

the church, officially known as the Sharon Methodist Episcopal Church, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Friends of Smithtown Church and Smithtown Cemetery Association have assisted with fund-raising activities. Two grants from the Clinton County Community Development Association have been received. A new wood shingle roof was put on the church in the fall of 2003. The exterior of the church was painted in 2005 and the window restoration was completed in 2006. In 2007, new oak front doors and handrails were added. Plans are being made for restoration of the interior of the church.

Also, the original Windsor reed organ from the church, dated 1898, has been restored and is used at the church for special services. To keep it free of mice and debris, arrangements have been made to display the organ at the Central Clinton Historical Museum in DeWitt when it is not in use at the church.

The church was featured in the 2007 Iowa Houses of Worship video on Iowa Public Television during the March Festival representing Clinton County as one of the 150 churches in Iowa on the National Register of Historic Places.



Special recognition and appreciation to the late Esther Edleman and the late Florence Machande for their interest in local history, also to Loretta Dickman and Ruth Burchichter Wilson for carrying on the tradition.

Smithtown Church



A Clinton County Historical Site
maintained by the
Clinton County Conservation Board
P.O. Box 68
Grand Mound, IA 52751

*Rest Easy, Pioneers, Sleep Well,
 The whispering pines your names shall tell,
 This weather-beaten church shall stand,
 A symbol of your gallant band,
 Like you, so strong and true to God,
 Rest Easy 'neath the old brown sod,
 The whispering pines your fame shall tell,
 Rest Easy, Pioneers, Sleep Well.
 — Esther Edleman*



THE CHURCH'S STORY...

The Smithtown Church building is the only surviving landmark of the Sharon Township village of Burgess. Sharon Township, located in the northwest corner of Clinton County, was one of the last areas to become populated in the county. This was primarily due to the lack of abundant water resources located in the area. Settlers banded together and established the first village of the township, Burgess.

Burgess centered around a four corners located two miles west and two miles north of present day Lost Nation. The town was served by a post office from 1854 to 1888. The land surrounding the four corners was platted and records speak of a general store, blacksmith shop, Good Templars Lodge and a schoolhouse. The east-west road running through the village and passing in front of the existing Smithtown Church building is a section of the old Camanche to Anamosa territorial road.

Soon after the establishment of the village, it was given the nickname of Smithtown and became better known by this colloquialism, given in recognition of one of its prominent first citizens, David Smith. Smith was a blacksmith, preacher and also served as the town's second postmaster.

In 1865, A Sharon Methodist Church Incorporation was made. George Read, trustee and area landowner, donated the land for the church and cemetery. The cemetery was put to use in short time, but the church structure was not completed until 1874.



For these nine years, Burgess residents gave of their time, money and labor in order to construct a place of worship. In 1875, the Sharon Methodist Church Incorporation agreed to allow the St. John's Congregation of the German Reformed Church of Sharon Township use of the church building for their services for the sum equivalent to one-fourth of the cost of the structure. In consideration of this sum, the German Reformed Congregation could use the Sharon M.E. Church one-fourth of the time.

The Reformed Congregation was an affiliate of the Saint Paul's Reformed Church at Wheatland and was served by ministers from that church. The Methodists were affiliated with the Monmouth Circuit of the Upper Iowa Conference of the Methodist Church and were served by ministers from Monmouth.

In 1871, plans were first made for the Sabula, Achley and Dakota Railroad to pass through the township. It was decided that the tracks would miss Burgess by two miles to the south. When the tracks were built, it was the beginning of the end for the little village, particularly in terms of a business center. Eventually the general store in Burgess moved nearer to the railroad, prompting the development of Lost Nation. Life in Burgess continued for some time though. The Good Templar Sharon Valley Lodge, a benevolent and charitable organization promoting the cause of temperance, held regular meetings and remained active until 1900.

The Smithtown Church building was used for funeral services and community meetings after it was discontinued as a regular place of worship (late 1920's). In 1929, interested members of the community established the Smithtown Cemetery Association. This group repaired and maintained the church building and cemetery grounds and in 1931 purchased the church from the Upper Iowa Conference.

On August 2, 1970, the Smithtown Cemetery Association presented the church to the Clinton County Conservation Board for use as a historical site.

The Smithtown Church remains today serving as a sole reminder of the pioneer village of Burgess and rural Iowa life. With the help of the Clinton County Historic Preservation Commission,

