

The Elmore Church

In the 1890s the smooth, rolling hills of the rich Palouse farmlands in northern Idaho were broken occasionally by clusters of trees and farm buildings. The discovery of gold on the Clearwater River in northern Idaho late in 1860 indirectly encouraged the settlement of the rich farmlands of eastern Washington and northern Idaho. The Deep Creek valley, located less than ten miles northeast of Palouse, just over the border into Idaho, drew settlers by wagon train eventually making their living as farmers.

The town of Freeze established as a typical rural center was never large but included a store and post office in one building, a blacksmith shop, grain chopper and chop mill, school, Woodmen of the World lodge hall, community church and a few houses. The town was short lived as the post office was discontinued in 1907, the store burned about 1908 and the rest of the community soon gave in to the competition from the new town of Potlatch.

Several communities appeared at about the same time: Cora, Mountain Home, Yellow Dog, and Cedar Creek all established schools and to some degree small stores to serve the needs of their communities. But the surrounding farms and forests remained a vital part of the Latah County economy.

Settlers in Deep Creek valley soon founded other rural schools and a few churches by the 1890s. The name of Elmore was first used because of the mistaken idea that the schoolhouse in District 78 on East Deep Creek was built on John Elmore's land. Surveys clearing off timber and fencing property later showed this building to be on Bysegger's land.

Families who homesteaded along Deep Creek bore the names of Katzenberger, Elmore, Krasselt, Bysegger, Nirk, Strong, Leistener, Gibbs, Soncarty, among others. Since this was a "backwoods" community, the more open farming area towards Garfield had developed sooner. One such community was the Cedar Creek neighborhood near the Washington line. Some of the ministers who came occasionally to those rural areas were Methodist. Since many settlers had a Methodist background, a rural Methodist church was contemplated. Methodist officials suggested that the United Brethren Church might be better able to service the growing community.

About 1900, a church building was put up at Cedar Creek, and a congregation was organized there. Conference records date the Elmore Church as being established in 1913. Early church records record a meeting on April 22, 1916 of the Cedar Creek Circuit meeting at the Elmore School. The circuit met again at the Elmore School house on March 3, 1917.

There was obviously a need for a church building to serve the Elmore community. Vincent and Dorothy Katzenberger recalled that the site for the church initially was west and north of John Valentine Katzenberger's private driveway to his farmhouse on his Clover Hill Farm. In 1918 the church was built by the cooperation of the Pastor at the time, J.O. Seibert, who was a carpenter. The problem of financial backing from the church members was creatively accomplished by having each member harvest trees from their properties and the logs were brought to Frank and Guy Parnell's sawmill to cut into proper lumber for the church building. The mill was convenient to the construction site for trucking the lumber across the open field winding through the stumps.

The church was positioned east of the old highway (really more an unpaved lane) and west of Deep Creek. Access to parking on either side of the church was available. On May 10, 1919, the new "East Deep Creek Chapel" was the scene of the Quarterly Conference. With dressed siding and a coat of paint, the Elmore Church was now presentable.

Church records list from the Adams, Bysegger, Brown, Carscallen, Doty, Gibbs, Hall, Katzenberger, Krasselt, Newton, Nirk, Perkins, Shattuck, Smith, Strong, Wetzel, Widmer and Zimmerschied families as members.



Courthouse records show the filing of a deed of land along highway 95 in 1937 conveying a gift of land from J. Valentine and Myra Katzenberger, "in consideration of one dollar, sell and convey unto

J.V. Katzenberger, Neta Shattuck, John Bysegger, Durrell Nirk and Arthur Strong, Trustees of the property" described in the deed. The grant and sale was intended to convey the premises for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and shall be in trust by said Trustees and their successors in office for the said church.

The church had been moved across the creek to its present location in December 1936. All work being done by donated labor. Timbered hills rise to the north and west, providing a striking background to the church.

In October 1936 a parsonage was built with Clark M. Smith as pastor. Material was used in this which had been obtained from the wrecking of the Cedar Creek parsonage in the spring of 1936. The bell from the old Hutton Church at Mountain Home was brought to the building site. In 1940 various improvements were added, including a belfry and a new chimney. In 1952, a basement was poured under the parsonage with members of the congregation working well into the moonlight. In 1966 the parsonage burned to the ground and a fellowship room was then added to the church.

