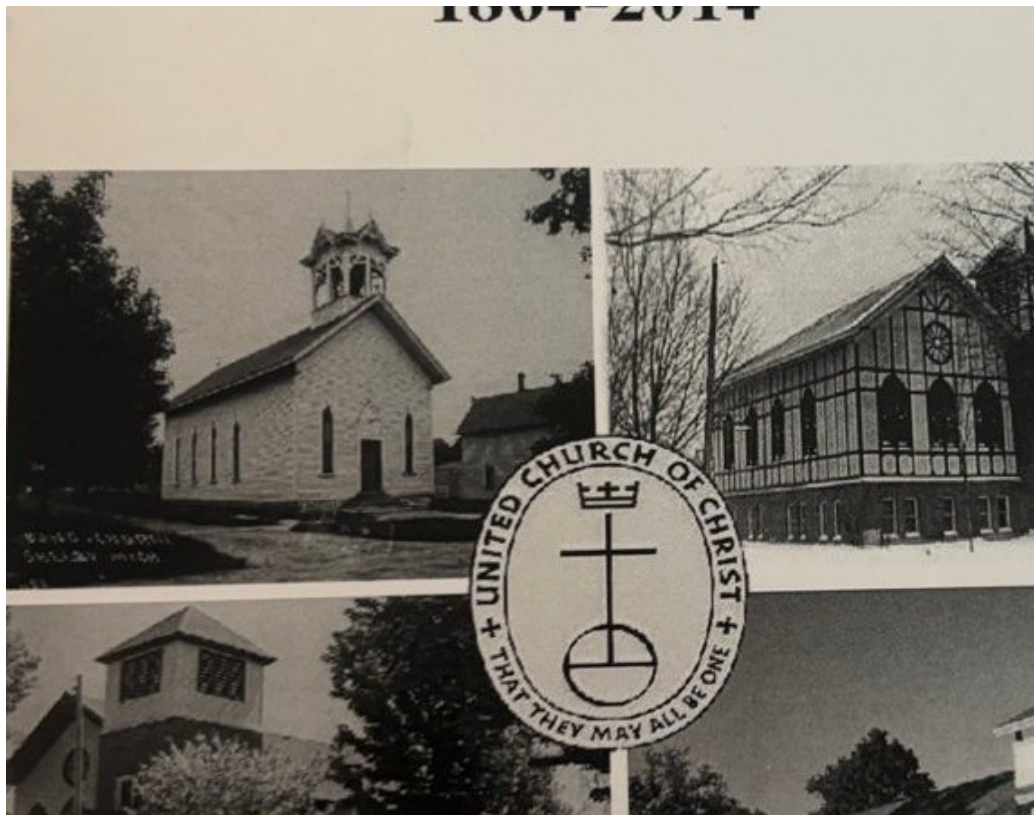


SHELBY CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

A HISTORY IN TIMELINE

1864–2014



Serving the community since 1864

Reorganized and reformatted from the 2014 sesquicentennial history

SOURCE & METHOD

About This Edition

A cleaner, chronological presentation of the church's sesquicentennial record.

This edition reorganizes the 2014 church-history booklet into a chronological, era-based timeline. The goal is readability: major events are grouped by period, repeated financial detail is condensed, and wording is lightly edited for clarity while preserving the substance of the source record.

The original booklet states that its information was drawn from the Oceana Historical Society, the Shelby Area Public Library History Room, church annual minutes and records, and the 1864–1964 Centennial Book. It credits Margaret (Fleming) Knapp and Janet Schultz with compiling the information.

Names and dates below follow the source booklet. Where pastor dates overlap or the original chronology is incomplete, this edition leaves the record as printed rather than attempting to reconcile it with outside sources.

At a Glance

- 1864 — A small group organizes a Congregational church in the Charles Bannister home.
- 1875 — The first dedicated church building is completed and formally dedicated.
- 1882 — The church bell is dedicated.
- 1887 — Fire damages the church; services temporarily move to the Methodist church.
- 1899 — The first parsonage is purchased.
- 1922–1923 — The church is enlarged, remodeled, and given a basement; the renewed building is dedicated.
- 1948 — The congregation votes against the proposed Congregational–Evangelical and Reformed union at that time.
- 1960–1961 — A new educational wing opens as the Fellowship Center; the congregation votes to join the United Church of Christ.
- 1965 — Ernest Cummings is called as pastor, beginning a ministry of more than four decades.
- 1978–1981 — A major addition and building campaign culminates in paying off a \$50,000 debt in two years.
- 1984 — Handbell ministry begins, later becoming the Royal Ringers.
- 2001–2003 — A \$300,000 estate gift helps establish an endowment; a December 2002 fire destroys the sanctuary and dining room.
- 2004 — The congregation returns to the rebuilt church site; about 400 attend the July 25 services.
- 2014 — The congregation celebrates its 150th anniversary.

