnahan highlighted the importance of the rural church. Carnahan noted that Benjamin Chapel continued to stand at its high elevation with a tall spire on the east side of the road. Many automobiles could still be found here on Sundays. A well-kept cemetery was found to the east, while the old cemetery at the intersection about half mile to the south was overgrown with brush. In a time that many rural churches were being torn down or abandoned, "Richwoods church has not ceased to be the civic and religious center of the community just as the Richwoods school is the social and educational center of the community." The school continued to be used, south of the church. It was known for its literary entertainment as well as interesting and instructive PTA meetings. However, he likely was well aware of the difficulties faced in maintaining activity at the church. He perhaps alluded to this fact, writing of the need "to preserve the memory and respect of those old pioneers who in their strength and determination built the foundation for this splendid community and our country is the duty of all citizens who now enjoy the results of their efforts. These stones and monuments are the landmarks of our civilization and must be preserved." Country churches and schools once filled with patrons of communities "are being torn down and disappearing or many of them are standing idle. We seriously doubt this to be the best for the rural people of these communities or the best for the country as a whole" (C.E. Carnahan, "A Trip to the Country and to Richwoods," *Mount Pleasant News*, July 24, 1948, 4).

Concern of the decline of the old Richwoods Cemetery associated with the old Methodist Episcopal Church destroyed in 1882 to the south in Section 25 led to the formation of the Richwoods Cemetery No. 1 association in August 1948. A total of 21 interested people met and elected Osbert Allender as president, John Allender as vice president, and Dan Miller as secretary and treasurer ("Form Richwoods Cemetery Organization," *Mt Pleasant News*, August 20, 1948, 6). A work day was held at the cemetery in October, with lunch at Richwoods church and free ice cream for all ("Richwoods Cemetery to be Improved Wednesday," *Mount Pleasant News*, October 2, 1948, 4). This cemetery is now known as the Old Richwoods Cemetery. Funerals for Richwoods Cemetery at Benjamin Chapel continued typically to be held at funeral homes in this period. The services for John Calvin Black were held at Crane Funeral Home with Dr. George G. Hunt officiating, and

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then he was buried with family at Richwoods cemetery ("J. Calvin Black Taken by Death," *Mount Pleasant News*, April 27, 1949, 7).

The question of rural churches and sustaining rural communities is echoed among other churches and sections of Henry County in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, with various results. The United Brethren church faced similar issues as the Methodists through the 1930s, with a number of churches closing. The Mt. Ayr United Brethren Church in southwest Jefferson Township closed in 1945, and it was sold for \$200 in 1946 with the money given to the remaining United Brethren church to the north, Cottonwood. Cottonwood Church expanded by added a new basement in 1940, celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on August 16, 1942. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ then merged with the Evangelical Church in November 1946, becoming the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and Cottonwood Church remained as a member. The gable-roof entry vestibule was then added to the church in the 1950s. Green Mound Church of God in northern Trenton Township similarly grew in this period, supporting a full-time ministry finally in September 1949. New members added resulted in the need for more space, with a basement added and a three-room addition built to the east at the rear in 1950-51. In 1951, the Trenton Methodist Episcopal Church transferred to the Wayland circuit, which continued to include the church in Wayland and Finley Church. The Sugar Creek Mennonite Church continued to grow as well, with the church remodeled in 1949 and a new church built to the north in Washington County to better serve members of that area. Rather than simply closing and disappearing, two Methodist churches in southern Henry County continued to serve their rural neighborhoods as community centers in the 1940s and 1950s. The last services were held at Donaldson Chapel in 1939, and it was then used as a community center for meetings, school programs, picnics, and reunions into the 1960s. Residents near Lowell remodeled Bethany Methodist Protestant Church (Pickle Church) by moving a church from Wever to the west side as an addition for kitchen and dining hall in fall 1949. Bethany Community Center then was used for dinners, showers, reunions, funeral lunches, etc. for rural residents of this neighborhood into the 1980s.

