

Ladies Aid Societies in Michigan-by Chris Rieser 2/16/24

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1967: Ronald A. Brunger-*The Ladies Aid Societies in Michigan Methodism*:
Association of Methodist Historical Societies: Lake Junaluska, North Carolina

“The Ladies Aid Society, of course, was strictly a local organization, serving the local church constituency and the community. It was not organized on a district, conference, or national level.”

“Seldom at this early stage (Civil War Period) were the women's church organizations called Ladies Aid Societies.” Many different names were used including "Ladies Benevolent Society", Soldier's Aid Societies, "The Ladies New Church Furnishing Society.", "Ladies' Sewing Society.", "The Methodist Aid Society", "Mite Box Society.”

“Without doubt the Ladies Aid Society was an important organization in Methodism from the time of the Civil War to 1940. In 1927 Elmer Houser said unequivocally in an article in the Michigan Christian Advocate:

“The Ladies Aid Society is the backbone of most of our Churches, and the most indispensable agency in the Church. Many a weak church, in town or country, depends on the Ladies Aid Society to bring up the pastor's salary,current expenses and benevolences, all of which would show serious deficits but for the efforts of these faithful and tireless workers. And when a building project is launched, or a debt-raising, in the average church the 'Ladies Aid' is expected to, and does, make the biggest subscription. And always pays it.”

Some of the items that the Ladies Aid Societies helped fund were: unpaid board bill of the pastor, raising funds for church upkeep, repairs, and building a new church.

Fundraising activities might include: oyster dinners, lectures, musical entertainment, box socials, pie auctions, annual fairs, bazaars and quilts. Frequently events were held in homes as many churches lacked basements or kitchens.

“A one-room Methodist church was built at New Boston in Wayne County in 1868. A Ladies Aid Society was flourishing in the church in the 1870's. Helen Craft recalled:

“They would meet once a month at the home of a member and serve dinner and the men would come to eat at noon. In summer we had ice cream or strawberry socials and in winter there would be oyster suppers and chicken pie suppers, served in a hall, and everyone would come regardless of religion.” (1)