

A HISTORY OF THE LORD'S CHURCH IN THE UPPER PENINSULA OF MICHIGAN

by Leslie W. Grant

The history of the Lord's Church in the Upper Peninsula, or U.P. as we will call it hereafter, cannot be told without our knowing the impact that the Hawley family had on it. First there was Brother H. H. Hawley, and then came Bro. and Sis. Wesley Hawley in 1955. Without the vision these people had, I dare say, the Lord's Church might never have been well-established in the area.

Bro. H. H. Hawley worked in the U.P., traveling from Ludington, during the years of 1912-13. It is believed a congregation existed in the Cornell area about 20 miles from Escanaba. As far as is known, Bro. Hawley made several trips to help these brethren. Though not confirmed, a congregation is believed to have existed in Sidnaw about 50 miles south of the city of Houghton. Again it is believed that these congregations ceased to exist in the teens or the twenties. Nothing more is known of the work of the Lord's Church in the U.P. until 1955.

In 1955 Bro. and Sis. Wesley Hawley moved to Escanaba to establish the Lord's church. As far as is known, this was the only one in the U.P. at that time. They met in their home at first and later at the V.F.W. hall. After a few years they were able to purchase a building vacated by a denominational group. In 1963, they moved into the present building. It is debt free and has been modified so that it is very adequate. Bro. Hawley shared this unique situation with me. He was due to retire from Farm Bureau in 1955. He was 65, and Sis. Hawley was 69. Farm Bureau was not in the U.P. at that time so he convinced them to send him to Escanaba to organize that business. He explained to me that in this way he was able to have finances to establish Farm Bureau (which he did very well) and to establish the Lord's Church also. More will follow about the Escanaba work.

A short time later, Bro. J. Krumrie started a congregation in the Sault Ste. Marie area. A congregation was also started at Dafter near the old Kinchelo Air Force base. This congregation, to my best knowledge, was a non-institutional work. In 1973, this group merged with the Sault Ste. Marie congregation. I haven't any record of who preached there after Bro. Krumrie until 1972 when Bro. and Sis. Jim Casey became the evangelist. Following Bro. Casey was another man whose name I cannot recall. The current man, Bro. Dan Schillinger, and his wife have been there for many years.

In the early 1960's, the K.I. Sawyer Air Force base had a congregation meeting which moved to the city of Marquette about 1963. They built a building which was completed in 1964. It is debt free and seats about 150. Preachers who have served this congregation include: Roy McGaugh, Tom Curtis, Harold Driscoll, Dan Robinson, Ron Bartenan, Al Meakes, Jay Allen, and Roger Rhoades who

just started there. Working with Al Meakes was Bro. Mike Bolton who had a campus ministry at Northern Michigan University.

The work in the Hancock area began in the early 1960's. Students from Michigan Tech were meeting at the Douglas Hotel in Mohawk with Bro. and Sis. Olin Yarger. A building was secured in Hancock about 35 miles south of Mohawk. Milton Austin and Perry O'Dell moved in as a team to work in Hancock. Following these men, Bro. and Sis. Dan Skaggs arrived in 1972 to work with these members and continue there at the date of this writing in 1996. We were saddened that the Yargers, who were so vital in the beginning of that work, left to attend the Christian Church during the mid-eighties.

Bro. Hawley had a plan for establishing Farm Bureau, and he used the same plan for the work of the church. He would establish a strong center which was based at Escanaba and then move out 50 miles or so in all directions. Thus the work at Iron Mountain 59 miles west of Escanaba was begun around 1966. I understand that Bro. and Sis. Hawley mortgaged their home to buy a building with the Church to pay it back as it grew. They found a man, Randolph Pritchard, to take over that work in the late 1960's. After Bro. Pritchard left, the congregation dissolved. After I moved here in 1972, we tried to resurrect that work, but failed. We sold the building and used the money to put a roof on Escanaba's building, to help purchase a building for a new work at Newberry, and to pay off a debt at the television station. (More will follow about Iron Mountain.)