Intermittent services and Sunday Schools continued to be held at Benjamin Chapel in the early 1950s. The United Missionary Church maintained congregations in Trenton and White Oak in this period, with no notes on meetings at Richwoods. An article on March 3, 1950 noted that the Richwoods (community) church was now operating again, with services held on Sundays at 2:30 under the direction of Pastor L.P. Dority of Grace Bible Church near Danville. The public was invited to attend, with the first half of the services directed towards children and the second half a sermon for adults ("Richwoods Church Resumes Services," *Mt Pleasant News*, March 3, 1950, 5). Church listings then cite Richwoods Community Church later in the month, and Rev. L.P. Dority was noted as pastor for Grace Bible Church meeting at City Hall in 1951 and 1952 (*Mt. Pleasant News*, March 24, 1950, 6; *Mt. Pleasant News*, November 24, 1951, 5). A building program at the United Missionary Church in Trenton in fall 1952 resulted in services normally in Trenton held at Richwoods church by Rev. R.E. Burk, with the evening service continuing to be held at White Oak (*Mt Pleasant News*, November 1, 1952, 3). For a few months during construction, services were held at 11:00 and Sunday School at 10:00 at Richwoods church ("Richwoods," *Mt Pleasant News*, December 24, 1952, 5). An announcement then appeared on January 30, 1953 that services of United Missionary Church at Trenton would be held in the new basement of church, and thanks were extended to the people of Richwoods community for use of their church during this remodeling project (*Mt. Pleasant News*, January 30, 1953, 3). This appears to have been the last use of Benjamin Chapel as a church, with church history noting that the last services were held here in 1952 (Virginia Sommerfeld 2013 (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002).

Richwoods Cemetery at Benjamin Chapel continued to be used through the 1950s and into the 1960s by current and former residents of the Richwoods neighborhood, with services generally held at funeral homes through this period. Overall, 24 burials occurred in the cemetery in the 1950s and 15 occurred from 1960 to 1965, the end of the period of significance. The obituary for Elmer McPheron in August 1950 noted that his "entire life had been spent near the Richwoods community where he was a farmer." His services were held at Crane Funeral Home, and then he was buried in Richwoods cemetery. Graveside services were held for



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former resident Ralph Dunlap in August 1950. Likewise, the body of former Richwoods resident Melinda Jay was flown back from California to be buried at Richwoods Cemetery in May 1951 ("Death Claims Elmer McPherron, 70," *Mt Pleasant News*, August 7, 1950, 1; "Ralph Dunlap Dies in Peoria," *Mt Pleasant News*, August 9, 1950, 4; "Former Resident Dies in California," *Mt Pleasant News*, May 11, 1951, 5). Services were held at Crane Funeral Home throughout the 1950s by various ministers, followed by interment in Richwoods Cemetery. A few services were held elsewhere, including at Faith Lutheran Church for Imo Lucille Scarff Rauscher in October 1958, at the United Missionary Church at Trenton under Rev. Walter Gray for long-time Richwoods resident Lula Bates in February 1960, and at Elliott Chapel in New London for Burlington residents Ina Combs in April 1960 and Earl Combs in June 1962 ("Mrs. C. Rauscher Taken by Death," *Mt Pleasant News*, October 29, 1958; "Mrs. Lula Bates Taken by Death," *Mt Pleasant News*, February 28, 1960; "Former Local Woman Killed in Wyoming Mishap," *Mt Pleasant News*, April 18, 1960; "Earl I. Combs," *Mt Pleasant News*, June 26, 1962). The Crane Funeral Home or the Weir-Cookes Funeral Home in Mount Pleasant generally provided services for the 12 other burials in Richwoods Cemetery in the first half of the 1960s.

### ***Preservation and ongoing role of Benjamin Chapel, 1965-2015***

As Cassius E. Carnahan had already noted in 1948, rural churches were being abandoned and torn down, permanently removing this piece of the rural landscape. Like other associations affiliated with rural churches in the 1960s and 1970s, the Benjamin Chapel Association faced the question of how best to proceed. At a time when other rural churches continued this procession towards vanishing off of the landscape, a concerted effort was made by the Richwoods residents to not let this landmark in Trenton Township follow the same path. Benjamin Chapel was maintained, repaired, and continued to be utilized for special services. Richwoods Cemetery continued and continues to serve its same role within the Richwoods neighborhood, providing a final resting place for current and former residents into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Benjamin Chapel thus now stands as a testament to the early pioneers who built churches in rural Henry County in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as a landmark to preservation efforts for rural churches.

