

**History of the Baptist Ministers Aid Society of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan,
Illinois and Wisconsin / compiled by Joseph W. Priest.**

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History of Baptist Ministers Aid Society

1885-1942

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HISTORY
OF THE
BAPTIST MINISTERS AID
SOCIETY

OF

OHIO, INDIANA, MICHIGAN
ILLINOIS AND WISCONSIN

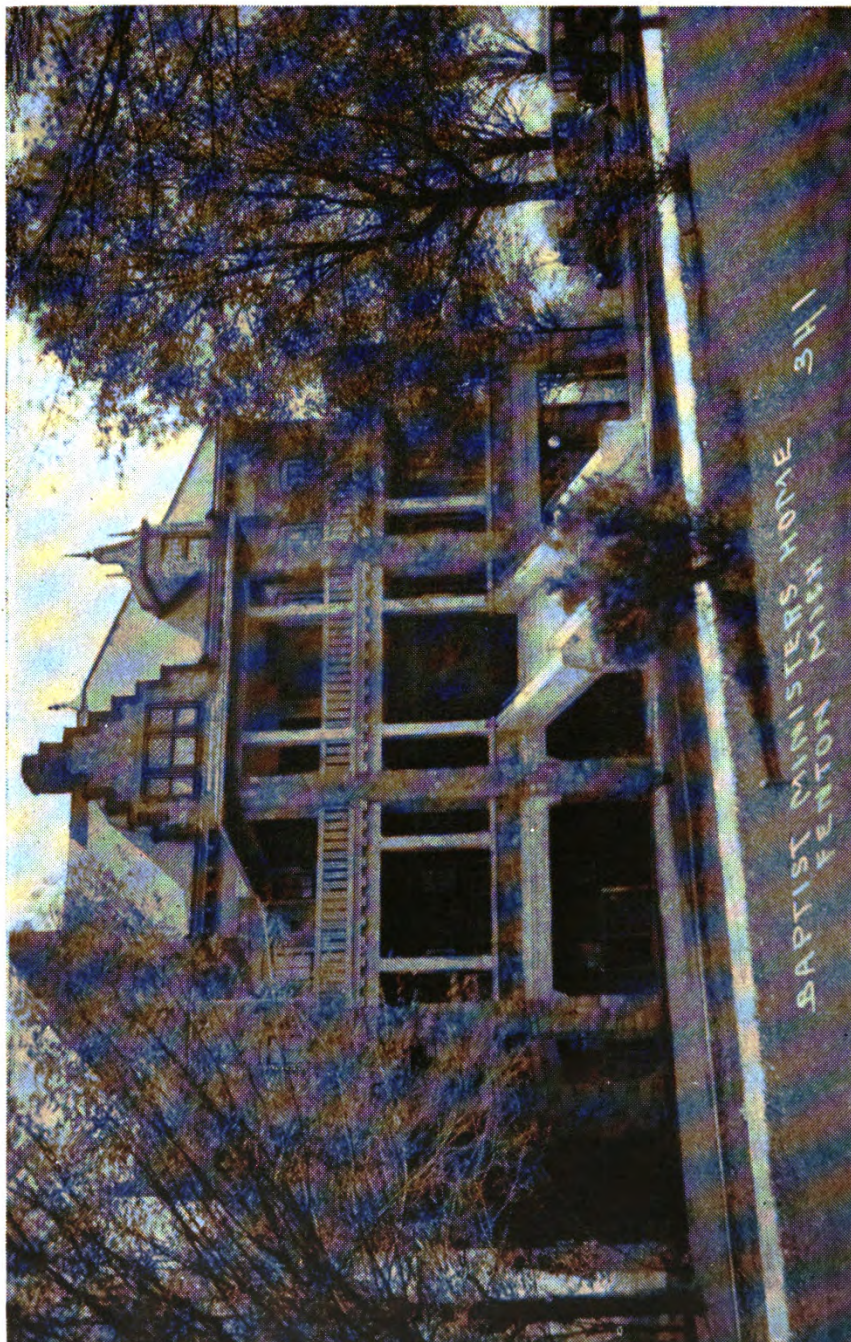


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Compiled by

JOSEPH W. PRIEST

Secretary of the Society
1909-1930 and 1934-1942



The Fenton Home

AGED MINISTERS; THE BEGINNING OF THE SOCIETY

In 1884 the Baptist Ministers' Home Society of New York was organized for the purpose of aiding aged and needy Baptist ministers, their wives and widows. The field of this Society covered three states. Probably the Baptists of the Middle West were stirred to action by the Eastern Movement. A circular was issued from Logansport, Ind., June 11, 1885, during the pastorate there of H. L. Stetson, LL.D., signed by influential Baptists in five states, proposing a conference in that city July 3, 1885, to consider the desirability of organizing a corporation similar to the Baptist Home Society of New York. The need was thus expressed: The necessity of making better provision for disabled and worthy Baptist ministers and missionaries who have lost their health or grown old in the service of Christ, and are in needy circumstances, and also for their dependent widows and infant orphans, has often been discussed in our religious papers and public gatherings; the prevailing idea seems to be that a home, where they may be taken and properly cared for, is the best way to help them.

There was a small attendance at the Logansport meeting, but they adopted a certificate of incorporation of the "Baptist Ministers' Aid Society" in five Articles under the laws of the State of Indiana, and appointed a committee to obtain names of incorporators. The organization of the Society was completed at a meeting held in Chicago, Sept. 17, 1885, at which time a constitution was adopted and officers were elected. H. L. Stetson was made president, D. A. Waterman of Detroit, vice-president, Alexander Blackburn of Lafayette, secretary, and Milton Shirk of Peru, treasurer.

