

# Graham Church

## 1879 - 2018

**70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary re-opening**  
**July 18, 1948**

Woodhull Township  
Laingsburg, Michigan



This booklet consists of several histories of Graham Church from previous generations which are reprinted in honor of God's grace to Graham for over 140 years. These documents are mostly unedited and as they appeared in various records and publications of the time.

Graham Church began meeting during the 1840's through 1860's as a Bible class or society. They mostly gathered in the Graham schoolhouse. The school was originally on the site where the old church building sits today.

In 1879, after the school moved across the street, the first church building was dedicated as a Methodist Episcopal Church. The church was named after the Graham family of farmers in the area. This church met until 1929 when it closed. During the depression and war years the church building was used for school programs and reunions.

In 1948 the building reopened as the non-denominational Graham Community Church. After a few years of organizing and flirting with various denominations, in 1955 Graham Church created formal membership and a constitution.

The Lord has richly blessed Graham Church through the years with facilities, ministry, godly people, good pastors and most important, His powerful Word.

May the Lord Jesus Christ receive all the glory and praise for his goodness to our fellowship.

## History of Shiawassee and Clinton County 1880

An Excerpt

In the year 1839 a Methodist class was formed in the log school-house on section 5. A Mr. Finch, of Bath, was the first class-leader. This class subsequently disbanded, and others of the same denomination have since been formed. The class now in existence in the northern part of Woodhull was formed in September, 1855, in the Antrim Circuit, and at the time was known as West Perry charge. James S. Harper was chosen class-leader. The meeting house of the society was erected in 1879, at the cost of one thousand and fifty dollars. The ground for the cemetery at this church was donated to the township by F.F. Mann and Samuel Graham. It contains one and one-half acres.



Rev. C. W. Butler in 1900

## History of Graham M.E. Church 1879 - Nov. 11, 1934

The Perry Journal and Morrice News Clipper

Thursday, November 22, 1934

by Minnie K. Colby

Before giving you the history of the building of this church I want to go back a few years to give you the religious background of the community.

Some of the history was given to me by Elmer Colby, Lizzie Stevens, my husband, Clio Colby, and others and some I know, and also gleaned from a history of Shiawassee County published in 1880. About the first that Elmer can remember, James Graham, a very religious man, living on what is now Horace Carlton's farm, organized a Sunday school in the old frame schoolhouse, that set in the corner of the cemetery next to the church, and was the second schoolhouse in the township, built in 1840. The Graham's were the third group of families that came into this community and consisted of the John, James and Samuel Graham families, John living on the Clinton Bachelder farm and Samuel on the Howard Foland farm, as you know them now.

During the interval of these early times, different religious denominations held meetings in various places and the Presbyterian's with Revs. Kay and Smith, established meetings in the schoolhouse and had a large following. Mrs. Lizzie Stevens tells me she can remember a minister by the name of Mesick followed by a Rev. Morgan from Owosso, who was a full-fledged Methodist minister, also a Rev. Pierce. Others can remember a Rev. Gibson or Giberson, who lived on the Haskins farm and used to feed "taffy" to Mary J. Houghton as a 3 year old, and Rev. Gibson with Lemuel Haskins visited the John Colby family one evening, and after concluding their visit started for home, and got over into the Colby orchard and helped themselves to apples, and the Rev. lost his pocket book there and after it was found Father Colby, who was quite a hector, had considerable fun at the preachers expense.

Upon Rev. Gibson's retiring, Rev. Alva G. Blood came to this place and lived in the frame house just east of the church on the knoll, built by LeMoyne Smith, and at that time owned by Isaac Foland, (Ask Almond Carlton and Elmer Carlton why they played the mouth organ for the pupils of the late 80's and all of the 90's there.) Rev. Blood

was licensed to preach by the Methodist church of Howell, and is believed to have been sent here by the Detroit Conference. He was here in 1876 and formed a Methodist class and was sent from here to Otisville. The Shiawassee county history of 1880 tells us conference was asked to send a pastor here and Rev. James E. Withey received the appointment in the fall of 1876 to serve the Woodhull circuit. During his pastorate, Rev. Whithey started the building of this and the Shaftsburg churches. Several instances lead us to believe that the subscriptions for this church were pledged in 1878 for the cornerstone is marked for that year and an early start to building the church was made in the spring. We find an M.P. class was formed in 1878 and several contributors to the building fund withdrew and formed the M. P's.