Throughout Henry County in the 1960s and 1970s, the large number of rural churches gradually dwindled and a handful were targeted for preservation. In Jefferson Township, services had not been held for several years at Center Chapel prior to the association buying it from the Methodist conference in 1948. They held a centennial celebration at the church in 1964, and then it was donated to the grounds for the Old Threshers Reunion in Mount Pleasant, where it has been preserved with its original pulpit, pews, and organ. Services were last held at Beulah Methodist Church in 1966, and it was sold and remodeled into a house. Salem Methodist Church in southeast Henry County closed in 1968. Thus, the number of Methodist churches in Henry County had declined significant by 1968 with the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the United Methodist Church. Thus, along with the remaining Methodist churches, Cottonwood Church in Jefferson Township became a part of the merged United Methodist Conference as well. The two remaining rural Methodist churches in Canaan Township then closed and were demolished, Trinity Church in 1970 and Canaan Church in 1973. Prairie Gem in Marion Township celebrated its centennial in 1966 before it closed, and it was then moved to the south portion of the Old Threshers grounds in 1974. Pleasant Hill in Center Township then closed in the early 1970s, leaving only Wesley Chapel on the formerly strong Mount Pleasant Circuit. The church was likewise donated to Old Threshers and moved in 1975, where it stood until it was demolished due to deteriorating conditions in 2012. The use of Donaldson Chapel in Jackson Township as a community center diminished in the 1960s, and it was sold to a private owner in 1973 and later demolished in 1983.

In this period that witnessed the removal of several churches from the rural landscape in Henry County, the trustees of the Benjamin Chapel Association and the residents of the surrounding Richwoods neighborhood made the decision to maintain and preserve their church. Several vacancies were filled at the meeting on February 23, 1974, adding Warren Brewster, Richard B. Burns, and James O. Miller as trustees with Leslie

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Alter and Guy Messer. A handwritten note at the bottom of the minutes page notes: "We had talked in our community that we ought to keep our church, as a community project. We had heard some were going to tear it down and give the lumber to someone to build a house. By luck we saw a car over at the church a long time – so we came over, and a man had torn one board off and just was ready to tear more off. We did get him stopped" (Sommerfeld files). Work then began to repair and paint Benjamin Chapel (Figure 19-23). The *Mt Pleasant News* published a long article and photographs about their project on June 1, 1974. The article noted that the disappearance of rural churches and rural neighborhoods was an unfortunate sign of the times, with a number of deserted churches in Henry County that suffer from a lack of maintenance and were slowly deteriorating. Benjamin Chapel stood out as an exception to this rule, as its neighbors decided to fix up the church. The Benjamin Chapel Association maintained the church and the cemetery, and they had determined to conduct a restoration project, not remodeling project. They believed that it was the oldest "original" church in Henry County – i.e. maintained its original footprint and features with no plumbing or electricity ever added to the building. Two stoves that sat in the aisles originally heated the building, and two kerosene lights once hung from the ceiling. The exterior and the interior of the church were painted, and the original wood pews were retained. Money was raised for the work from neighbors, former neighbors, and family of those buried in the cemetery, as well as labor donated from volunteers and L.J. Hill Painting. Without electricity, a generator was brought to the property for a power vacuum, and water was likewise hauled to the property for cleaning. They were completing the work simply to stabilize and preserve the church, with no plans for starting services or Sunday School. When it was completed, their intent was to use it for special services such as for a centennial celebration in 1977. The article concluded: "It is a happy sign of the times that – although not commonly – neighborhoods still exist" ("Neighborhood strives to keep church alive," *Mt Pleasant News*, June 1, 1974, 4-5).



Figure 19. 1974 photograph of Benjamin Chapel before painted (in collection of Virginia Sommerfeld)