In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church united with the Methodist Church to become the United Methodist Church.

In 1983 the Reardon Church loaned money to buy a mobile home parsonage. (They later forgave 2/3 of the debt.) By 1986 a well had been drilled and sidewalks were laid. Audubon Park Church in Spokane helped pay off part of the



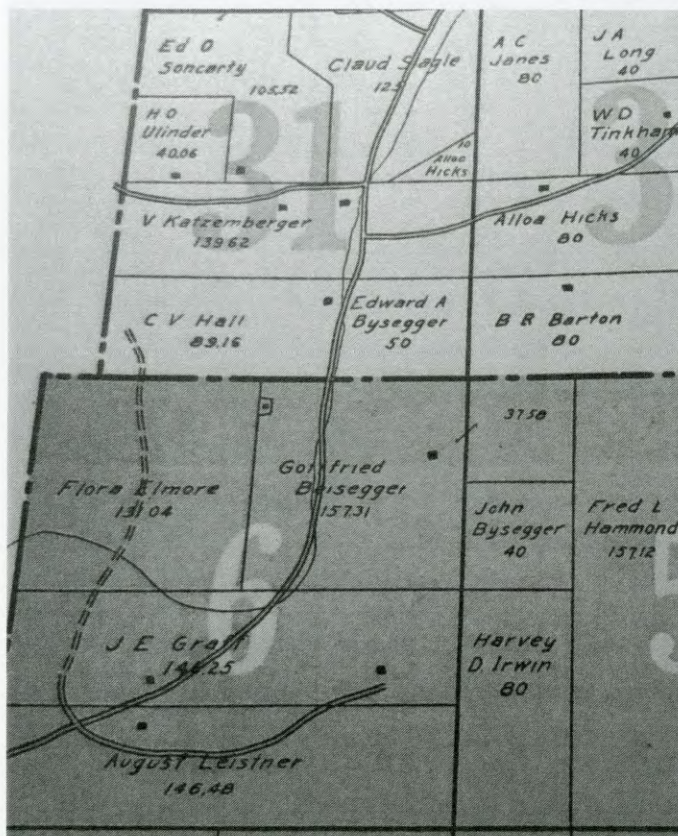
loan on the well. A roof and carport were added to the parsonage in 1989. In the summer of 1992 volunteers from the Coeur d'Alene United Methodist congregation did all of the work necessary to give the church two coats of paint.

The bell tower was re-roofed in the late 1990s. In early 2000, improvements were made to the foundation of the building, the kitchen was remodeled, the electrical wiring was upgraded, new carpets were laid, and the sanctuary floor refinished. A new roof was put on.

Highway 95 was widened in 2005-06 which made expansion of the parking lot necessary. (This was accomplished through long-term lease of additional land from Gary and Carolyn Strong.) At the same time, fencing and landscaping were done. In 2009 Bryan Amos, working to become an Eagle Scout, built a gazebo behind the church. In 2011 folding doors were installed between the sanctuary and the fellowship hall to help accommodate overflow crowds, new windows were installed in the church, and the patio door at the parsonage was replaced. In 2013 the parking lot railings, the lower level of the church siding and the church sign were repainted.

In 1986 Kathy Williams Kramer became the lay pastor at Elmore. She continues to serve with distinction and is called on as a leader through the entire North Latah county area officiating at baptisms, weddings, funerals, and comforting us all. Today Elmore is renowned for its music and community spirit, bringing folks together for Easter sunrise service and Christmas programs.

While there were never commercial enterprises located at Elmore, the church has flourished through good and challenging times remaining an important community gathering place. So it is appropriate to consecrate this hallowed ground on the anniversary of its 100th year.



The plat map from 1937 shows the ownership of lands surrounding the Elmore School and Church. The School was located on the Bysegger land and the Church was located in two locations on the land owned by Katzenberger. The logs for the first church were cut by the Parnell mill located on Claude Slagle's place and taken through the fields to the Katzenberger location. The church moved across the creek in 1936 onto land donated by Katzenberger.

Photo credits: Early Church and Parsonage: Keith Katzenberger and Janice Palmer. Church and hall 1987: Cleora Strong. Compiled by Gary E. Strong from information provided by Phyllis Strong, Janice Palmer, and Gary E. Strong. Printed at Stronghold Press.

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