During the late sixties, some trouble in Escanaba erupted so the Hawleys had to return to maintain the work of that congregation. In 1972, Bro. Hawley persuaded Bro. and Sis. Leslie W. Grant to take on the work they had started. Upon their arrival May 28, 1972, there were four members attending. Bro. Hawley was then 79 and his wife 84. That summer they moved back to Ludington after doing a great work for the Lord's Church and lost souls. The other members also left us that summer for about three years, but as Paul said, "The Lord was with us."

During the summer of 1973 a man arrived to worship with us; this was quite noticeable since there were only 8 or 9 of us meeting. He had moved to Marinette, Wisconsin (65 miles to our south) to establish the Church there. There are no records of a church of Christ ever having been established in the twin cities of Marinette-Menominee, MI. Bro. and Sis. Jerry Pace of Flint moved there, obtained a job at Ansell manufacturing, and started the Church. We traveled to their home for worship several months. A couple had moved to Escanaba on January 1, 1973 to work with us, but Bro. and Sis. Charles James chose to move to Menominee to lead that work. During their time there, the congregation bought land and completed a building. The facility is small but adequate and can seat about 75. Bro. and Sis. Bruce Tanner took up the work after the James family left and stayed about 6 years. Next came Bro. and Sis. Phil Rogers who stayed about 7 months. Starting

March 13, 1996, Bro. and Sis. Tyron Yates are working with the Twin Cities congregation.

A lady living at Gould City (86 miles east of Escanaba) kept goading us to begin a work in that area. Thus, we began in 1974 going to the home of Bro. and Sis. Millard Dockery every other week for worship service. We met in the afternoon and returned in time for evening worship. This continued for about a year and a half until the (formerly) Lennon Road congregation in Flint took the oversight and transferred the work to Newberry. Soon thereafter they were able to purchase a building and hire a preacher. At this time Bro. and Sis. Mike James are leading this work.

In February of 1985, I received a letter from a lady in Florence, Wisconsin (15 miles west of Iron Mountain) asking if I would help them start a congregation in Iron Mountain. We began with afternoon meetings in a motel. Several would go from Escanaba to make the crowd larger. At that time Champion paper mill opened and brought in key personnel from their other mills. Seven of these key people were members of the Lord's Church so that was a big boost for the fledgling work. Within a year or so, a building was constructed and Bro. John Ankron was hired to preach. Following him, Bro. and Sis. Mike James moved into that work. Currently, Mike is at Newberry preaching, and the Iron Mountain congregation does not have an evangelist. Attendance is small (3 families).

In the early 1980's, after four were baptized in the Osier area (35 miles north of Escanaba), we began meeting there every Sunday night. This continued for about a year until one family moved and the host home was no longer available to us for services. Then, in 1992, a family came to Escanaba after hearing our television program "Let the Bible Speak." Shortly thereafter the parents were baptized followed by their two teenagers a few months later. About a year later Bro. Richard Wert taught his brother and family. After those five were baptized, they began meeting in Osier. They purchased a building on county road 41.5, 13 miles north of Rapid River. Some of the Escanaba members started going there to assist. They meet on Sunday mornings with about 20 in attendance with Bro. Wert preaching.

Perhaps a history of the Lord's Church would not be complete without mentioning the television outreach. So many have been so helpful and supportive of this effort. In 1976 we had the vision that if 400 people would give one dollar each week, we could preach the Gospel via television. Thus we began on March 28, 1976 for one half hour each Sunday. As I write this, we just passed the 20 year anniversary of this television outreach. Again we appreciate the many who have supported this endeavor and praise God for the nearly 150 who were taught and have been baptized from this effort.

Furthermore, I would estimate a number of 25 to 30 who are still in this area and who are faithful members in attendance each week who were reached through television. The Osier congregation exists as a direct result from that contact. Marquette and

Escanaba, as well as Osier, benefit by having good members from this evangelistic outreach. The television audience, according to Neilson ratings, numbers approximately 3000 per Sunday. Our plan is to continue as long as God blesses us with the dollars per week to finance the air time.

Although this report does not include all the names of all the workers in the vineyard of the Lord in the Upper Peninsula, it is submitted with the knowledge of God's blessings and the hope that it will encourage the readers to pray and to support the work in any way that they can.