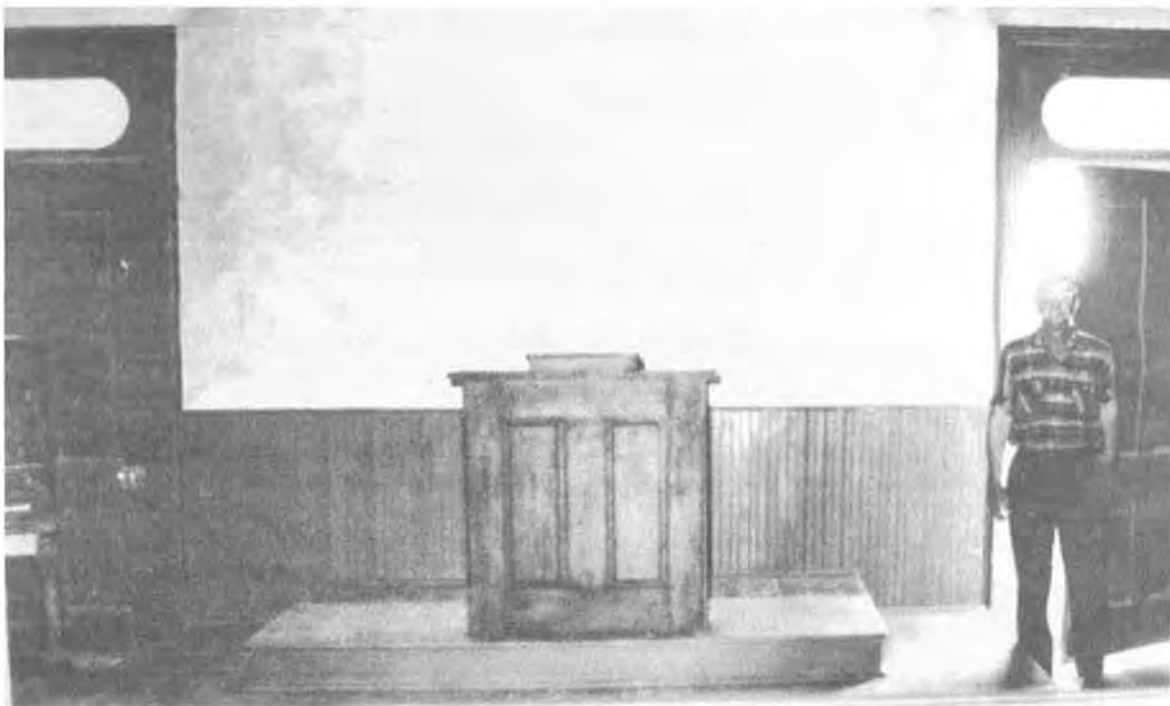


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Figure 20. 1974 photograph of Benjamin Chapel while being painted (in collection of Virginia Sommerfeld)

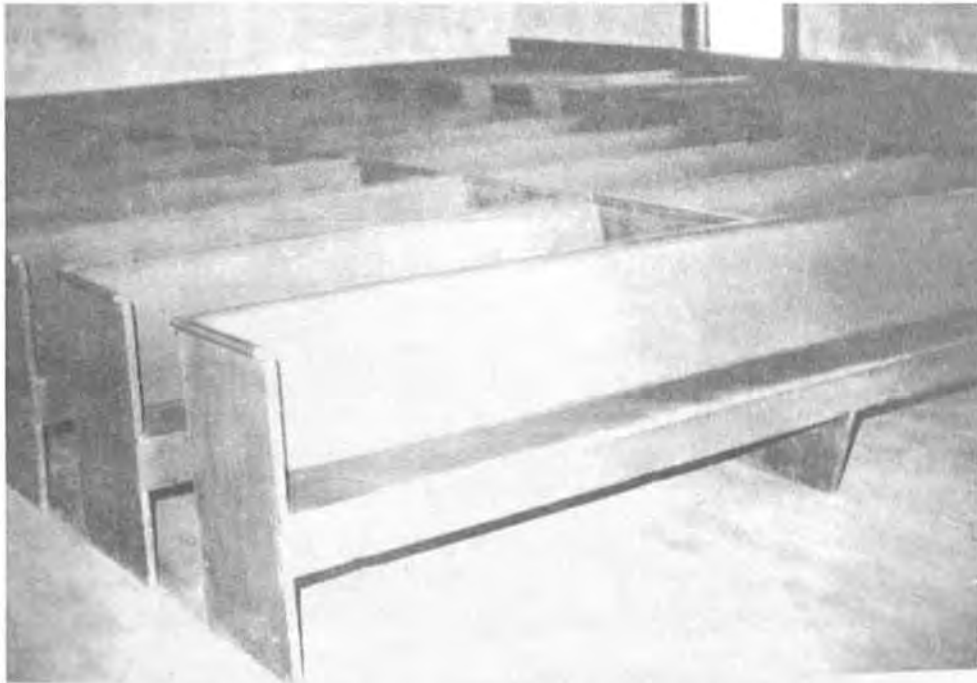


It might be that the man who designed Benjamin Chapel disliked tardiness and put the altar between the two front doors. Guy Messer is at one door—the piano blocks the other. Can you imagine coming late to a service and trying to be inconspicuous as you face the congregation?

Figure 21. Interior of the church in 1974, facing west (*Mt Pleasant News*, June 1, 1974, 5).

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Most of the pews in the church are in the solid block with a divider down the middle as shown in this photo. Other, shorter, pews are solidly attached to each side wall.