The cornerstone was laid May 1st 1879 and we find from reading Rev. Whithey's report "that the church was to be built and dedicated August 18, 1879, but the contractors failed utterly to come across and the conference year closes without this being accomplished. James E. Whithey, pastor." The report also states, "that Joseph Graham had been paid \$1,000 and the church was nearly ready for dedication." Sidney Stevens caught the whooping cough the day the cornerstone was laid; he doesn't remember it, but his mother does. The conference held at Ann Arbor September 10-16, 1879, Bishop Bowman in charge, Rev. T. J. Joslin, P. E. sent Rev. James Balls to the Woodhull circuit, and Shaftsburg had been added to this place and he resided there. Edwin Chadwick was the first class leader that I remember.

On November 9th, 1879, or 55 years ago, the pastor Rev. Balls dedicated this church and \$200 was raised to meet the indebtedness to be paid Nov. 1st, 1880. We also find by the minister reports that the Graham church or class was No. 1, and Shaftsburg No. 2. The records show Rev. Balls stayed one year and he added several names to the membership list. Then came John Wesley in 1880, and William Birdsall came and was here 3 years and many were the couples that sought his services in tying the wedding knot for he married 9 couples. After this remarkable record came Rev. J. G. Kern, for whom also the young people showed quite an affection, for he married 2 couples in one day, also others and he stayed 2 years. I think the people were no better to their pastors in those days than they are today. They stayed such a short time. P. G. Wager comes next on the scene and John Wright came in 1888, Rev. Hotchkiss

also served this charge and we find on the records where James Shirley Smart performed a baptism, but have found no one who remembers him. And through the various changes of the former years we come down to year 1889 and I believe at this time we were put in with Perry circuit and Rev. Charles Benson was the pastor and the old record was discarded and a new one made out. Rev. Benson organized the Ladies Aid Society 44 years ago last June. During the time we were with Perry, besides Rev. Benson, we had as pastors, Rev. J. F. Emerick, Rev. T.P. Barnum, who died while serving the charge, and a young man by the name of Robb was sent as a supply and finished the year; then either Rev. Guy M. Bigelow or Rev. Taylor came to shepherd the flock.

C. W. Butler was the next in line and if you want to know the date of one of the years, ask George G. Foland in what year he was born and also married Clinton and Ella Murray Bechelder. Following Butler came B. E. Allen, and Marvin and Grace Arthur Bechelder followed Clint and Ella's example, and Rev. Allen performed their marriage rites, and at the close of Rev. Allen's pastorate another shift in the circuit was made and Shaftsburg and Graham were put in with Williamston center, with Floyd Harding as pastor and many are the

scenes I remember for Floyd was always late. This was known as the Shaftsburg charge and brings us to the years 1902-3. Rev. Harding stayed one year, then Rev. G. H. Curtis came and stayed 5 years and parsonage at Shaftsburg was bought. Well can I remember one Sunday at dinner, a small lad saying to Rev. Curtis as the chicken was passed, "Don't take both chicken legs, I want one for my dinner tomorrow." This was Rev. Curtis first charge after uniting with the Detroit Methodist Episcopal conference.



Rev Theodore Barnum died in 1897 while serving as pastor

Another young man, with his bride Rev. C. E. Doty, came for his first ministerial experience. John Colby, Vivian Robinson were

married by Doty. Then came the Gordon's, E.G. and George W. and how those Gordon girls and boys did appeal to some of our young people. Elias Gordon married Grace Crandell and Edwin Foland in the holy bonds of matrimony. Then came B. F. Porter with some more bewitching girls. He stayed one year and was followed by G. W. Wright and he only was with us one year. It seems to me two young people from here went to Laingsburg one cold winter's night to be married by Rev. Wright and it was midnight before they reached their destination, they found the roads badly blocked with snow, Howard and Neva, isn't that so? Howard Foland and Neva Carlton Foland.

