

In the peaceful rural community of WEST ROCK, located seven miles southwest of Pine City, there stands a wooden frame church and parsonage, the symbol of spiritual strength for some 63 years. There the people of this fine rural community have associated themselves with the Methodist church; first under the direction of the Northwest Swedish Conference, and after this conference united with the American Methodist Conference, under the direction of the Minnesota Conference of the Methodist church. In the early days of the pioneer spirit, pastors preached loud and long against the sins of drunken wickedness, and instilled the fear of God in the Swedish immigrants.

During the cold winter months Sunday School was often disbanded from Christmas until spring, with worship services often held in the homes due to the cold and snow. The people and children were happy to gather again in the church in the spring and meet with their neighbors and friends in worship after the long cold winter.

The WEST ROCK church was organized in September, 1897 by the Rev. A. G. Olson, District Superintendent of the Northwest Swedish Conference, who served to bring religion to the newly organized community. Following in 1898 the church was served by J. A. Willmar to 1901, and then by the Rev. Charles S. Rydell who served for eight years, and did much to stabilize the work in the community. During two periods, 1913-1921, and 1926 - 1931 the Rev. Claus Johnson served the church and it made real progress. During the second period the use of the Swedish language was displeasing to the young people and under the following pastorate of Charles Swanson and Elmer Bloomquist the Swedish service was held only occasionally for the older people. With the coming of Russell Honeywell the church has not had any Swedish services, since 1939. Mr. Honeywell was a student and was married while at West Rock, and went to Asbury College, and later with his wife and two children became a missionary in the Philippine Islands, and is still serving there in 1960. Ralph Steel came Oct. 1, 1941 and left to enter the service as Chaplain in 1945.

The original church and parsonage burned in 1913. The fire started from a gas lamp during the evening service. There was a strong north wind, and without any water or fire department to fight the blaze, both the church and parsonage were soon destroyed. At that time Mrs. Johnson had with her the Rev. Marlin Johnson of our conference, then a child of nine months, whom she carried out to safety. No one was hurt, but the property was a total loss, except for \$2500.00 insurance. Under the leadership of the Rev. Claus Johnson the church and parsonage was rebuilt in 1914. The farmers cut logs and donated the lumber, and also much labor, enabling the rebuilding. The church is thankful for the pioneers.

In 1957 the church was moved south on the property, since it stood in the way of the new highway 70. \$1800.00 was paid to the church by the highway department to help in this move. The church also planned to build classrooms and a serving center which is badly needed in our community for Sunday School, W.S.C.S. etc. At present nothing has been done.

The community while now 50% Catholic and Lutheran, still looks on the little church as the center of much good that has come into the life of the people of West Rock. Each pastor has made a contribution to the life of our community and some one's life is better because of the witness of the Christian faith. One young man, the Rev. Marlen Johnson, oldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Axel Johnson, has answered the call to the ministry and is an active member of the Minnesota Conference, now serving the Centennial Church of St. Paul. Many other youth have left our community to render noble service in other fields. The present membership looks forward to a greater ministry with coming generations in the eventful days that lie ahead. The teen-agers, some juniors and seniors have continued in Sunday School. The church has a fine youth choir, and an active MYF and W.S.C.S. There is a church membership of 65 at present.



<u>Name of pastors</u>	<u>when appointed</u>	<u>when removed</u>
A. G. Olson	1897	1897
J. A. Willmar	1897	1901
Charles Rydell	1901	1909
Charles Hedeon	1909	1911
A. M. Rue	1911	1913
Claus Johnson	1913	1921
Lois Johnson	1921	1926
Claus Johnson	1926	1931
Charles Swanson	1931	1934, Denham & Windery
Elmer Bloomquist	1934	1938 - Belgrade
Nels W. Bord	1938	1939
Russell Homywell	Sept 1939	Sept 1940 Missionary to Philip
Donald Lathrop	Dec. 1940	June 1941
Ralph C. Steele	1941	1945 went as army chaplain.
Harry W. Bell D.D.	Oct. 1945	June 1946 - had also North Branch
Lynn J. King	June 1946	April 1947
Edmond L. Richards	April 1947	Aug. 1948
Stanley B. Anderson	Oct. 1948	May 1951
William O. Knale	Aug 1953	Dec. 1954
John M. White	Jan. 1955	July 1956
W.B.O. Baker	July 1956	still pastor 1961

**Some special names and comments**

Mrs. Axel Johnson - 22 years S.S. Teacher, Pres. of W.S.C.S. and many years lay member of the Annual Conference, and still is.

Mrs. Anderson S.S. Supt. for many years

Mrs. Hammet Johnson for 20 years Ladies Aid Treasurer

Mrs. Ardell Strins

T. A. Willmar first regular minister

Louis Johnson first ordained minister

The above history was prepared by Mrs. Axel Johnson - church historian and sent to the Historical Society January 1, 1961.

*Sent to me by Mrs. Phyllis  
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Hobbs*