**Figure 22. Interior of the church in 1974, facing southeast (*Mt Pleasant News*, June 1, 1974, 5).**



**Figure 23. Privy on north side of Benjamin Chapel being painted in 1974 (*Mt Pleasant News*, June 1, 1974, 5).**



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The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Benjamin Chapel was celebrated on August 21, 1977, with an extensive history given by Orville Allender and coverage in the *Mt. Pleasant News*. It noted how the church had been built in 1877 under the leadership of Benjamin Allender, and thus had been named for him. Work had been underway for two years to clean, paint, and restore the church. It was again noted to be believed to be the oldest "original" church in Henry County, as it had no structural changes and had not been modernized. Benjamin Chapel continued to stand as a landmark in the Richwood-Trenton area, and the public was invited to attend the centennial celebration ("Chapel centennial celebration," *Mt Pleasant News*, August 17, 1977).

A number of projects and events have continued to be undertaken at Benjamin Chapel over the last four decades to preserve the church for the future. The bell was stolen from the bell tower in the 1960s and returned three years later. It was later mounted on a concrete pad in front of the church, dedicated in 1983 to the memory of Andrew Ernest Farrier (1960-1981) (125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002). Cemetery projects have included a donated sign (2000), repairs to gate (2002), and posts replaced (2005) (Zihlman 2013). Roughly 10-20 burials have continued to occur in Richwoods Cemetery each decade, typically relatives of those previously buried or current/past residents of Richwoods. A special service was held at the church in May 1999, and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary service was held on June 23, 2002. Trustees at this time were Ruth Alter, Larry Brewster, June Klopfenstein, Genevieve Messer, Guy Messer, Ella Mae Smith, Virginia Sommerfeld, and Charlotte Zihlman. They met each year to discuss maintenance projects to preserve the historical features and value of the church. They also strive to hold a brief program in the church roughly every other year ("Historic Richwoods Church plans service," *Mt Pleasant Journal*, May 14, 1999; 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, June 23, 2002).

To qualify for additional funds for maintenance projects on Benjamin Chapel, the Benjamin Chapel Association reorganized in 2005 as the non-profit (501c3) Richwoods – Benjamin Chapel, Ltd. The initial board of directors included June Klopfenstein (president), Larry Brewster (vice president), Virginia Sommerfeld (secretary/treasurer), Thomas Allender, Charlotte Zihlman, Ruth Alter, and William Lane. Any person with an interest in the historical church or that has family members buried in the cemetery are qualified to be a member of the organization, with voting members required to pay an annual membership fee as fixed by the board of directors, initially set at \$10 (Sommerfeld files). More extensive repairs were then undertaken over the next few years. The spire of Benjamin Chapel had been damaged by wind, and its repairs were undertaken in 2005 along with a number of other projects. Donations were requested for shoring up the rock foundation, securing the floor beams, repairing the roof, straightening the steeple, and painting the building. Ongoing donations were also needed for care of the cemetery, as the money contributed by the county only covered about one-third of the maintenance costs (Larry Kershner, "County's oldest chapel under restoration," *Mt. Pleasant News*, November 28, 2005). Projects completed on the church then included steeple repairs (2005), new wood windows (2006), new steel roof (2007, Hoaglin Foundation grant), and doors repaired and painted (2007). A severe thunderstorm in 2010 blew down the privy on the church property, and it was removed and not replaced. A wedding was held at Benjamin Chapel in June 2010 for the first time in decades for Andrew Gingerich and Mary Liechty, a woman that grew up on the farm to the north of the church (Lydia Baker-Crawley, "Benjamin Chapel Restoration: A Step Back in History," *Mt Pleasant News*, July 6, 2010). Sing fests were held at the church in 2010, 2011, and 2012 (Zihlman 2013). Ongoing water infiltration around the bell tower resulted in the decision to clad the bell tower in vinyl siding, halting further damage to the roof structure and interior. The church was powerwashed and painted again in August 2014. The 137<sup>th</sup> anniversary program was then held at Benjamin Chapel on October 5, 2014. Ruth Alter, June Klopfenstein, Genevieve Messer, and Guy Messer had died since the last celebration in 2002. Current officers are Tom Allender, President, Jeff McPheron, Vice-President, and Virginia Sommerfeld, Secretary / Treasurer, with Larry Brewster, Delores Crossett, John Klopfenstein, Bill Lane, Marilyn Liechty, and Charlotte Zihlman also serving on the board of directors ("Richwoods-Benjamin Chapel, 137 years, 1877-2014," Homecoming program, October 5, 2014). Benjamin Chapel continues to be owned and maintained by the Richwoods-Benjamin Chapel association, composed of people historically linked to the church or cemetery.

