

**Willerup UMC**  
**Celebrates 170 Years**  
**On May 3, 2021!**

*Happy*  
*Anniversary!*



Let us REJOICE at the  
Goodness and Faithfulness of  
God!

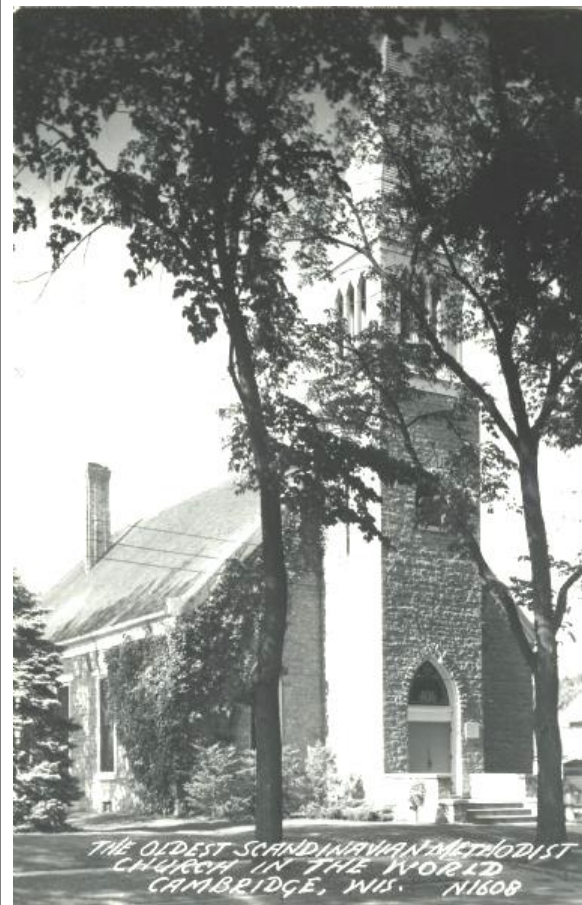
Our history in review:

Spring 1850- Rev. Carl Peter Agrelius, a Swede, sent by the American Methodist Episcopal Church came by horseback into Cambridge and held meetings in homes and schoolhouses, preaching to the Norwegian/Danish settlers, who also understood Swedish.

November 1850- Rev. Christian B. Willerup answered the call for a man who could preach in Norwegian. He had zeal for the Lord and reported that homes and schools were crowded every time he preached. Soon he had enough members to organize a church.



**Rev. Christian  
B Willerup**



May 3, 1851- The day the “Methodist Mission Church” was incorporated in Madison. (We were not known as Willerup Methodist Church until many years later.)

July 21, 1852- Our stone church was dedicated. Rev. Willerup had the vision for a building that would last and did rigorous fundraising, including a significant amount of his own salary, in order for the church to be built. Willerup was right about erecting a building that would last. Ours is the first Norwegian/Danish Methodist Church in the World and became known as the “Mother Church” for all the other N/D churches that formed after ours, across the US and in Norway and Denmark.



1882- A parsonage was built next to the church and was used until after the new education wing was built and then was moved to a spot behind the church along the creek, was updated, and sold.



April 24, 1853- The first Sunday School was organized with 50 students divided into 8 classes.

Elementary Sunday School, 2017



Willerup Bible Camp Chapel, now named the Edith Kenseth Chapel

1884- Willerup Park at Lake Ripley was acquired for holding camp meetings, which were becoming popular for evangelizing. The ‘park’ became known to us as Willerup Bible Camp where we now have worship, baptisms, and a chicken barbecue in the summer.



March 5, 1884- The first choir was formed with 18 members. Thereafter, a choir sang year round for services until the early 2000’s.



Mary Circle, 2010

April 1886-The Women’s Home Missionary Society was formed. The organization has functioned ever since, albeit under different names. Currently, we have the Mary Circle of United Methodist Women.



Singing Christmas Tree 2019

1888- The church bell was acquired and rang for church services and funerals. It was recently updated and fitted with an automatic timer.



Church Bell—on the ground during 2017-18 updates

November 6, 1891- The Epworth League, a society for young adults, was established. That flourished into the 1930s. In 1916, Willerup Lake Ripley Campgrounds was the site for the Epworth League Institute- a gathering of League members from Norwegian/Danish churches around Wisconsin and Illinois. Meetings for youths have continued through the years, designed to meet the needs of the times. In 1951, the early teenagers were called the Crusaders. Other names have been The Omegans, Guided Missals, MYF, and simply the Youth Group.



Youth Group 2019

May 1901- The church celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by renovating the building, which had become “so old and battered that pillars had to be put inside the church” to keep the roof from falling down on the congregation! Renovations included a new roof and the tin ceiling with crowns that we sit under today, a new steeple with weather vane, two rooms at the rear for “society purposes” and all new furniture.

**There are many more ‘firsts’ to record-** First vacation Bible School, first nursery for babies and toddlers, first Church orchestra and church band, first praise band, first Singing Christmas Tree, first Willerup missionary conference, first AWANA club, first Lay Witness Mission, first couples’ club, first Bible study with the prisoners at Thompson Camp, first 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Sing, first 24-hour prayer vigil, first *Willerup Whispers*, first coffee and donuts hospitality before/after church services, and more....

The point is- God has been faithful to lift up leaders in the Willerup congregation and to provide ministers **both** who have been attentive to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to see that His Word has been preached, taught, shared, and practiced for 170 years. Let’s **thank** Him and renew our commitment to following Him and doing His will for Willerup, our community, and the world.

Written by Judy Vasby, Willerup Historian  
Much information was taken from the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet.





Picture of Willerup interior circa 1930's