Rev. E. L. Schofield, D.D., was engaged as financial secretary and served until the beginning of 1888, having an important part in the establishment of the first Baptist Ministers' Home in the western states. Dr. Schofield, in broken health, later entered the Home with his wife, and though a great sufferer in the body, made the Home brighter by his radiant graces of spirit.

THE SOCIETY FINDS A HOME IN FENTON, MICH.

A committee with Dr. W. H. Doane as chairman, was appointed to seek a desirable property in which to establish a Home. They were given power to act. Several sites were considered. The trustees of the Baptist Seminary at Fenton, Mich., offered their buildings and grounds, which originally had cost \$43,000 as a free gift to the Society, and the generous offer was gladly accepted. About \$7,000 was expended upon repairs, improvements and furnishings. On Oct. 2, 1888, the Baptist Ministers' Home was formally opened with appropriate exercises. The veteran minister, Rev. J. L. Smith of Dexter, Mich., was the first to be received as a resident, and soon others with their wives came to make a congenial family.

The location of the Home at Fenton, Mich., made it advisable to reincorporate under the laws of Michigan. This was effected Jan. 28, 1887, the period of incorporation being thirty years from that date under the name of the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society, with principal office in the village of Fenton, County of Genesee. (The charter was renewed for thirty years Jan. 28, 1917.) The necessary changes were made in the Articles of Association, and the Society became an established agency of beneficence in the denomination.

THE INCORPORATORS OF THE SOCIETY

The first of the Articles of Association, as then adopted read as follows: Be it known by these Presents, That we, P. S. Henson and Edward Goodman of Chicago, Ill., H. L.