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**Figure 24. Benjamin Chapel around 2005 (HCHPC 2005: 34)**

Over the last three decades, Henry County has continued to lose rural churches, though a number are still standing and operating. The last service was held at White Oak Church in 1995, and it was then demolished in 2001. Bethany Community Center, in the former Pickle Church in Baltimore Township, closed in the 1980s, and it currently is vacant. Likewise, the shell of Abraham Church in Center Township remains standing but abandoned. The former Beulah M.E. Church in Canaan Township has undergone additional remodeling as a residence. The old Sugar Creek Mennonite Church in Jefferson Township was demolished and replaced by a new church to the south in 1982, perhaps the largest rural congregation in Henry County. Other rural churches still in use to some degree are concentrated on the west half of the county: Cottonwood Church (U.B. merged into U.M.), Finley Church (M.E. merged into U.M.), Green Mound Church of God, Wesley Chapel (M.E. merged into U.M.), Pleasant Point Church, Oakland Mills Community Church, and Cedar Creek Friends Church. Among these churches, Benjamin Chapel stands out as an excellent example of a historic rural church in Henry County, with its original footprint and features that reflect its 19<sup>th</sup> century roots.

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**Figure 25. Benjamin Chapel in September 2014 (McCarley 2014).**



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**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Nye, John A. *Between the Rivers: A History of the United Methodist Church in Iowa.* Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing Company, 1986.

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*Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry County, Iowa.* Chicago: Acme Publishing Co., 1888.

Sommerfeld, Virginia, member of Richwoods Church in 1930s and active in organization to maintain church and cemetery since 1950s. Collection of historic photographs and articles on church, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. Portions copied and provided by daughter Charlotte Zihlman, Mt Pleasant, Iowa. Interviewed by Rebecca McCarley in 2013 and 2014. Collection also accessed in 2013-14. Collection includes:

125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Richwoods Church (Benjamin Chapel) and the Richwoods Cemetery, anniversary program with extensive history, June 23, 2002.

137 years, 1877-2014, Richwoods-Benjamin Chapel Homecoming, anniversary program with history, October 5, 2014.

Articles of Incorporation for – 1877

Articles of Benjamin Chapel Association – 1921

Original deeds for land association with church and cemetery

Church programs and articles including history of church

Historic photographs from c.1910 and 1974

Original wood window sashes

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Vertical files, Iowa Methodist Conference Archives, Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt Pleasant

Willis, Susan C. *Two-Door Churches of the Inner Bluegrass.* National Register Multiple Property Document form on file with Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort, Kentucky (not listed). Prepared by Susan C. Willis, project director, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY, August 1986.

Young, Donald, collection, Henry County Heritage Trust. Photographs and 1998 calendar of Abandoned Churches of Henry County. Accessed while being processed in 2014.

Zihlman, Charlotte, member of board of directors of Richwoods-Benjamin Chapel Ltd and daughter of Virginia Sommerfeld, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. Interviewed by Rebecca McCarley in 2013 and 2014.

Sources on other Henry County churches, primarily found within the county histories, vertical files of the disbanded Henry County Historical Society (Mt Pleasant Library), collection of Iowa Methodist Conference Archives (Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt Pleasant), and collection of Donald Young (donated to Henry County Heritage Trust):

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*Centennial History of Finley Methodist Church*, June 3-4, 1951.

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*Cottonwood UMC: Celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, June 2000*

Leeper, Jean Hallowell. *Cedar Creek Friends and Its People*. Mt. Pleasant, IA: Self-published, 2007.

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*New London Methodist Church, 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, 1959*.

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*Trinity United Methodist Church, Centennial Observance, April 26, 1970*.

*Special thanks to Pat White (Henry County Heritage Trust), Esther Wonderlich (Iowa Methodist Conference Archives, and Chris Anderson and David Reagles (Special Collections, Methodist Archives, Drew University Library) for their assistance with research on Benjamin Chapel, other Henry County churches, and Methodist doctrine.*

*Preparation of this nomination is supported financially in part by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Historical Resource Development Program (Resource Enhancement and Protection program).*

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

Iowa Inventory #44-01769



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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** approximately 2 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1 \_\_\_\_\_  
Latitude Longitude

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Latitude Longitude

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Latitude Longitude

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Latitude Longitude

or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map): \_\_\_ NAD 1927 or x NAD 1983

1 15 616715 4542665  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

Henry County, Iowa  
County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register of Historic Places boundary is depicted on the map below. It follows the parcel lines associated with the Benjamin Chapel property. The boundary starts at a point along Franklin Avenue, extending east approximately 345 feet, south 240 feet, west 345 feet, and north 240 feet to the point of beginning.



