

## 1843: Founding a New Church

In Clerk Book #1, page 1, we read:

*"A meeting of Professing Christians in the vicinity was held during intermission of public worship on Sabbath May 7, 1843 at the home of Mr. Matthew Dodsden in North Prairie in the township of Genesee to consider the expediency of forming a church. Rev. Stephen Peet was appointed Moderator and Henry W. Sherman was chosen Clerk and the meeting was opened with prayer. A list of the names of those who wished to connect themselves with a church was taken; and after deliberation it was Resolved that we take measures for the organization of a church of Jesus Christ in this place. Resolved to adjourn to the first Sabbath in June to give opportunity for members of churches abroad to obtain their letters of dismissal [dismissal] and recommendation. Closed with prayer."*

*-H. W. Sherman, clerk*

On Sunday, May 7, 1843, five years before Wisconsin became a state (May 29, 1848), a group of people led by the Rev. Stephen Peet met at the home of Matthew Dodsden, north of North Prairie. Matthew had a strong Episcopalian background. Feeling the need for a spiritual witness in this new land, they endeavored to form a church. At that first meeting, there was much to be gained in the way of harmony among those present. Being of diverse religious backgrounds, there was a long debate as to whether they would align themselves with the Presbyterian or the Congregationalist faith. There were eight Presbyterian and eight Congregationalists present, not including Matthew Dodsden. His strong vote in favor of becoming Episcopalian resulted in a tie among the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. As history has shown, a month later, on Sunday, June 4, it was *"unanimously Resolved that the Church adopt for the present the Congregational form of government."*

That *"for the present"* has now extended to 170 years! On Sunday, June 4, 1843, the First Congregational Church was formally organized under the "Plan of Union" observed by the American Home Missionary Society, which Rev. Peet represented. The charter members numbered 17. Ten more were added within a year.