E. O. Tinglan had better staying qualities for he was with us 3 years; E.A. Stringer, 2 years; Roy C. Scott, 2 years; W. F. Baldwin of Lennon came Nov. 1, 1922 and served two years; B.E. Lockwood, 2 years; C. W. Seelhoff, 1 year; Rev. W. H. Morford also brought his bride to the parsonage and they stayed 2 years, and that brought the time down to 1929 since that time there has been no regular service here and Sunday school one summer. And to our forefathers, who gave of their time, money and labor, we owe a debt of gratitude for this church standing here in this community, and as you look at this church and when you enter its doors, does it speak to you of what your lives would be if it was not here, is it a daily inspiration to a faith in God, an incentive to a cleaner and better life, that was the heritage given us, that was its mission, have you kept the faith in that of which they were the founders?

Respectfully Submitted,  
Minnie K. Colby  
Woodhull, November 11, 1934

Becky Warner tells about the re-opening of Graham Community Church on July 18, 1948.

A BRIEF NOTE REGARDING THE REOPENING OF THE GRAHAM COMMUNITY CHURCH  
July 18, 1948

After feeling a call to go into God's service, Mr. Binger, of Bennington, Michigan, asked the Methodist for the location of an empty church he could start services in.

They obligingly gave him the names and locations of two or three churches which had been closed for some time.

Mr. Binger informed us that after praying for God's will on just which church he should reopen, he felt the definite pull towards Graham Community.

After mailing a few post-cards to a few near residence of the church, word just spread around and the enthusiasm of the community was shown when at the very first meeting, a group of approximately 35 congregated.

Our very first Sunday service was held July 18, 1948.

On August 22, 1948, Mr. Bowen, a member of the Baptist Church of Lansing, Michigan, took over the services at Graham Church.

(I am submitting this bit of information to the Church to bring)  
(the minutes up-to-date prior to the opening of the Church, )  
(also because I believe it may have some historical interest )  
(to the Church. *Ms. Harry Warner* )

Becky Warner describes the first few weeks of the re-opened Graham Church.

August 31, 1948

Dear Rev. Klontz,

On Sunday July 18, a Mr. Binger opened our Graham Community Church. This church had been idle as a church of worship for a long time. It had been in use as a Community club.

The great enthusiasm of the community to again have church was shown by the turn-out at the first opening. Very few people returned cards, but word just spread around, and we had a group of approximately 35 or 40 people.

On the second Sunday, Mr. Binger offered to go outside and let the group vote as to whether or not they wanted him to stay, or to vote in another minister. He was told that the congregation would not have...in presence if they had not wanted him so Mr. Binger thanked every one, and remained.

One member of the congregation asked if they could have a choir and offered to donate his time on a Friday night to lead them. A very nice "show up" was had at choir practice. On the third Friday night of choir practice ( as I understand it) a little argument arose over the new song Mr. Binger asked the choir to learn to go along with his Sunday sermon. It was not known by any of the choir and a majority of them flatly refused to attempt to learn it. This was a song from the Methodist Hymnal.

The following Sunday Mr. Binger apologized for the attitude he had taken in the singing matter and he allowed the choir to go ahead and sing just the songs they wanted to.

The following Sunday, August 22 we go to church and find a new minister preaching. He was a very good minister and I enjoyed his sermon. Mr. Binger seemed to be a member of the congregation.

The new minister was a... Mr. Bowen, who is studying ministry and is a member of the Baptist Church in Lansing (so I hear). Although he is a much better minister than Mr. Binger I do not believe Mr. Binger is being treated properly.

1  
Financial Account  
of  
Graham Community Church.  
for period beginning  
with fiscal year  
Jan. 1, 1953.  
Mrs Wayne Mills Treas.

Financial Policy  
40% to Pastor  
(or minimum of \$15.00)  
20% to Missions  
40% to Church Fund.

Missionary Commitments  
40% to Mid-Missions  
40% to Bethel Children's Home  
10% to American S. S. Union  
10% to American Missionary Fellowship

Budget for 1953. Books indicate the pastor made \$15 most weeks

## **Graham Community Church History**

Sep 6, 1970

Dedication to Addition by Pastor Lonnie Barlow

The Graham Church was started in 1879 when Mr. Isaac Foland deeded the land to the Methodist denomination. It was operated as such for several years, until closed from lack of interest.