**Map depicting National Register boundary (1"=100')**  
(base aerial photography from April 2013 from Henry County Planning/GIS)

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

Henry County, Iowa  
County and State

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register boundary for the property includes the parcels currently and historically associated with Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Rebecca Lawin McCarley, Architectural Historian  
organization SPARK Consulting date August 12, 2015  
street & number 17 Oak Lane telephone 563-324-9767  
city or town Davenport state Iowa zip code 52803  
e-mail sparkconsulting@octaspark.com

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

*Property owner info (as requested to be completed by SHPO):*

name Richwoods – Benjamin Chapel, c/o Virginia Sommerfeld, secretary/treasurer  
street & number 310 E. Baker St telephone n/a  
city or town Mount Pleasant state IA zip code 52641

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo log:**

Name of Property: Benjamin Chapel

City or Vicinity: Trenton vicinity

County: Henry State: Iowa

Photographer: Rebecca Lawin McCarley

Date Photographed: September 9, 2014, October 24, 2014

*Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:*

1. Setting of Benjamin Chapel, camera facing southeast.
2. Setting of Benjamin Chapel, camera facing northeast
3. West elevation, camera facing east
4. Detail of entries on west elevation, camera facing east.
5. South elevation, camera facing north.
6. North elevation, camera facing south.
7. Detail of window and cornerboard on north elevation, camera facing south.
8. East elevation, camera facings southwest.
9. Interior of church, camera facing southwest.
10. Front section of church, camera facing northwest.
11. Interior of church, camera facing east.
12. Detail of pews, camera facing northeast.
13. Interior of church, camera facing southeast.
14. North section of cemetery, camera facing east.
15. Middle-north section of cemetery, camera facing east.
16. Middle section of cemetery, camera facing east.
17. Middle-south section of cemetery, camera facing southeast.
18. South section of cemetery, camera facing northeast.

Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

Henry County, Iowa  
County and State



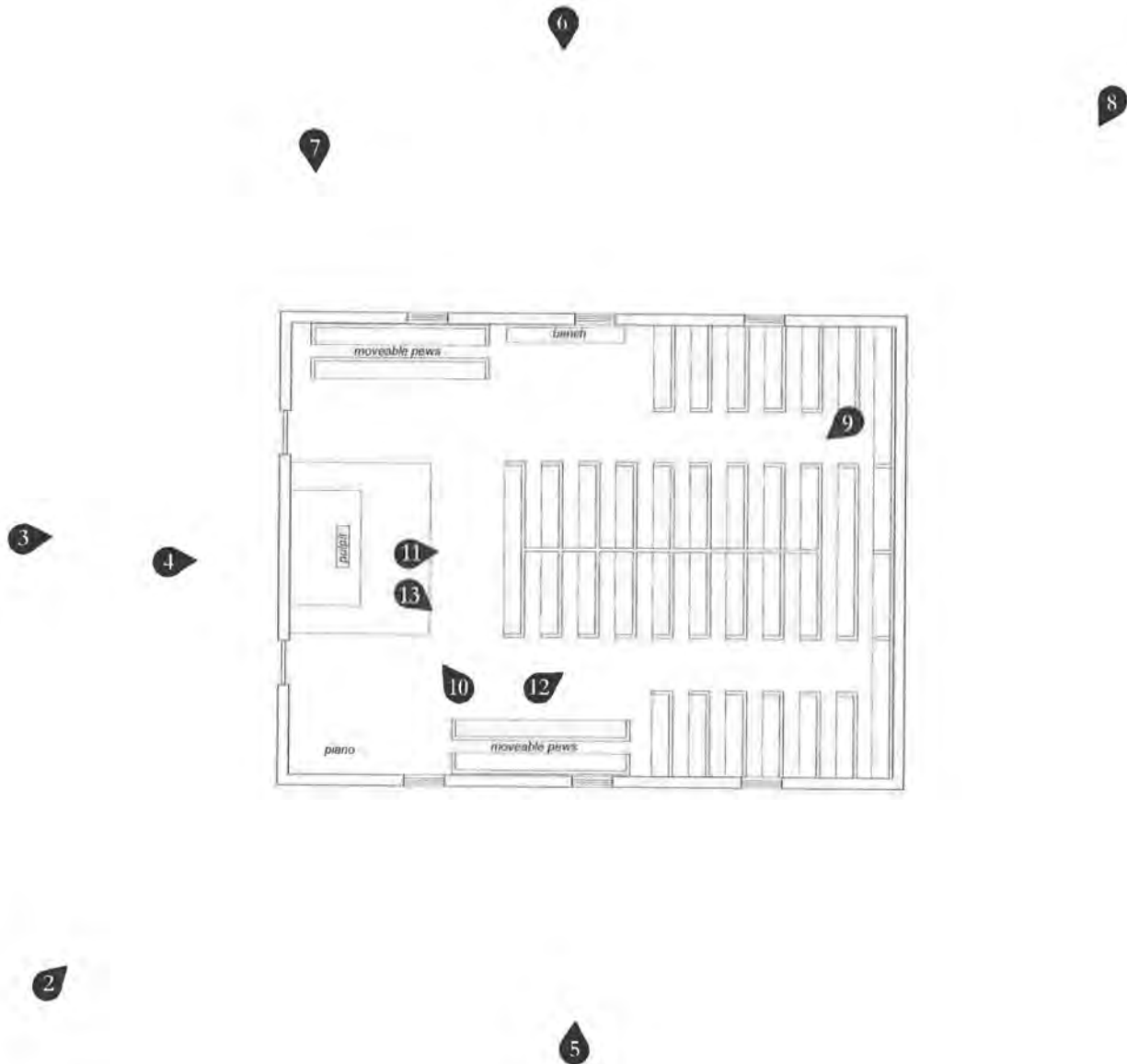
Photograph key 1  
Benjamin Chapel  
Henry County, Iowa