Stetson of Logansport, Ind., A. Blackburn of Peru, Ind., F. A. Marsh of Beloit, Wis., T. W. Goodspeed of Morgan Park, Ill., D. A. Waterman, Detroit, Mich., W. H. Doane, Cincinnati, Ohio, H. F. Colby, Dayton, Ohio, A. S. Hobart, Toledo, Ohio, Albert Henderson, Lafayette, Ind., S. A. Northrop, Fort Wayne, Ind., J. A. Smith, Chicago, Ill., O. S. Lyford, Chicago, Ill., C. R. Henderson, John Matthews, R. E. Manning, A. C. Bacon and J. E. Howard of Detroit, Mich., A. E. Mather, Battle Creek, Mich., H. B. Latourette and C. W. Barber of Fenton, Mich., George W. Gay, Grand Rapids, Mich., C. E. Harris, Port Huron, Mich., L. D. Temple, Flint, Mich., H. R. Bond, Milwaukee, Wis., Samuel Haskell, Ann Arbor, Mich., W. T. Lewis, Racine, Wis., and B. F. Cavins, Peru, Ind., do voluntarily associate ourselves together under and by virtue of the provisions of an Act of the Legislature of the State of Michigan entitled, "An Act for the Incorporation of Charitable Societies, and being chapter 165 of Howell's Annotated Statutes of the State of Michigan."

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE SOCIETY

In January, 1888, Rev. A. E. Mather, D.D., of Battle Creek, became financial secretary of the Society, serving also as superintendent of the Home; he rendered splendid service for eleven years until his death. The place which the Society holds in the hearts of our people is due not only to its own merit, the filial care of our fathers in the faith, but also to the abounding confidence in the representatives of the Society who have successively been its financial secretaries. In March, 1899, Rev. J. S. Boyden became field secretary, and upon the death of Dr. Mather he was elected to succeed him as financial secretary. Mr. Boyden was well known and loved throughout the five states and served the Society well for seventeen years from 1899 to 1916, when the new relationship with the M. & M. Board made that office unnecessary.

Various methods have been used to acquaint the churches of our territory with the work of the Society and to secure their interest and support. For the greater part of thirty

years this work was under the direction of a financial secretary. The need of more publicity prompted the appointment of two assistant financial secretaries in 1902, but after one year's trial this experiment was abandoned. In 1914 and 1915 an assistant financial secretary, Rev. George Waid, was employed but negotiations with the M. & M. Board whereby it was agreed that that organization was to collect funds for ministers aid, did away with the necessity for an assistant, and very soon thereafter the office of financial secretary also was discontinued.

As the work grew and became known, gifts and legacies increased in number. The first large gift was from John M. Love of Chicago, who gave \$10,000 for a Memorial Fund. There were many other smaller but still generous gifts, so that in April, 1905, the treasurer reported an endowment of nearly \$23,000. Many churches made annual contributions; many rural churches adopted the practice of giving one communion offering per year for the work of the Society. This practice the M. & M. Board has in recent years urged all the churches to establish for the purpose of aiding specially needy brethren and the plan has been widely adopted.

After the organization of the Northern Baptist Convention, and the subsequent institution of the United Missionary Budget, in each of our five states a certain percentage of the missionary offerings—in Michigan 3%—was allotted to the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society, though many churches continued to send communion offerings. There were other large gifts for the endowment and some undesignated legacies as the years went by: E. J. Barney of Dayton, Ohio, \$11,265.00; Jesse A. Baldwin of Chicago, \$14,731.10; Judson A. Roundy of Wisconsin, \$4,765.00. There were many smaller legacies and there were also several annuities. President F. P. Beaver took one out for \$10,000, and a few of the ministers and ministers' widows who came into the Home brought considerable sums into the Society Treasury, so that by 1938 Memorial Endowment Funds and Undesignated Legacies amounted to \$141,000.00.

GRANTS TO OUTSIDE BENEFICIARIES

The traditions of the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society cluster around the Ministers' Home at Fenton, but for thirty years the Society had a larger work, and ministered to even more people outside the Home. Most ministers with their wives and also ministers' widows who needed help preferred to stay in their own homes and receive financial aid even though the grants were not very large. It was the business of the financial secretary not only to collect funds but to keep in touch as closely as possible with those to whom the Society ministered. Financial aid was given to needy ministers in 1885, as soon as the Society was organized, and was continued until the year 1916 when that responsibility was transferred to the M. & M. Board. The registrar's report of 1914 shows that grants ranging from six dollars to fifteen dollars per month were made during that year to forty persons who had thirty-six dependents, and there were fifteen persons in the Home Family. These figures are for one year only, but for thirty years this two-fold ministry in the Fenton Home, and in the homes of many sick and aged ministers throughout the five states, was carried on.

