

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

By Photographer Fred Powers
And Historian Arch Merrill

Williamson First Baptist



CAREFULLY selected cobblestones 24 inches thick went into the walls of the picturesque First Baptist Church which has graced Williamson's Main Street since 1846.

The frame entrance-way, which was built later, bears the date of the society's founding, 1821. An offshoot of the Sodus Baptist Church, it began with 39 members. Strict discipline was enforced in the early years.

The first meeting house, built in 1827, burned in



Rev. L.
van Heerden

1843 and in three years was replaced by the present cobblestone structure.

At that time the slavery issue was the subject of intense debate.

During the past 30 years the church has largely been served by students of Colgate Rochester Divinity School. One of them, the Rev. Richard Brown (1950-53) now is minister of Rochester's Immanuel Baptist Church.

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IN SEPTEMBER, 1961, the Rev. Lawrence van Heerden came to Williamson as a full-time pastor after a three-year tenure with the First Baptist Church of Virginia, Minn.

The Rev. van Heerden

was born and raised in the Union of South Africa. He came to the United States in 1950 to study for the ministry.

A graduate of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and of Bethel College and Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., he presently is working for his master's degree at Colgate Rochester while carrying on his pastoral duties at Williamson.

Of the society's 145 members, Mrs. Frank Cunningham, who joined the church in 1904, has been on its rolls the longest. Senior members in point of age are Mrs. Kate DeBack, Mrs. Sue DeCracker and Mrs. Edith Fields.

The Church has three

women's societies, two youth groups, a senior and a junior choir and a Sunday School with 125 members.

The church school has so outgrown its facilities that three classes have to meet in the adjacent parsonage, built in 1900.

Plans are ready and \$26,000 already has been pledged for a new eight-class-room church school in the rear of the sanctuary. One and one half acres have been purchased for parking facilities.

Williamson's distinctive First Baptist Church, built by cobblestone artisans 108 years ago, is a substantial house of worship in a substantial community in the heart of the Wayne County fruit belt.