In January, 1949 a small group of neighborhood folk decided to reopen the church for regular Sunday School and church services. Under the guidance of Pastor Richard B. Hill, Graham Community Church came into being, without regular membership, but a constitution and by-laws. Following Pastor Hill's resignation in August of that year, the pulpit was filled by several short term pastors. Rev. Leo Pugh served from Dec. 1949- Nov. 1950. Rev. Henry Busch from Dec. 1950 - April 1952. Rev. Reiber served for a period starting in Aug. 1952. In Feb. 1954, Rev. Neil McDowell came to us and remained until Dec. 1955. During his pastorate the church became affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Seemingly, this was not the course the Lord had laid out for this Church, for we were soon faced with problems, necessitating much change. Once again we were without a pastor and faced with the problem of disbanding or purchasing the property.

In December, 1955, a new constitution with by-laws was adopted. In April, the purchase of the property was completed. Henceforth, the fellowship was to be known as Graham Community Church - independent of any church affiliates.

The first Pastor following reorganizing was Earl Segar, who served part-time from April 1956 to Oct. 1959. In Dec. 1956 our church began

holding one church service per month at the Lansing Rescue Mission. In Jan. 1957 another stride forward was taken by setting up a regular one night a week calling program. The church membership continued to grow, by the close of 1956 there were 44 members.

During 1957 the church underwent some extensive improvements, such as floor raising and fixing the basement for Sunday school classes. Dedication of the church took place on Feb. 23, 1958.

Rev. Howard A. Belknap became our Pastor in Jan. 1960, serving part-time until he was forced to resign due to his health in Jan. 1962. In Nov. of that year Rev. Fred Childers became our Pastor, remaining in that capacity until July 1966. In 1964 and 1965 the carpeting was laid, new ceiling and light fixtures, the entry and balcony paneled. In Aug. 1966, Howard Belknap returned to be our pastor, until forced once more to step down in June of the following year.

Our present Pastor Lonnie Barlow came to us in Aug. 1967. Our church has seen growth both in membership and building. We are presently finishing another extensive building program.

Twenty-one years ago there were 30 signers on the organization roll, at the time of reorganization there were 20 Charter Members. At this present time we have a membership of 119 members. We rejoice that we have gone forward for the Lord.

## Graham Church History

Graham School and Church Reunion

Centennial Celebration 1879-1979

September 23, 1979

As a bit of background, Woodhull township was named after Zetus Woodhull, Lavern Crider's grandfather. The second schoolhouse built in Woodhull township was erected in the corner of the cemetery in 1840. Another schoolhouse was later built across the road, south of the cemetery, and that one burned in the early 1960's.

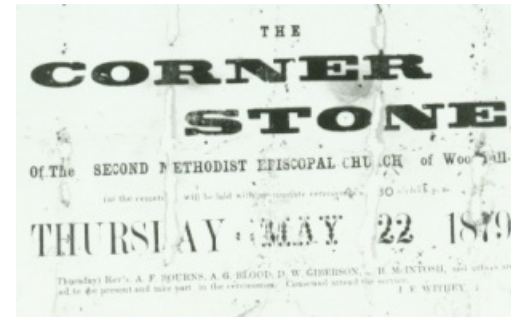
The Graham's were the third group of families that came into this community, and consisted of the John, James, and Samuel Graham families. John lived on the Bachelder farm across the road from Howard Foland, Samuel had the land between the church and the Foland farm, and James lived on the hill south of the church (Horace Carlton farm). James was a very devout man and organized a Sunday School in the old schoolhouse.

During these early times different religious denominations held meeting in various places. The Presbyterians, led by two pastors - Kay and Smith - had a large following at their meetings in the schoolhouse. There was also ministers by the names of Mesick, Rev. Morgan from Owosso, who was a full-fledged Methodist minister, and a Rev. Pierce. Rev. Gibson (or Giberson?) is recalled in Graham history for the time he and Lemuel Haskins visited with the John Colby family one evening, and on their way home they helped themselves to apples from the Colby orchard. This would never have been known if the Rev. hadn't lost his pocketbook there. Father Colby, who found it, had considerable fun at the preacher's expense.

