

# Red Oak Grove Reporter

Issue No. 26

Red Oak Grove Church and Cemetery

April 2020

*CELEBRATING 100 YEARS*

## Construction on New Church Started in Summer of 1920

**A** century ago this summer construction began on the present Red Oak Grove Church building. It was Presbyterian and the Rev. C. E. Thompson was minister at the time. On the building committee were J. M. Bowser, chairman; Allan R. Laing; Howard J. Safley; and Albert J. Yule.

The new church was built just south of its 1859 predecessor. Groundbreaking was probably in early July 1920, based on this report from the July 29, 1920, *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*:

“Work on the new Presbyterian church in the Red Oak Grove settlement is progressing nicely... The foundation has been laid.”

After about eight and a half months, the new church was ready for dedication March 13, 1921, however Iowa’s unpredictable weather postponed the event to April 17. But the weather then was even worse — “Middle West Swept by Terrific Storm” was one headline.



*100 Years: 1920-2020*

Finally on May 8, 1921, the weather cooperated and the new church was dedicated, with services at 10:45 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and 7:30 p.m. More people attended than the 30-by-70-foot church would hold.

The cost was originally estimated at \$20,000, but the final amount was \$28,000. Membership was about 67.

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**THE 14th ANNUAL Red Oak Grove Reunion has been canceled this May because of the Covid-19 pandemic.**



**THE 129th ANNUAL meeting of the Cemetery Association is postponed. A new date will be announced later**

## ***New Church continued from cover...***

In the early 1930s, the church nearly closed. Rev. Louis Penningroth, a Red Oak Grove native, came to its rescue. On October 12, 1941, the centennial of the congregation was celebrated.

In 1959, membership was about 100, according to an article by Mildred Yule Phelps. The congregation's 125th anniversary was marked June 12, 1966. The Rev. Ralph Schenl was pastor then.

By the late 1990s, membership had dwindled. The

final regular Sunday service took place December 17, 2006. The Rev. Carol Lamp was the last minister. There were 16 members, some inactive.

On May 20, 2007, responsibility for the Red Oak Grove Church was formally assumed by the Red Oak Grove Cemetery Association. That was also the date of the first Red Oak Grove Reunion. Under the able presidency of Bob Rickard, a new kind of life has been breathed into the century-old church.

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## ***CELEBRATING 100 YEARS***

### **New church designed by Cedar Rapids architects**

The architects who designed Red Oak Grove Church were Herbert "Bert" Rugh and Charles Benjamin Zalesky, natives of Cedar Rapids. They were partners for only two years, 1920 to 1922.

Besides Red Oak Grove Church, two Cedar Rapids junior high schools, Roosevelt and McKinley, were designed by Rugh and Zalesky. Rugh and another architect designed Franklin Junior High.

Rugh, born in 1879, was a veteran of the Spanish American War and World War I. He died in a July 1924 auto accident.

Zalesky, born in 1889, practiced in Cedar Rapids until 1960, then moved to Sanford, Florida. He died in December 1980 in Virginia.

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## ***CELEBRATING 100 YEARS***

### **Rev. C. E. Thompson was young, energetic**

The minister who oversaw the fundraising and building of the present Red Oak Grove Church served from early March 1918 through late January 1923. His name was Chesteen Elbert Thompson, but he went by the initial C. E.

Born in 1885 in Indiana, he moved to Four-Mile Township, Polk County, Iowa, as a child or teenager. On Nov. 29, 1906 he married Elizabeth Moses, and they had four children.

About 33 when he came to Red Oak Grove, Rev. Thompson also organized congregations at New Olivet and Coon Creek churches in Linn Township,



*E. C. Thompson,  
resident pastor*

and the Buchanan village church, Cass Township.

The 1930 census found Rev. Thompson in LeClaire, Scott County. By 1940, he was in Clinton. His 1942 draft registration form listed him as 5 foot 11, with blue eyes, brown hair, and ruddy complexion, weighing 200 pounds.

