

Center Bethel Church marks 150th anniversary

By Roxanne Smith
 Courier Staff Writer

ALVERTON — Its walls stand solid and sturdy like the members of the congregation.

It's a place of worship in Alverton which has seen 150 years of life. And with faith, will continue to stand firm on its ground in the Westmoreland County village.

Center Bethel Church of God at Alverton is celebrating its 150th anniversary. The celebration is concluding this week with special services.

But the Alverton located church has a history — one which will continue to grow.

Center Bethel Church of God was organized in the fall of 1839.

According to history compiled by the Rev. J. Arnold Berg, who served as pastor in the 1950s, that in 1825, John Winebrenner, a pastor with the German Reform Church at Harrisburg, had doctrinal differences of opinion. He came to his church one Sunday and found the doors were locked.

Rev. Berg's history said Winebrenner led a group of followers down the banks of the Susquehanna River. This was the beginning of the denomination — Church of God.

Winebrenner had tried to search for a name for the church. Rev. Berg's history says he turned to the Bible for help. Here, he discovered there were no names given to the churches but they were referred to as the Church of God in various places where churches had been established.

Winebrenner chose to follow the Biblical pattern, says Rev. Berg in his history. The church

was organized as a church without a name.

Rev. Berg's history says members of the first church set out to establish other churches and by the year 1839 they had crossed the state and set up preaching points. These men were called "circuit riders" and continued to hold services as often as possible, making rounds, getting back to each of the points they had established.

Three points were established in this area, he says. They included the vicinity of Hawkeye, Old Bethany, and Alverton, which was then known as Stonersville.

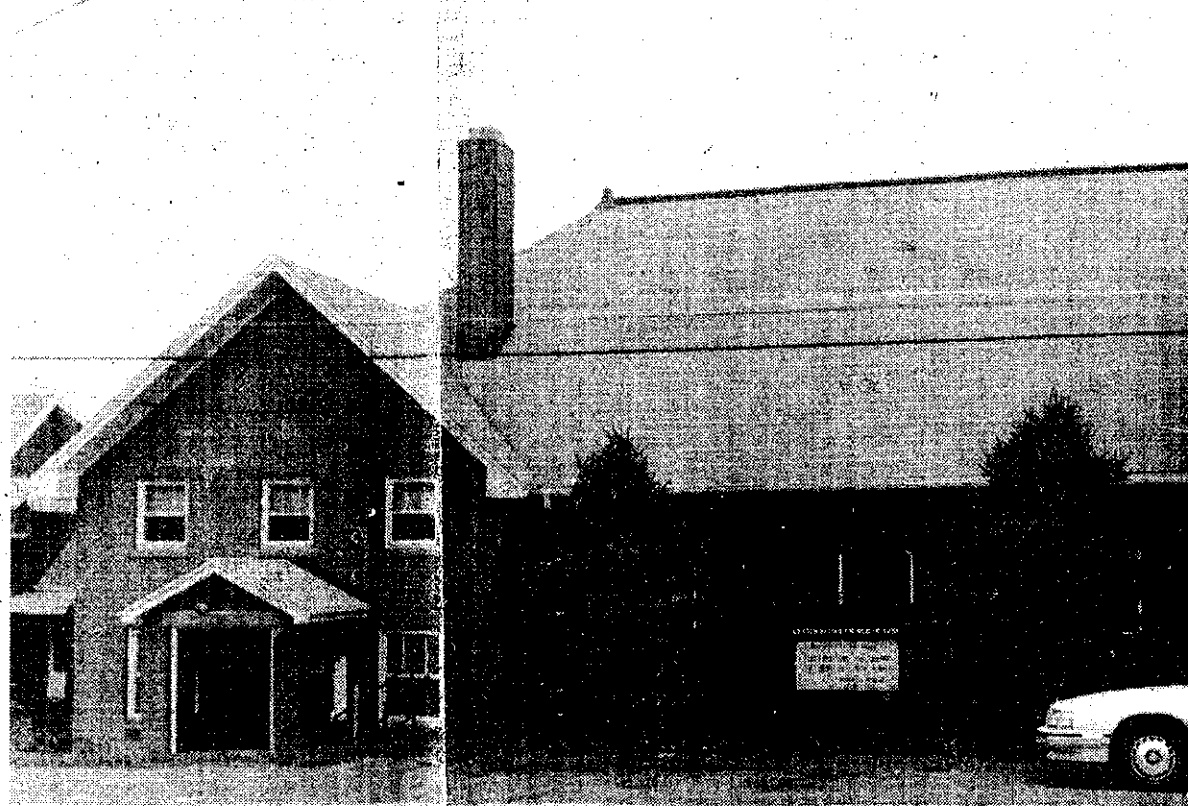
Alverton was the center of the three.

Berg said name of the Alverton located church was derived from Old Testament scriptures. According to history, Jacob worshipped at a spot which he called "Bethel," which means "Beth" for house and "El" for God. Name was established as the center house of God of the Churches of God.

Rev. Berg's history said the first building at this centermost point is where the present "bethel" now stands. There has been extensive remodelings. However, the section of building currently used as the prayer meeting room was the first church building.

The Mennonite Meeting House in Stonersville was where Winebrenner preached several years before the Church of God organized in the community.

In 1939, Jacob Keller and John Hickernell began preaching in the meeting house and



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WEEKEND FEATURES

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Hickernell, who was a mis-
sionary from East Pennsylvania
Eldership, organized a church in
Old Bethany.

History says soon the meeting
place in Old Bethany was lost
due to a flaw in the title. These
members joined at Stonersville,
where membership was steadily
increasing.

In the spring of 1863, it was
determined a need to build a new

and larger facility. The building
was dedicated on Dec. 27, 1864
and was called Center Bethel
Church of God.

Additions to the church began
in 1881, when it was decided to
modernize and enlarge by an ad-
dition of a cross section in the
rear. A section was added at a
cost of \$2,319. Later, during the
pastorate of William Harris
Guyer (1906-12), an upstairs

tinues to grow. The church has celebrated throughout the month of
October. Celebration will conclude Sunday with special services.
(Courier Photo by Roxanne Smith)

floor was added to the rear sec-
tion which provided needed Sun-
day school classes.

A major building project came
during the pastorate of Anna Ed-
wards Hoverter (1918-30). At a
cost of \$25,000, the whole building
was raised and foundations dug
by hand. A full basement was
constructed beneath the existing
building. A new section was add-

ed to the existing front entrance,
consisting of more classrooms
and a balcony in the sanctuary.

In 1986, a fellowship hall was
completed and dedicated. This
addition consists of a fellowship
hall, modern kitchen, storage
space, restrooms, stair tower
and foyer. The Rev. Fred Lan-
dolt was pastor at the time.

He will serve six months ARD.
tossed salad, chilled pineapple
milk.