LIFE IN THE BAPTIST MINISTERS' HOME

At the time this is written there are still many people who have precious memories of the Baptist Ministers' Home in Fenton. Opened in 1888, it grew in favor with the people. In February of 1899 the Home suffered a disastrous fire. All the members of the Family were removed to places of safety, and almost all the furniture was saved. The stone walls were found to be in perfect condition and the Home was rebuilt with many improvements. In 1920 the wooden porch in front of the building had deteriorated and it was removed, and a handsome cement porch was built at a cost of \$4,275.00. The spacious porches on three floors were a great delight to the Family, especially during the summer months.

Fenton is a delightful Michigan village, sixteen miles



Auntie St. Claire

south of the great industrial city of Flint. The Home was located on a hill at the south edge of the village and was surrounded by a farm of twenty acres. It is a beautiful property with fine trees and well cultivated fields. A resident farmer also served as janitor of the building. There were two fine orchards with many apple and pear and plum trees and many varieties of small fruits so that the members of the Family could have all the fruit they desired, and a good vegetable garden was always maintained. The Home had its own cows, and milk and cream in abundance. A large flock of chickens was kept up, made famous at one period because of the dear lady, a minister's widow, called Auntie St. Claire, who made them her special care. In early days the Home had its horses and a carryall to convey the Family to church. During the last sixteen years of Home life there were automobiles not only to take the Family to church, but also to take the members of the Family on delightful rides in that beautiful country side.

The average number cared for annually in the Fenton Home was fifteen, one year there were twenty-one including three young children of a deceased minister; one hundred and five persons have been members of the Home Family in the forty-five years, from 1888 to 1933. Some of us still remain who knew most of the people who shared the privileges of the Fenton Ministers' Home. They came from all our five states, the smallest number from Wisconsin. Many of them had given consecrated service to small churches and had received small salaries; some had larger churches but suffered from illness or other misfortune; and there were some who had means but who chose to put their money into the treasury of the Society in order that they might have the care and the fellowship of a friendly Home. There were many beautiful characters among them and it was a rich and rewarding experience for those who came to know the Home Family, and for the trustees as they met once a year, to mingle with these men and women, and know that all of them had been faithful and useful servants of the Church

of Jesus, and were abundantly worthy of the care they received in the Home during their last days. In that Home prayer was wont to be made and the interests of the Kingdom of God were dear to the hearts of these disciples of Jesus. The members of the Family were interested in the local church and brought inspiration and fellowship and strength to the pastor and the members of his congregation.

THE CHURCHES AND THE HOME

The Baptist churches of the five states were kind to the members of the Home Family; there were certain churches indeed, and Woodward Ave. Baptist Church, Detroit, Mich., and the First Baptist Church, Dayton, Ohio, ought to be named, which sent most generous gifts of money and other presents at Christmas time, gladdening the hearts of the members of the Family and making of that holiday a very happy time for these good people. A Michigan lady who wished to be anonymous sent a Tea Service to the Home, and was thereafter known as "The Lady of the Teacups". One Christmas she sent lovely blankets for all the beds, and for several years before the Family was moved from Fenton she sent to every member of the Home Family a new five-dollar bill neatly wrapped in a pretty little Christmas box.

But while mention is made of this good friend and of two large wealthy and generous churches, it should not be forgotten that through the years, large and small churches from all the five states were sending gifts, clothing, quilts, fruit and household supplies of all sorts. The Baptist Ministers' Home became enshrined in the affection of Baptists of this territory who were informed about its work, and so was often and generously remembered by Baptist churches and Baptist individuals in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan.

