

Centennial July 11

By Lucie Mollison

WORTHINGTON — On July 11 the First Congregational Church of Worthington will celebrate its bicentennial.

The town of Worthington was incorporated in 1768 but the church was not organized until 1771. The present church building is the fourth to be erected in town. The first church, built near the corner of Sam Hill Rd. and West St., which in earliest days was the center of population, was a primitive building, never completely finished.

Near it was the first cemetery. There were 30 original members of this church. Nearby, on West St., the first pastor, the Rev. Jonathon Huntington, built his home. This is still standing and has been restored by the present owner, Mrs. Jerilee Bunce.

The early meetinghouse was used for about 20 years until the growth of membership and the change of the town's center of population called for a change. At that time, this church was torn down and the material incorporated in a new church in the rear of the village store near the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Q. Smith.

The church increased rapidly. The population of the town was between 1,100 and 1,200 people and in those days the majority of the inhabitants were church going. The meetinghouse was the center of religious, civic and social life.

New Meetinghouse

Early in 1818 plans for a new meetinghouse were started, but because of dissension as to the part of town in which it should be built, it was seven years before the question was settled. The argument between the north and south parts of town was bitter and it finally became clear that outside help would have to be called in to settle the argument.

Three committees worked on the problem before it was



THE PARSONAGE presently in use is this large house located on Huntington Rd.

finally settled. Elaborate calculations were made as to the exact center of town in regard to population, territory, value, and mileage, and the committee recommended that the new meetinghouse be built on the spot where the present church stands.

In 1825 construction was started on a colonial style church. This church was built with a high steeple that was a landmark for miles around, heated by two box stoves with pipes running along the sides to a single chimney at the back. The building was used until April 2, 1887 when it was destroyed by fire. Only the large Bible and a hymn book were saved. Parts of the bell were salvaged from the ruins and sold to help raise money for a new church. Fortunately the church had \$7,000 insurance which was a help in rebuilding.

The present church was dedicated in 1888 under the leadership of the Rev. Frederick Sargent Huntington, pastor. The new church was a copy of an English church, which caused some dismay as many preferred the old colonial style. The new church features rose windows in the gable ends of the sanctuary and memorial windows along the sides.

Addition Built

In 1960 a two-story, four-room addition was built at the back of the building. In 1961 the church, known as the First Congregational Church of Worthington, united with the United Church of Christ. At the present time there are 182 members with a town population of 768 year-round residents. The Rev. Jerome H. Wood is now pastor, but will leave this summer to enter the teaching field.

Many years ago the Women's Benevolent Society of the church was organized. This group had as its objectives the building of the present parsonage and its upkeep. This the women did entirely until a few years ago when they deeded the parsonage to the church. They still work toward its upkeep.

Other church organizations are the Friendship Guild and an active Youth Group.

On July 11 the church will formally observe its bicentennial. There will be a morning service with Dr. Warren Wright, a summer resident of Chesterfield and widely-known orator, as guest speaker. Those attending have been urged to take a picnic lunch and eat on the lawn afterwards.

The afternoon program will consist of a "Conversation" or dramatic dialogue by several of the church people, giving a look at the folks of former days as they lived 200 years ago.

Dr. Warren Wright, guest speaker for the morning service, is a member of the speech department at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y. He has been a professional speaker and lay preacher for 20 years. He was interim pastor for the two Cummington churches for a year and has preached in various churches in New York State.