After Rev. Gibson, Rev. Alva G. Blood came to this community. He lived in the frame house that used to stand just east of the church on the knoll, built by LeMoyne Smith, and at that time owned by Isaac Foland.

Another bit of humor concerned the frame house that used to stand just east of the church on the knoll, built by LeMoyne Smith and owned by Isaac Foland. When this house stood vacant during the late 80's and 90's, Almond and Elmer Carlton played their harmonicas for the school pupils to square dance during their noon hour, in this house.

After Rev. Gibson, Rev. Alva G. Blood came to this community, and he lived in that frame house. Rev. Blood was licensed to preach by the Methodist church of Howell and is believed to have been sent here by the Detroit Conference. In 1876 he formed a Methodist class here. The Conference was asked to send a pastor and so Rev. James E. Withey came in the fall of 1876 to serve the Woodhull circuit and he initiated the building of Graham and Shaftsbury churches. Subscriptions for this church were pledged in



1878; the cornerstone was marked for that year, and the building was started early that spring. Even back then there were contracting problems and the building wasn't finished until that next

year. By then, the minister was Rev. James Balls, and he dedicated the church on November 9, 1879. Two hundred dollars was raised to meet the indebtedness to be paid by November 1 of the following year.

Early photos of the church show a tall church steeple, but that was struck by lightning three times and finally not replaced.

Succeeding ministers were John Wesley in 1880, and William Birdsall. He was here 3 years and in that time married 9 couples. Next came Rev. J. G. Kern - he married 2 couples in one day! Next came P. G. Wager, John Wright, and Rev. Charles Benson. Rev. Benson organized the Ladies Aid Society in June of 1890. About this time

Graham was put in with the Perry circuit - several churches to be served by the same minister. The next pastors were Rev. J. F. Emerick, Rev. T. P. Barnum, who died while serving the charge, and a young man by the name of Robb was sent as a supply and finished the year. Then came Rev. Guy M. Bigelow, Rev. Taylor, and C. W. Butler, who married Clinton and Ella Murray Bachelder. Following Butler came B. E. Allen, and he married Marvin and Grace Arthur Bachelder.

With the next change in pastors another shift in the circuit was made, and Shaftsbury and Graham were put in with the Williamston Center, with Floyd Harding as pastor. He is remembered as being always late.

The next ministers, Rev. G. H. Curtis, came for his first charge, and stayed 5 years. During this time the parsonage at Shaftsbury was bought. Another touch of humor includes the time Rev. Curtis was eating Sunday dinner with a family and a small boy said, "Don't take both chicken legs, I want one for my dinner tomorrow."

Another new young minister was next, Rev. C. E. Doty, and he brought his bride. John Colby and Vivian Robinson were married by Rev. Doty. The next minister, Elias G. Gordon, married Grace Crandell and Edwin Foland. He was followed by George W. Gordon, B. F. Porter, and G. W. Wright, who married Neva Carlton and Howard Foland, one snowy winter night.

The Methodist Conference continued its rapid rotation of ministers: E.O. Tinglan, 3 years; E.A. Stringer, 2 years, Roy C. Scott, 2 years; B. E. Lockwood, 2 years; C. W. Seelhoff, 1 year, and then Rev. W. H. Morford brought his bride to the parsonage where they stayed 2 years. By the time he left it was 1929 and the Great Depression had started. Services were no longer held in the building.

The Ladies Aid continued, to the extent that it held suppers and get-togethers in the church to raise money to pay the building insurance.

The Methodist's, after 20 years, had even forgotten that they owned the idle building when services were started again.

Mr. Binger from Corunna started holding services and Sunday School in the vacant building about 1949. Cleaning hornets nests, spiders, dust, and even the cookstove that had been installed for the suppers, was a major task. Lavern Crider could tell more about that.

After only a few meetings with Mr. Binger, Rev. R. B. Hill came to guide the church. There were 30 signers on the roll which was not a regular membership, but there was a constitution and by-laws.