1" = 100'  
R.L. McCarley, SPARK Consulting  
November 2014



Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery  
Name of Property

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Photograph key 2  
Benjamin Chapel  
Henry County, Iowa

3/32" = 1' (general layout sketch)  
R.L. McCarley, SPARK Consulting  
November 2014

















RICHWOODS CEMETERY Established 1877



















































ALLENDER  
ASBURY ALLENDER  
NOV. 11, 1848 - DEC. 14, 1915  
NANCY JANE  
HIS WIFE  
JAN. 3, 1847 -

WIFE OF  
ASBURY ALLENDER  
DIED  
MAY 14, 1887  
AGE 39

BENJAMIN ALLENDER  
DIED  
MAY 14, 1887  
AGE 39

WIFE OF  
ASBURY ALLENDER  
DIED  
MAY 14, 1887  
AGE 39



ALLENDER  
EDALINE F.  
JULY 23, 1860  
APR. 8, 1934  
CHARLES H.  
APR. 13, 1854  
MAY 20, 1934

ALLENDER

FORD  
ANNA FORD  
NOV. 6, 1828  
AUG. 27, 1900  
LLOYD FORD  
MAR. 15, 1818  
NOV. 25, 1904  
Like the traces of an old  
beam, or timber cut and gone

LUSK











UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: IOWA, Henry

DATE RECEIVED: 9/09/15      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/06/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/21/15      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/25/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000746

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    10.23.15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Issued by  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

RECEIVED 2280

SEP - 4 2015

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

September 4, 2015

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmarks  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Fl.  
Washington D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

The following National Register nomination(s) from Iowa are enclosed for your review and listing if acceptable.

- Manning Commercial Historic District, 217-411, 41-507 and 302-326 Main St., 717-723 3<sup>rd</sup> St., 303 Center St. and 825 5<sup>th</sup> St., Manning, Carroll County
- Edwards, Joseph A. and Lydia A. (Frazier), House, 1735 Salem Road, Salem vicinity, Henry County
- Boyle, Hugh and Matilda, House and Cemetery Historic District, 3225 Lexington Avenue, Lowell vicinity, Henry County
- Garretson, Owen A. and Emma J. (Dilts), House, 1878 335th Street, Salem vicinity, Henry County
- Benjamin Chapel and Richwoods Cemetery, 1936 Franklin Avenue, Trenton vicinity, Henry County
- Monroe Elementary School Historic District, 3200 Pioneer Avenue SE, Cedar Rapids, Linn County
- Cedar Rapids 2nd Avenue SE Automobile Row Historic District, Roughly, 2nd Ave. SE to 3rd Ave. SE, from 6th to 8th Streets SE, Cedar Rapids. Linn County

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Foster Hill  
National Register