1864–1899

Founding a Congregation

From house meetings to a dedicated church, a bell, a fire, and a permanent place in Shelby.

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- 1864

On May 15, a small group met in the Charles Bannister home to form a Congregational church. Charter members named in the record were J. W. Gilbert, William Weston, Myron A. Gilbert, D. A. Gilbert, Laura Ann Gilbert, Emma N. Bannister, Ann Weston, Calissa A. Ruckel, Alice M. Gilbert, and Anna Weston, with John Vetter as minister. Services were held in homes, schoolhouses, and halls; because ministers were not always available on Sundays, some regular services were held on Saturdays.
 - 1868

The local record noted approximately 1,400 Indigenous people in Mason and Oceana counties.
 - 1869

On December 18, the congregation changed its name from First Congregational Church of Benona to First Congregational Church of Shelby. The church record also reflects rapid post–Civil War settlement in western Oceana County.
 - 1870

The first recorded baptism was Blanche Hewins, daughter of Charles and Anna Hewins, on May 8.
 - 1871

A Building Association was formed to manage construction and financing. The railroad also reached Shelby that year.
 - 1872

Members judged the time right to construct a church. Donations of logs and volunteer labor came from Congregationalists, people of other denominations, and people with no church affiliation, making the project a community undertaking.
 - 1873

The Congregational Society adopted Articles of Association. Officers included trustees Alex Pittenger, Perley A. Cady, Rhodes Willett, Ezekiel J. Shirts, and Edward B. Gaylord; Jarvis Fleming served as clerk and George W. Piper as treasurer. The church was for a time the only church in the township.
 - 1874

Shelby hosted the 11th annual meeting of the Western Conference of

Congregational Churches at Shirt’s Hall. By July 31, the new church frame was standing and construction was moving quickly.

1875 On June 27, Rev. Leroy Warren dedicated the Shelby Congregational Church. Despite a heavy thunderstorm, visitors came by train from Pentwater, Mears, and East Golden, crowding the 30-by-60-foot building. The original cost was about \$2,500; a \$225 collection that day helped defray expenses.

1876 The first recorded church wedding joined Effie Ann Hall and Thomas Pittenger in July.

1877 Christmas was an elaborate church-centered celebration, including a meal, baskets for those unable to attend, gifts hung on the tree and distributed by name, and Sunday School recitations and songs. The church also received pulpit lamps and gifts for the pastor.

1879 The source describes Shelby as a town of about 400 with stores, shops, hotels, a sawmill, a school, two church groups, two resident ministers, and three doctors. It also notes that Susan B. Anthony lectured in nearby Pentwater on woman’s suffrage in March.

1880–1881 Rev. J. A. Bartlett served the church and offered a winter lecture series. Christmas observances included multiple services, children’s concerts, and crowded Christmas-tree programs in both local churches.

1882 On June 24, the church dedicated its bell, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Truman Penfield. Members took turns ringing it; C. A. Hawley reportedly pulled the rope for a full hour.

1886 Facing financial difficulty and needed interior work, the church auctioned pew seats. Prices ranged from \$5 for rear side pews to \$40 for long pews along the main aisle.

1887 A fire damaged the church. Services and Sunday School were temporarily held in the Methodist Episcopal church while repairs were made. Insurance paid \$398.80. Rev. Thomas Parker resigned later that year.

- 1889** Members attended Muskegon Association meetings in September.
- 1892** The church lost two active members, Mrs. Robert Johnston and Thaddeus Fleming, within a week in July, while also receiving a substantial group of new members. Christian Endeavor was organized during the ministry of Rev. L. F. Waldo.
- 1893** The Ladies Aid Society sponsored a Chicken Pie Supper. The year also brought an unusually heavy death toll among members.
- 1895** The church borrowed from the Congregational Building Society in New York and sold property to the village of Shelby for a park, applying the proceeds to church debt. The record remembers horses and mules tied to hitching poles during worship and Sunday School.
- 1897** A week of prayer was followed by meetings marked, in the source's words, by increased interest in Christian work.
- 1899** The first parsonage was purchased on State Street for \$800. During the 1899–1907 pastorate of Rev. C. Grieshaber, membership grew to 156 active members.