We, the undersigned, having read, or having understood, the Constitution and By-Laws of the Graham Community Church as adopted December 7th, 1955, do hereby signify our desire to be enrolled as Charter Members:

1.	Mrs. Helen Foland	22
2.	Howard Foland	23
3.	Mrs. Elizabeth Ross	24
4.	John E. Ross	25
5.	Mary D. McConnell	26
6.	Mrs. Georgia Warner	27
7.	Gloria Putnam	28
8.	Mrs. Bessie Kebichl	29
9.	Mrs. Cecil Harris	30
10.	Mrs. Erma L. Middaugh	
11.	James R. Middaugh	
12.	Weldon R. Crider	
13.	Lavern Crider	
14.	Neola Carr	
15.	Billy Carr	
16.	Jerry Carr	
17.	Larry Carr	
18.	Mrs. Ethelyn Seger	
19.	Earl R. Seger, Jr.	
20.	Earl R. Seger, Sr.	

Charter members December 7, 1955



Following Pastor Hill's resignation in August of that year, the pulpit was filled by several short-term pastors: Rev. Leo Pugh served from Dec. 1949 to Nov. 1950; Rev. Henry Busch from Dec. 1950 to April 1952. Rev. Reiber served for a period starting in Aug. 1952. In Feb. 1954 Rev. Neil McDowell came to us and remained until Dec. 1955. During his pastorate the church became affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Seemingly, this was not the course the Lord had laid out for this church, for we were soon faced with problems, necessitating much change. Once again, we were without a pastor and faced with the problem of disbanding or purchasing the property.

In December 1955, a new constitution with by-laws was adopted. By April the purchase of the property from the Methodist Conference was completed. Henceforth, the fellowship was known as Graham Community Church - independent of any church affiliation. There were 20 Charter Members.

The first pastor following reorganizing was Earl Segar, who served part-time from April 1956 to October 1959. In December 1956 our church began holding one church service per month at the Lansing City Rescue Mission, and this mission has been continued today. In January 1957 another stride forward was taken by setting up a regular one-night-a-week calling program, and a church membership continued to grow.

During 1957 the church underwent extensive improvements, such as raising the floor and making a basement, for Sunday School rooms. Dedication of these improvements took place on February 23, 1958.

Rev. Howard A. Belknap became our pastor in January 1960, serving part-time until he was forced to resign due to health in January 1962. In November of that year Rev. Fred Childers became our pastor, remaining here until July 1966. In 1964 more improvements were made to the building: carpeting was laid, new ceiling and light fixtures installed, and the entry and balcony were paneled.

In August 1966 Rev. Belknap returned to be our pastor, until his health once more forced him to step down in June of the following year.

Pastor Lonnie Barlow came to us in August 1967. Under his leadership a two-story addition was built on the back-Sunday School rooms with a pastor's study, a nursery and a new furnace- these were dedicated in September 1970.

In 1970 membership rolls were at a peak of 119. However, due to difficulty in establishing a quorum at business meetings a procedure to keep an active membership roll current was activated. Today the active membership is at 63.

An organ was given to the church in 1972 in memory of Mrs. Ella (Grandma) Parish. An addition of 2 ½ acres of land was added to the rear of the church property in 1974. This currently is used for sports-softball field, volleyball court and recreation area.

Pastor Barlow left in January 1971 and he was followed by Rev. William Blount who stayed 2 years. In March of 1973 Rev. Jack M. Jennex began his ministry here, commuting on weekends from Grand Rapids until he moved his family here in June.

In 1977 a new pulpit, communion table, carpeting and comfortable pews were purchased, and the walls were repainted. One of the newest programs added to the church activities is the JOY Club for children, which takes place weekly on Wednesday evenings during the midweek services.

As we review our attendance we can praise the Lord for a greater number of people carrying on responsibility than ever before in the history of the church.



Pastor and Mrs. Howard Belknap

## 1979 is Centennial Year for Graham Church

Maple River News~ Sept. 19, 1979

This year marks the 200th anniversary of Sunday Schools, institutions relatively unique to the United States and Canada. During the early years of settlement in this country, there were few ministers, and people, especially those living in isolated areas, found it necessary to provide for their own spiritual lives. Meeting in private homes, school houses and whatever other public buildings were available these settlers would study their Bibles and hold makeshift worship services among themselves. Eventually, circuit riding preachers came to serve these people and many present-day churches owe their existence to these early Sunday Schools.

One such congregation is the Graham Community Church, situated southeast of Laingsburg at 8920 West Britton Road. 1979 marks the



1950's class

Centennial Year for this small wood-frame church located on a rural, half-graveled/half-paved road in southern Shiawassee County.