GOD'S ACRE IN FENTON

In May, 1912, in the Fenton Cemetery and on the large lot belonging to the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society, a splen-



The Annual Meeting, May 2, 1928

did monument was dedicated with impressive services. It has this inscription:

A MEMORIAL TO THE FAITHFUL MEN AND WOMEN
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES TO THE MINISTRY
OF JESUS CHRIST

ERECTED BY
THE BAPTISTS

OF

OHIO, INDIANA, ILLINOIS, WISCONSIN AND MICHIGAN

"They rest from their labors and their works do follow them."

Forty-two of the ministers, ministers' wives and widows who were residents of the Home are buried here, and a headstone bearing the name and dates of birth and death is on each grave. Other members of the Home Family having so requested, were buried in the places from which they came.

THE BAPTIST MINISTERS' AID SOCIETY AND THE M. & M. BOARD

The Baptist Home Society of New York and the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society of the Middle West were the pioneers in caring for aged and needy Baptist ministers, but they were limited, one to three states and the other to five states.

In 1911 the Ministers' and Missionaries' Benefit Board was organized, having the territory of the Northern Baptist Convention as its field. Desiring to seek funds for endowment in the territory of the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society, the Board entered into a working agreement with the Society in 1912, an agreement continued each year until 1916 when a new agreement was made, whereby it was arranged that the M. & M. Board should receive the offerings of the churches in these five states for Ministerial Aid, the Board agreeing in return to care for all our outside beneficiaries, and also to make up whatever deficit there should be in the funds for the maintenance of the Home. As a result of this agreement, from 1916 on it has been the responsibility of

the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society to conserve its invested capital and to carry on the work of the Baptist Ministers' Home.

BAPTIST OLD PEOPLES' HOME, MAYWOOD, ILL.

When the Baptist Old Peoples' Home at Maywood, Ill., completed its new and modern and fireproof building in 1931, there began discussions among the trustees of the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society regarding the advisability of caring for our Family in that modern Home, and in June, 1933, they voted to enter into agreement with the trustees of the Maywood Home to that end. On September 20, 1933, twelve members of the Family were transferred to the Maywood Home, and one was transferred to the Baptist Old Peoples' Home at Fairport, N. Y. The members of the Family were greatly attached to the Fenton Home and Fenton associations, and they had pleasant memories of the old Home, but the new Home was well equipped, groups from Chicago churches did much to make life pleasant for Maywood Home residents, and those in charge of the Home did all in their power to make life pleasant for the new members of their Family.

THE OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

The Society has been blessed with excellent leaders. The first president was Dr. H. L. Stetson, followed by Dr. S. A. Northrop, Edward Goodman, Dr. H. F. Colby, Dr. W. H. Doane for one year; Dr. Colby for a second term, followed by O. S. Lyford. In 1898 Dr. W. H. Doane, the gifted musician, whose melodies the church still sings, was for a second time elected president and gave notable and enthusiastic service in that office until his death in 1916. In that year a consecrated layman, F. P. Beaver of Dayton, Ohio, became president and served till 1932. As he refused reelection in that year Robert Ernst of Detroit, who had been for several years the hard-working chairman of the Local Committee, and who was

deeply interested in the work of the Society, was elected president and served till 1935, when Rev. W. T. Roberts of Alma, Mich., was elected president, and held that office till the Society disbanded.

In early years Mr. Shirk and J. E. Howard were treasurers of the Society, then in 1898 H. B. Latourette of Fenton, became treasurer and held that office till his death in 1906. Mr. Latourette was one of the trustees of the Fenton Seminary who deeded the property to the Society and his services were invaluable to the new and growing organization. He bequeathed a legacy of \$1,000 to the Society. Mr. Howard was again treasurer for two years and in 1908 Bruce Macdonald of Flint, Mich., became treasurer and held the office till 1922. Devout in spirit and a successful business man he did much for the welfare of the Society. Victim of an illness which later proved fatal, he resigned and Grant J. Brown, also of Flint, served from 1922 till 1929. In November, 1929, Sheldon H. Latourette was appointed acting treasurer, by the Executive Committee and in May, 1930, he was elected by the Society as treasurer, serving to the end. Born and brought up in Fenton, his long acquaintance with the Baptist Ministers' Home gave him a deep interest in aged ministers and their wives, but also the long service of his father as trustee and treasurer caused him to regard that office as a sacred legacy. He has managed with great ability the financial affairs of the Society in its closing years.