1900–1919

Growth, Organization & War

A maturing congregation develops formal governance, strong lay organizations, and a broad Sunday School ministry.

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| 1900 | The church formally recognized D. V. Jackway for long and faithful service as its first male organist. Collections were also taken for Home Missions. |
| 1901 | The Ladies Aid Society became increasingly integrated into the church’s practical and financial work, and collections supported ministerial relief and the Building Society. |
| 1904 | Rev. Charles Grieshaber urged the congregation to advance in spiritual life rather than merely “hold its own.” |
| 1906 | The Missionary Society became a regular part of church reporting. |
| 1907 | Fifty people were added to the church during the year, many by confession of faith and baptism. College-bound young people often chose Olivet College, strengthening the church’s Congregational connection. Mrs. A. T. Field became church clerk, beginning a tenure that lasted until 1935. |
| 1908 | Church reports now included payment of an electric light bill — a small sign of modernization. |
| 1910–1911 | Sunday School remained a major ministry: in 1910 it enrolled 110 with an average attendance of 80; by 1911 it listed 211 scholars with an average attendance of 93. |
| 1911 | The Ladies Aid Society paid \$100 toward the minister’s salary, \$19 for the organist, \$14.55 for flowers, and more than \$400 in church and parsonage improvements. |
| 1912 | Sunday School had 13 classes and an average attendance of 100. |
| 1913 | Christian Endeavor renewed its program with monthly social evenings and special |

music. The Ladies Aid Society continued significant parsonage repairs.

1914 A committee was appointed to draft a church creed and constitution. Junior Christian Endeavor reported 40 members.

1915 The creed of the First Congregational Church of Shelby was enacted January 24.

1916 Membership stood at 199. The Ladies Aid Society completed payment of a \$900 parsonage debt it had assumed three years earlier. Children's Day was observed and the church roll was reviewed.

1917 Midweek prayer meetings were reported as growing. Church organizations — trustees, Christian Endeavor, Missionary Society, Sunday School, and Ladies Aid — continued active financial and ministry programs.

1918 The church supported wartime and mission efforts. A service flag recorded members in military service; a second gold star was added after Hubert Wylie died of pneumonia at Camp Holabird. The congregation adopted the Every Member Drive to underwrite the 1919 home-expense and benevolence budget.

1919 The service flag had 47 stars. Rev. John T. Husted was in his 50th year of ministry and participated in Red Cross, Liberty Loan, and patriotic work. The church adopted a standing-pledge system and formally accepted a constitution. Rev. Husted retired from active ministry later that year.

1920–1949

Building, Ministry & Mid-Century Change

The church expands its building, navigates pastoral transitions, war years, and early discussions of denominational union.

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| 1920 | Rev. Clarence L. Austin resigned because of poor health but intended to remain in Shelby and continue working with the church. In November the congregation called Rev. Stephen Vaughan at a salary of \$1,320. |
| 1921 | Rev. Vaughan began January 2. Membership was listed as 38 men and 90 women. The Plymouth Guild organized in June with 35 members. |
| 1922 | During Rev. Vaughan's pastorate, the church was remodeled and enlarged and a basement was added. A cornerstone was laid. |
| 1923 | The enlarged church was dedicated during April 19–24. Former pastors and area ministers participated, and O. H. Fleming formally turned over the building keys to the trustees. |
| 1931–
1934 | Rev. C. H. Innis served as pastor and became known for funeral ministry that extended beyond the congregation to families throughout the area. |
| 1934–
1938 | Rev. John Williams served as pastor. The source remembers Rev. and Mrs. Williams as an effective team and notes their care for families in need throughout the Shelby area. |
| 1939–
1940 | Rev. Charles Schofield served as pastor and was especially influential among young people. The Pilgrim Fellowship received its charter during his ministry. |
| 1940–
1941 | Rev. C. L. Austin accepted a second call to Shelby. The source praises his preaching while noting that injuries sustained on the front lines in World War I limited his health. |
| 1942 | The Women's Fellowship purchased a second parsonage for \$100 and other |

considerations.

**1942–
1946**

Rev. C. L. Pendleton came to Shelby early in his ministry and was ordained while serving the congregation. During World War II he left to serve as an Army chaplain. Rev. Robert Van Meigs, a retired Baptist minister at Silver Lake, served as interim from 1944 to 1946.

1946

After release from Army chaplaincy, Rev. Pendleton returned briefly before resigning in 1947.

