

HISTORICAL SKETCH

In 1882 Rev. James Chick was appointed supply pastor of the Free Methodist Church in Rockford. That is the first mention of Rockford in the appointments of the conference.

Two years later, on June 6, 1884, the society was incorporated as the First Free Methodist Church of Rockford. Trustees signing the affidavit were Louis North, John Tyler, H. P. Marks, James Chick, and Jechariah Shaw. The name was changed to the First Rockford Church of the Free Methodist Church of North America in 1910. Exactly fifty years later it was amended to the First Rockford Society of the Free Methodist Church of North America.

For a number of years the society used homes and rented halls. Then in 1918, under the pastoral leadership of John Harvey, the group decided it was time to have a permanent building. They invited the Illinois Conference to hold its annual session there twelve months later in spite of the fact that they had not yet broken ground. The construction began in the spring of 1919 at the corner of Chestnut Street and Hinkley Avenue with the men of the church doing most of the work. A rainy spring delayed the work. So did the flu epidemic. Then just six weeks before conference was to convene, George M. Bradley, a fine Christian and a faithful laborer on the new building, was killed in a streetcar accident. The remaining men recovered from the shock and pressed on with the work. A month later John Milton Woodard, an effective lay preacher and one of the moving spirits in the building program, fell from the nearly completed tower of the new church and died. The double loss shook the congregation badly, but the building was made ready for conference.

One of the highlights in the ensuing years was the revival with Rev. Harry Black in 1934. The building was packed night after night as the evangelist brought messages on prophecy. Pastor Amy Finders received 105 new members into the church as a result of that meeting.

Attendance and enthusiasm peaked again in the late 1950's and early 1960's under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Ralph Dietzman followed by Rev. Arthur Rothfuss. In the turbulent 60's the church became a victim of urban blight and racial tensions. By 1970 declining membership, attendance, financial resources, and property values made it impractical for the church to remain where it was. It must have been with mixed feelings

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that the old church building was sold to a black congregation and the Free Methodists bought an estate at the edge of town (5850 E. Riverside) to begin anew.

For the first six and a half years at its new location, the congregation and the pastor shared the large house. Then on July 11, 1976, ground was broken for a new building. Rev. Ralph Woodworth was the pastor. The first service was held in the new structure on New Year's Eve 1976. Two months after the congregation moved into the new building, the attendance spurted sharply upward. The gain was not held, but it seemed to indicate vigorous possibilities for the future. That spring, the congregation decided that the new location and the new building called for a new name. Pine Grove Free Methodist Church was the nearly unanimous choice and was adopted.