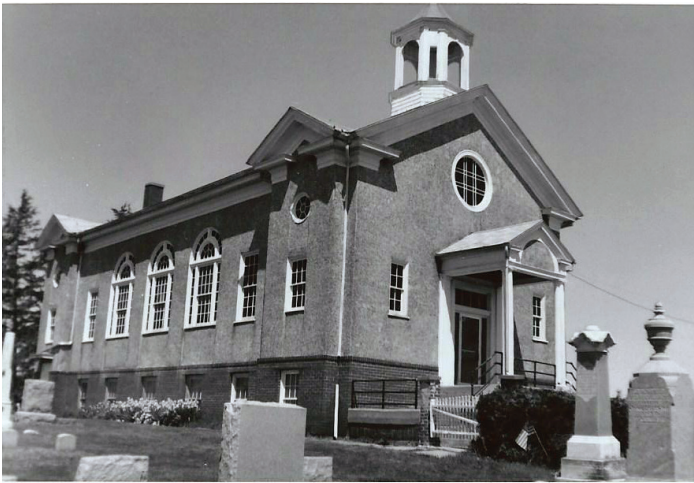
The Rev. C. E. Thompson died in 1974. He is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery, Clinton.



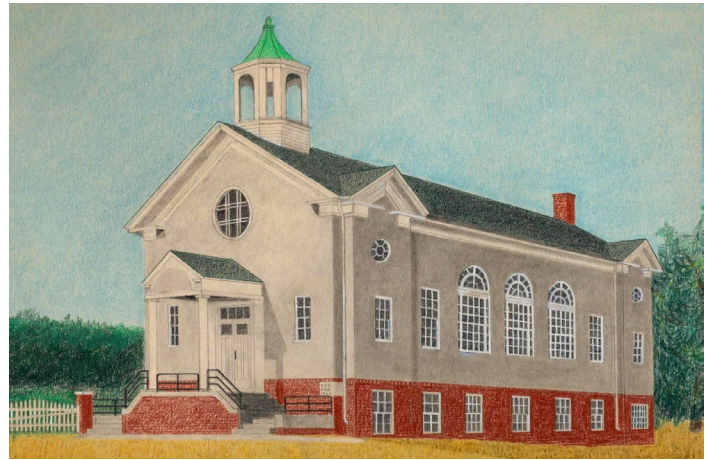
*Old Church replaced 1920*



*Red Oak Church 1941*



*Red Oak Church Spring 1966*



*Painting by Charles A. Sisler 1970*

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## Historic stained glass window given to Cemetery Association

A stained glass window, 38 by 24 inches was given to the Red Oak Grove Cemetery Association in March 2020 by the Cedar County Historical Society Museum. The museum did not know the age or origin, but it's believed to be from the first Red Oak Grove Presbyterian Church (1859-1921).

The window commemorates James Safley, brother of John Safley. John was one of the ten founders of the church on March 1941.

Born in Scotland, James came to the U. S. in April 1835 and lived in Indiana, New York state, and Linn County, Iowa, before moving to Red Oak Grove in 1843. He married three times and fathered 16 children.

At 67, James Safley died of pneumonia Jan. 9, 1880. He is buried in Red Oak Grove Cemetery with his wives, Janet, Sally Eliza, and Margaret.



# Tree Project 2019

The tree project was started in 2016 with completion in 2019 with thirty-two trees planted by Hughes Nursery & Landscaping of Cedar Rapids. Trees planted were twelve shade trees (4 Blaze Maples, 2 Princeton Elm, 1 Northern Hackberry, 4 Red Oak, 1 State Street Maple) and twenty crabapple trees. The planted trees outline Valley Drive recently completed that gives the Red Oak Grove Cemetery a serene look of a peaceful place of quiet solitude.

The tree project was made available to friends of Red Oak Grove Cemetery by donating a tree in honor of or memory of a special loved one. To date sixteen trees have been donated.

## Project 2020 — Kitchen Restoration

Mike Herring and Daisy Wingert will direct the Kitchen Restoration project for 2020. The project will consist of a new floor, counter/sink with electrical water heater, plumbing and electrical work. The restoration will be kept to the vintage look as well as possible.

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## In Memoriam:

### Recent interment at Red Oak Grove Cemetery

**James David Tripp**, 71, of Tipton died Feb. 4, 2020, at Cedar Manor Nursing Home. Funeral Feb. 8, 2020, Trinity Lutheran Church, Tipton. Survivors include his wife of 23 years, Beverly Belitz Tripp; six children: Shawna Wiebel, Ron Humphrey, Stacy Chapman, Ryan Humphrey, Rachel Salamo, and Aaron Tripp, and thirteen grandchildren. He was predeceased by his first wife, Elaine Winter Tripp.

*The Red Oak Grove Cemetery Association, Inc., is a 501 (c) (13) organization, and all donations are tax-deductible.*

For information about church rental, purchase of plots, or other matters pertaining to the church or cemetery, contact Bob Rickard, Red Oak Grove Cemetery Association president:

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