1947

Sunday School enrollment was 94 with average attendance of 72. In October the congregation extended a call to Rev. Oliver S. Page.

1948

A new constitution was adopted. The congregation also considered the proposed union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church; the motion was defeated, 12 in favor and 16 opposed.

**1949–
1950**

Rev. Page's ministry included parsonage improvements, missionary giving, and practical building projects. In 1950 the church considered purchasing the Wurlitzer organ already in use for \$800.

1950–1969

Education, Fellowship & Joining the UCC

A new educational wing, renewed church structures, and the congregation's entry into the United Church of Christ.

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| 1951 | After an unsuccessful vote to call Rev. Edgar Shaw, the congregation unanimously called Rev. Harry Rogers. He began July 1. |
| 1952 | The church planned a major round of repairs and improvements, including roof work, flooring, kitchen improvements, furnishings, and educational equipment. Rev. Harry Rogers was ordained at the church on November 6. |
| 1953 | Rev. Rogers resigned to serve a Grand Rapids congregation. In December, the church called Rev. Richard Evans, welcoming him the following March. |
| 1955–
1956 | The church considered a basement stage. In 1956 Mr. and Mrs. Jack Jackson were elected delegates to the National Convention in Omaha. |
| 1957 | The parsonage telephone was changed from a party line to a private line. A committee was appointed to plan an addition for Sunday School rooms. |
| 1958–
1959 | The congregation authorized architectural work and fundraising for the educational addition. A \$23,000, 15-year loan at 6% was obtained from Ludington Savings and Loan. Junior and Cherub choirs enrolled 47 children. |
| 1960 | Sunday School counted 123 students, five officers, and 13 teachers. The new Sunday School building was completed and occupied in August. |
| 1961 | A Bible Study Group met monthly. The new educational wing was dedicated and named the “Fellowship Center.” In May, the congregation resolved to join the United Church of Christ. |
| 1962 | The church activated a Prudential Committee to be called the Church Council, tasked with outlining program goals and purpose. Men’s Fellowship and Pilgrim |

Fellowship were active.

1963

A Board of Outreach was created to welcome newcomers and care for the infirm and bereaved. Planning began for the church's centennial celebration. The congregation also approved major heating-system work.

1964

A special gifts committee was created to encourage memorial gifts and bequests. Bible studies included Job, Psalms, and Isaiah, and centennial programming emphasized appreciation, family, fellowship, and loyalty.

1965

On July 31, the congregation voted unanimously to call Ernest Cummings as pastor at a salary of \$6,750.

1966

The Fellowship Center was rented to Shelby Public Schools while a new elementary building was being completed.

1967

Howard and Dorothy McDonald donated a site for a new parsonage. The congregation authorized planning for a \$25,000–\$30,000 parsonage.

1968

A church endowment was established on May 15. The Congregators group formed, new hymnals were acquired, and a contemporary service was promoted.

1970–1989

Expansion, Accessibility & New Ministries

The congregation renovates, expands, strengthens community partnerships, and develops distinctive music ministries.

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| 1970 | The constitution and bylaws were adopted on a permanent basis. A \$1,750 chair lift for the sanctuary stairs was donated by Abby Field. The church also supported local institutions and outreach programs, including an “Adopt a Grandparent” effort. |
| 1971 | Women’s Fellowship replaced the thrift shop with a Christmas Boutique. Youth became more involved in leadership. The church pursued a new organ, hosted Methodist men, and even offered airplane rides at the annual ox roast. |
| 1972 | Women’s Fellowship responded to disaster appeals; Men’s Fellowship anticipated using a new kitchen; and George and Mrs. Fleming purchased a baptismal font for the church. |
| 1973 | The congregation began the process of incorporating as a nonprofit corporation in the State of Michigan. |
| 1974 | The church undertook cleanup of the old parsonage property, began a pictorial directory, formed “Young Congregators,” installed memorial doors, refinished and replaced pews, and held an ox roast with airplane rides and parachutists. |
| 1975 | Stained-glass windows were repaired. The congregation’s float won first place in the church category at the Asparagus Festival parade. A new Endowment Income Fund was established, and plans moved forward for roof repairs and the Jane Fisk Memorial entrance. |
| 1977 | A Good Friday cantata united Methodist, Catholic, and Congregational choirs. The Board of Missions reported record giving of \$3,150.95 for 1976. |
| 1978 | Ground was broken October 22 for a new addition. The source also notes financial pressure as revenue struggled to keep pace with expenses. |