Rev. C. W. Barber of Fenton, served as secretary for fourteen years; Rev. C. H. Maxson of Marquette, his successor, served for eight years, and wrote a brief history of the Society in 1906, from which the early part of this record is taken. In 1919 Rev. J. W. Priest of Fenton, was elected recording secretary and served twenty-one years, till he became superintendent of the Home, Rev. W. T. Roberts served for four years, until he was elected president, when Mr. Priest again became recording secretary, to hold that office through the closing years of the Society.

Mr. Willis Hough, a Detroit business man, acquainted

with the affairs of the Society in its early years, and deeply interested in its work, was elected auditor in 1908, and served with great devotion for thirty years.

THE TRUSTEES OF THE SOCIETY

It would take too long to name all the trustees who during 50 years have given time and thought and energy to make the Fenton Home a real refuge for faithful ministers and ministers' wives. Mention should be made of some: the late Walter W. Smith of Detroit, who served with whole-hearted devotion for twelve years, till his death; Rev. R. M. Traver of Pontiac, who served for some years as chairman of the Local Committee, then was called to a pastorate in the East, but when he returned to Michigan was quickly reelected as trustee, and Dr. H. C. Gleiss of Detroit, who in the later years of the Society has been of great service. The late Dr. H. N. Spear and S. G. Chard have given many years of worthy service. The Illinois representatives, Dr. G. A. Sheets of Ottawa, now of Michigan, Dr. P. J. Stackhouse of Chicago, and the late E. D. Caulkins, for several years our vice-president, all served for many years and were exceedingly helpful, while Wisconsin representatives such as Dr. A. A. Hobson and Rev. C. C. Browne, who is now in Indiana, have done their share. All of these trustees have given long service, while many others who served shorter terms have been just as willing to help.

SUPERINTENDENTS OF THE HOME

The first superintendent of the Home was Dr. Mather, who served eleven years. He was succeeded by Mr. J. E. Bullock; then came Rev. C. VanDorn, well known as State G.A.R. chaplain and evangelist in Michigan. He was succeeded by Rev. H. A. McConnell, a Michigan pastor, and in 1907 Miss Lou Latourette was chosen superintendent. With great elation, in May, 1907, Dr. Doane introduced to the Society Miss Lou Latourette, a young woman, daughter of H. B.

Latourette, as the new superintendent of the Baptist Ministers' Home. He believed she had the qualities necessary for that important position, and her long service of twenty-two years abundantly fulfilled the high hopes that were then entertained. Miss Latourette, for some years before her father's death, and for several years after she became superintendent was assistant treasurer of the Society, and well acquainted with its affairs. She won the affection of the members of the Family; as the years rolled on she gained new friends for the Home and the Society; and no annual meeting passed without enthusiastic expression by the trustees of their appreciation of her splendid service. In 1917 while she was on leave of absence, Rev. and Mrs. M. H. Pettit had charge of the Home. In 1926 Miss Latourette had another year's leave of absence and Rev. and Mrs. J. W. Priest took charge for that period. In the spring of 1929 Miss Latourette's health was broken and she resigned the office she had held so long and administered so well. In 1929 Rev. J. W. Priest was appointed superintendent and Mr. and Mrs. Priest took charge till Sept. 20, 1933, when the Family was transferred to the Maywood Home.