According to some early histories of the area, the Grahams: John, James, Samuel and their families were among the first settlers in the Laingsburg area and gave the church its name. James, purportedly a very religious man, organized Sunday School classes in the Graham school house.

During these times, various denominations held meetings in the area. In a history of the church printed in the November 1934 issue of the Perry Journal and Morrice News Clipper, Minnie Colby told of Presbyterian ministers Kay and Smith who used the school house to meet with their large followings.

A story is also told of one minister, a Reverend Gibson, who used to feed taffy to the children. According to Mrs. Colby, one evening Reverend Gibson along with Lemuel Haskins, paid a visit to the John Colby family. As the two started home, they wandered into the Colby orchard and helped themselves to some apples. Mr. Colby later had considerable fun at the ministers expense when the Reverend's wallet was found on the ground among the apple trees.

The Shiawassee County History of 1880, relates that in the fall of 1876 a Reverend James E. Withey was appointed to serve the Woodhull circuit. During his pastorate, he established classes at Shaftsbury and the Simpson School and began the building of the Shaftsbury and Graham churches.

Problems with construction deadlines were apparently a fact of life even in those times. In a pastoral report, the Reverend stated, "The church was to be built and dedicated August 8, 1879, but the contractors failed utterly to come across and the conference year closes without this being accomplished." The cornerstone, dated 1878, was eventually laid May 1, 1879.



Late 1950's class in new basement



Services were held in the church until the late 1920's when it stood idle for 17 years. Lawrence Foland of Laingsburg, a descendant of the family which donated land for the church site, remembers that people living in the area kept the church building up during this time. He also credits the survival of the building to the fact that it was "built well. In the upper part of the church, they used white pine 2 by 12, and that was when 2 by 12 meant just what it said," Mr. Foland says.

The Graham School, which stood just down the road, was not so lucky. A home now stands on the site of this, the second school house in Sciota Township, built in 1840. The school was destroyed by fire in the early 1960's and some members of the church believe it fell victim to arson.

In the late 1940's services resumed at this quaint, country church. It looks much as it must have when built, sitting next to a sleepy, tree-shaded cemetery which was in use even before the church was built.

From the outside, the only obvious changes are the addition of stained glass in the front windows and extra rooms added at the back of the church. The inside however, is that of a more modern house of worship. Carpeting has been added along with cushioned pews. The rooms at the back are used for Sunday School classes and Pastor Jack M. Jennex's (current pastor) study.

The basement houses more classrooms and a kitchen. But the deep window embrasures show that the original foundation has been reinforced with cement block.

One last throwback to an earlier time is the thick brown rope with a knot at its end which hangs through the ceiling of the choir loft. The children of the congregation take turns hauling on the bell rope to announce Sunday services. Howard Foland, whose grandfather, Isaac, donated land for the church site from his farm, used to ring the bell. In his 80's now, he has given this duty to the children.



Pastor Brian Knight digs out the cornerstone in 1999. The fragile contents of the cornerstone included a Bible and a copy of the Book of Discipline.

This Sunday, September 23, the Graham School and Church Reunion Centennial Celebration will be marked by special services. The non-denominational services will begin at 10 a.m. with Sunday School. At 11 a.m., former pastor, the Reverend Lonnie Barlow, will be the guest speaker. Following a potluck dinner, an afternoon of special music and the Graham Reunion Business Meeting will be held Reverend Barlow will speak again at the 6 p.m. service.

The public is invited to attend.



Betty Howe, Dale and Leola Carr 1950's

## Echoes of Yesteryear: Shiawassee County Schools

1987

An Excerpt

John and Samuel Graham came from Ireland in 1837 and purchased 480 acres of land in sections 10 and 15. A meeting was held in the home of John Graham in 1842 and a site for a school was selected. It was built in 1846 in the SW corner of Section 10. The land was either given or leased as no record of a deed could be found. The school was named after the Graham families. The school was financed by the parents of pupils attending as no tax money had been raised at that time.