1979	The church participated in One Great Hour of Sharing for the first time. Stained-glass windows were refinished, and major building improvements continued.
1980	The main church building was re-bricked on three sides, basement dining space was enlarged, and radiators were removed from the rear of the sanctuary to create more room between pews. The Mission Board supported a foster child in Africa.
1981	A mortgage-burning ceremony celebrated paying off a \$50,000 debt in two years. The courtyard was landscaped and a fountain built; music and fellowship programs remained active.
1982	The church briefly tried two summer worship services before a special meeting returned to one service. A Building Advisory Committee was formed for repairs.
1983	A lay ministry of pastoral care was introduced. Women's Fellowship hosted a West Michigan Association retreat and continued substantial mission and fundraising work.
1984	A two-octave set of Malmark handbells was purchased. The first handbell choir included youth and adults under director Jean Loughmiller.
1986	The constitution and bylaws were reviewed. The record notes that a \$1,581 lien from the Congregational Church Building Society, originally established in 1875, still existed. The congregation also voted to sell the parsonage to Lois and Ernest Cummings for \$35,000.
1987	The handbell choir adopted the name "The Royal Ringers." Trustees investigated property across from the church for future parking.
1988	The church pursued handicap accessibility, purchased a copy machine to replace mimeographing, installed new kitchen ovens, and began selling SERRV products through the Mission Board.
1989	An adult handbell choir was organized in June under Sara Collins, and Mary Wagner was hired as Music Director. Plans for the 125th anniversary were underway.

1990–2014

A Wider Community & Rebuilding

From the 125th anniversary to the 2002 fire, rebuilding, new outreach partnerships, and the sesquicentennial.

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- 1990

The congregation celebrated its 125th anniversary. Rev. Cummings was recognized for earning his Doctor of Ministry. Church school adopted a more family-centered format.
 - 1991

A barrier-free lift was fully funded. Youth ministry was formed jointly with the Methodist church, and Sunday church school continued to grow.
 - 1992

The handicap lift was dedicated November 8. Handbell ministry expanded with another octave of bells and interest in hand chimes for children. Computerized financial recordkeeping was introduced.
 - 1993

A new Allen organ was installed and dedicated, with organ and equipment totaling about \$32,000. United Youth Group activities continued jointly with the Methodist church. Royal Ringers participated in a bell-choir event in Grand Rapids.
 - 1994

The church dedicated and began using The New Century Hymnal. On October 9, the Royal Ringers held their first community concert at the church.
 - 1995

Trustees received authorization to purchase the Morningstar property for future parking. United Youth helped bring the AIDS Quilt to West Michigan. A beginner handbell choir, Beta Bells, was formed.
 - 1996

A new music room was added and handbell/chime ministries expanded. The Morningstar house was removed to make way for future church use.
 - 1998–
1999

Air conditioning was installed in the sanctuary, music room, and dining room. Youth attended Camp Talahi, and the church completed its commitment to the national Make-A-Difference Campaign.
 - 1999–

The chancel area was rearranged, music leadership continued under Sara Collins,

2000	and the church adopted an endowment investment proposal.
2000– 2001	Wider Community Ministry intentionally connected the congregation with area organizations including the Children’s Help Care Center, Good Samaritans, Oceana Outreach Advocate Program, and Christian Caregivers. Nursery construction and roof work also took place.
2001– 2002	The church received a \$300,000 gift from the Thielman estate. A Praise Team began singing at the early service.
2002– 2003	The Endowment Fund was finalized with the United Church Foundation. On the night of December 16, 2002, fire destroyed the sanctuary and dining room. Trustees chose architect Norm Dodds of Pentwater to lead the rebuilding project, purchased additional property, and salvaged reusable items from the damaged building.
2003– 2004	During demolition and construction, worship was held in the Shelby High School auditorium. An Endowment Fund Policy was adopted. Elvin Curtis donated a grand piano in memory of his wife.
2004– 2005	The congregation returned to the church site in the new building on July 25, 2004, with about 400 people present for the two services. The Endowment Committee issued 17 higher-education scholarships. Wider Community and Women’s Fellowship continued extensive local and wider-church ministry.
2005– 2006	The Royal Ringers participated in area bell events. Women’s Fellowship helped lead a multi-church “Water for Life, Water for All” well project in Africa and supported the Trinity Lutheran pantry.
2007– 2008	Rev. Ernest Cummings retired May 12 after almost 42 years as Shelby’s pastor. Rev. Bonnie Stagg served as interim minister. A worship-planning committee developed into the Music and Worship Ministry Board.
2008– 2009	Middle- and high-school youth groups continued under new leadership. The Diaconate began selling Fair Trade coffee, Women’s Fellowship supported the Community Thanksgiving Dinner, and the church’s rebuilding debt was paid off.
2009	A new church website was established. Rev. Ruth Fitzgerald accepted the call and

began as settled pastor October 12.