LAST THINGS

After the Family had been transferred to Maywood the furniture and other effects of the Fenton Home were sold. One condition of the deed of gift by the Fenton Seminary to the Baptist Ministers' Aid Society was that when the property ceased to be used as a Home for aged ministers, their wives and widows, it should be given to the Michigan Baptist State Convention for educational purposes. The executive committee of the Society therefore complied with the terms of the deed and delivered the property to the Michigan Baptist State Convention. The Society held its annual meetings in May of 1934, 1935 and 1936, in Detroit. In 1937, on the first Wednesday in May a few trustees met in Detroit and adjourned to meet the next day in Maywood, Ill.



Miss Lou Latourette, Superintendent of the Home for 22 Years

The annual meeting of Wednesday, May 4, 1938, was held in Maywood, Ill., and important action was taken. Realizing that the time had come when we should look toward the closing of the affairs of the Society, the trustees voted to transfer \$70,000 of the negotiable assets of the Society to the M. & M. Board, the balance of approximately \$71,000 to be turned over to them as rapidly as they were liquidated. The M. & M. Board agreed to assume all the obligations of the Society to beneficiaries and annuitants and other matters. It was also agreed that during the process of liquidation the trustees would not be called together unless it was legally necessary, and the executive committee should meet twice a year and transact the business of the Society.

In 1912 Mr. Priest was appointed Registrar of the Society and through the years continued to carry on the duties of that office. In May, 1934, that office was reaffirmed by the trustees, and it was later established by agreement with the M. & M. Board that Mr. Priest should continue to minister to the people who entered the Maywood Home under the auspices of our Society, as long as they live. From 1934 to 1938 seven persons, ministers, ministers' wives and a minister's widow were recommended for entrance to the Maywood Home, and were also aided in paying their entrance fees. Of the twelve received from Fenton in 1933, only one is living in 1942, Mrs. D. Q. Barry, and in all there are five persons to whom Mr. Priest now ministers by correspondence and occasional visitation.

Fifty persons, trustees and former trustees of the Society, have been invited to a meeting in Maywood, Ill., on May 6, 1942. We expect to have delightful fellowship there, but we plan to disband the Society which was organized 57 years ago. There will be some regret: The Ministers' Home of Fenton is now a memory, though a precious memory for the Home ministered in a beautiful way to many lives. We are bringing to an end the corporate life of the Society but the work to which it was consecrated is continued on a larger scale by the Ministers' and Missionaries' Benefit Board of

the Northern Baptist Convention and the funds of the Society collected through the years have been turned over to that larger work.

OFFICERS—1942

President.....Rev. W. T. Roberts, Alma, Michigan
 Vice-President.....Robert Ernst, Detroit, Michigan
 Treasurer.....S. H. Latourette, Flint, Michigan
 Secretary.....Rev. J. W. Priest, Alma, Michigan
 Auditor.....Ralph Gault, Flint, Michigan

TRUSTEES—1942

Willis HoughFerndale, Michigan
 S. H. LatouretteFlint, Michigan
 George A. ChrittonOak Park, Illinois
 S. T. ChardSouth Bend, Indiana
 Rev. W. T. RobertsAlma, Michigan
 Dr. John W. HoagDetroit, Michigan
 Rev. O. A. CookCumberland, Indiana
 Dr. P. J. StackhouseChicago, Illinois
 Smith G. YoungLansing, Michigan
 Rev. T. B. FrizelleRacine, Wisconsin
 Rev. C. C. BrowneSouth Bend, Indiana
 Robert ErnstDetroit, Michigan
 C. V. CourterCincinnati, Ohio
 Rev. J. W. PriestAlma, Michigan
 Dr. R. M. TraverPontiac, Michigan
 Dr. Geo. A. SheetsSt. Joseph, Michigan
 Dr. S. B. CrandellNewark, Ohio
 Rev. Wm. JacobsMaywood, Illinois
 Ralph GaultFlint, Michigan
 Rev. Robert GordonKenosha, Wisconsin

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