Worship services were held in the schoolhouse and a little cemetery was platted just west of the school. This schoolhouse burned and was replaced by a frame school on the same site. This was an unusual schoolhouse as it had a flared hip roof and a bell tower. We do not know how long this schoolhouse stood but before 1875 a frame school was built across the corner on the south side of the road and the smaller school was sold. The new school stood for two years and burned down. Another frame school was built that served for many years until the annexation to the Perry K-12 District in 1962. After closing, this schoolhouse later burned

More land was given to expand the cemetery which has become a rather large country cemetery and many of the early pioneers are buried there.

The Graham community Church, which had its beginning in the little log school, is still open and active. This is on Britton road, east of the cemetery.

## Ministers Who Served at Graham



Groundbreaking with Pastor Hashley 1993



Pastor and Myrtle McDowell 1955

Alva G. Blood	1876
James E. Whithey	1876-1879
James Ball	1879-1880
John Wesley	1880-1881
William Birdsall	1881-1884
J. G. Kern	1884-1886
P. G Wager	1886-1888
John Wright	1888-1889
Charles Benson	1889-1893
J. F. Emerick	1893-1894
T. P Barnum	1894-1897
Guy M. Biglow	1897-1898
Rev. Taylor	1898-1900
C. W. Butler	1900-1902
B. E. Allen	1902-1903
Floyd Harding	1903-1904
G. H. Curtis	1904-1908
C. E. Allen	1908-1910
Elias G. Gordon	1910-1912
George W. Gordon	1912-1913
B. F. Porter	1913-1914
G. W. Wright	1914-1915
E. A. Tinglan	1915-1918
F. A. Stringer	1918-1920
Roy C. Scott	1920-1922
W. F. Baldwin	1922-1924
B. E. Lockwood	1924-1926
C. W. Seelhoof	1925-1927

## Graham Community Church Significant Dates in History

W. H. Morford	1927-1929
Church Closed	1929-1948
Mr. Binger	1948
Mr. Bowen	1948
R. B. Hill	1949
Leo Pugh	1949-1950
Henry Busch	1950-1952
Rev. Reiber	1952
Neil McDowell	1954-1955
Earl Segar	1956-1959
Howard A. Belknap	1960-1962
Fred Childers	1962-1966
Howard A. Belknap	1966-1967
Lonnie Barlow	1967-1971
William Blount	1971-1973
Jack M. Jennex	1973-1981
Gary L. Hashley	1982-1995
Brian Knight	1992-2003
Michael Hixson	1995 - present
Johnny Schlaack	2001 - present
James Dewald*	2003 - 2005
Bob Karr	2008 - present

Pastor Gary Hashley ministers at Calvary Memorial Church in Gering, NE. Pastor Brian Knight serves Dollar Bay Baptist Church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

1836	John and Josephus Woodhull first settlers in township
Spring, 1838	John, James and Samuel Graham move into community
1846	First log schoolhouse erected east of cemetery. Named "Graham School" Worship services held in schoolhouse.
Sept, 1855	Methodist class formed in schoolhouse known as "West Perry Charge"
1875	New schoolhouse constructed on southwest corner of Britton and Pulver



Carriage barn behind church which blew down in 1930's.

- Fall, 1876 Graham family\* donates 1.5 acres land and Rev. Withey arrives to lead effort to construct church building. Cost \$1050. \*Some say Isaac Foland donated land
- Nov 9, 1879 Rev. Balls dedicates the church building
- 1929 Regular services cease
- July 18, 1948 S. S. classes and services resume as "Graham Community Church"
- 1953 Graham temporarily joins Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Dec, 1955 Church reorganizes with new constitution
- Apr, 1956 Church building purchased from Methodist denomination for \$800
- 1957 Floor raised and basement added. Dedicated Feb 23, 1958
- Sep 6, 1970 Two story addition dedicated
- 1974 2.5 acres additional property purchased
- Sep 25, 1994 New Auditorium dedicated



Work crew on building 1993



Worship service in auditorium 1994-2016

- 1998 Parsonage converted into office building
- 2001 New constitution; 3 acres purchased
- June 26, 2016 New Graham Church building at the former Shaftsbury Elementary School dedicated.



Auditorium 1994-2016. Original building in background



1950's Church Service



Auditorium in Shaftsburg building 2016

Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers,  
as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly,  
and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.  
2 Thessalonians 1:2–3