2010 A hearing loop was installed in the sanctuary. New exterior signs were dedicated as memorials. Women’s Fellowship’s Railroad Supper served nearly 300 people and raised \$1,685.38 for outreach projects.

2011 Wider Community began working with L.O.V.E., Inc. A church-wide mission trip was planned for 2012, and Men’s Fellowship began a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper.

2012 Seventeen youth and church members traveled on a mission trip to Deer Lodge, Tennessee. Longtime organist Mary Wagner retired December 31. Sunday School raised money for Heifer Project, the church purchased the Dorer property, and a collaborative Christmas-basket effort distributed 350 food baskets.

2013 Pastor Ruth D. Fitzgerald resigned in June to serve East Congregational Church in Grand Rapids. Rev. George Reed and his wife Betty were selected as interim leadership. Disciple classes, a “Death and Dying” class, and an office remodel were among the year’s activities.

2014 The 150th anniversary was marked by an open house and dinner on May 15, an Asparagus Parade entry on June 7, a Wider Community ice cream social on July 19, and a sesquicentennial worship service on August 17.

APPENDIX A

Pastors Serving the Congregational Church of Shelby

Names and dates as printed in the 2014 source booklet; overlapping dates are retained.

Pastor	Years
John Vetter	1864–1865
Amos Dresser	1865–1867
Crane	1867–1868
Alanson St. Claire	1869–1872
James Watts	1873–1875
A. C. Buttner	1875–1876
Thomas Towler	1876–1877
Levi Waldo	1877–1878
James Watts	1878–1880
J. A. Bartlett	1880–1881
R. W. Fletcher	1881–1882
Levi Waldo	1883–1885
Thomas Parker	1885–1887
John B. Kaye	1887–1890
I. A. Shanton	1890–1891
E. J. Burgess	1892–1897
James Provan	1897–1898
G. W. Mylne	1898–1909
C. O. Grieshaber	1899–1909
F. P. Sprague	1909–1910

W. S. Steensma	1910–1912
G. C. Speer	1913–1916
J. T. Husted	1916–1919
C. L. Austin	May–Sept. 1920
Stephen Vaughan	1921–1927
William Skentelbury	1928–1931
C. H. Innis	1931–1934
John Williams	1934–1938
Charles Schofield	1938–1940
C. L. Austin	1940–1941
C. L. Pendleton	1942–1946
Robert Van Meigs	1944–1946
C. L. Pendleton	1946–1947
Oliver S. Page	1947–1951
Harry Rogers	1947–1951
Richard Evans	1954–1959
David A. Cornell	1959–1965
Earnest Cummings	1965–2007
Ruth Davey Fitzgerald	2009–2013

APPENDIX B

Moderators

The source identifies 1968 as the beginning of the moderator list.

Moderator	Years
Jay Sikkenga	1968–1969 (1st Church Moderator)
George Wheeler	1970–1972
Maxine Huggard	1973–1975
Winston Lewis	1976–1981
Wayne Fleming	1982–1985
Ted Zoulek	1986–1988
Sharon Martin House	1989–1994
Jos George	1995–2000
Gary Babinec	2001–2002
Nancy Hallack	2003–2008
Gary Babinec	2009–2014

APPENDIX C

Sesquicentennial Notes & Source Credits

The 2014 booklet was itself a community memory project.

2014

Summer sesquicentennial celebrations included a May 15 open house and dinner, June 7 Asparagus Parade entry, July 19 Wider Community ice cream social, and August 17 period worship service.

Original source note

Information was obtained from the Oceana Historical Society, the Shelby Area Public Library History Room, church annual minutes, church records, and the 1864–1964 Centennial Book. The information was compiled by Margaret (Fleming) Knapp and Janet Schultz.

Sesquicentennial committee members named in the booklet: Barb Fox, Ed Rickertson, Laura Beyer, Betty Field, Gary Babinec, Chris and Sara Beyer, Ross Field, Janet Schultz, Don and Margaret Knapp, and Vicki Kiel. Cover design was credited to Jeriad Kiel.