

HISTORY OF THE  
COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH  
OF  
KODIAK, ALASKA

By Gregory S. Morony

This history is only for the first two years, December, 1940, to December, 1942. It is not exhaustive, but gives the basic history. Many personal events occurred which would be of interest, but this is not intended to be more than a history to record the basic facts at the time of and immediately following the founding of this church. For this history the writer's personal files and records were used.

November, 1979  
San Joaquin, California

About 1939 the United States government began building a naval base along Women's Bay, Alaska, which is across the harbor from Kodiak, Alaska. The year 1939 is approximate, but the major building was begun in 1940.

At that time the only Christian witness in Kodiak was the Russian Orthodox Church and the American Baptist Children's Home, the staff of which conducted a small Sunday School in the town of Kodiak.

There were at that time two home mission societies operated by the American Baptists (at that time known as the Northern Baptist Convention; later the name was changed to American Baptist Churches USA). One of these two mission societies was "The Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society", which in 1893 had established and continued to operate the Kodiak Baptist Mission (or Baptist Children's Home of Kodiak, Alaska).

The other organization was for the general mission work of the denomination: "The American Baptist Home Mission Society".

With the construction of the navy and army bases The American Baptist Home Mission Society recognized the responsibility and need to establish a church in Kodiak. Accordingly, money was made available to erect a building and secure land. And Rev. and Mrs. Walter Warner were sent there to do this. Mr. Warner was already on the ABHMS staff as a missionary-builder and was expert builder (carpenter, etc.) as well as a minister. Rev. and Mrs. Warner arrived sometime in the spring of 1940, and successfully carried out the project. In doing this, they also gathered a small group which later served as the nucleus for the church. He conducted regular services. Mr. Warner also built a parsonage next to the church building.

(Some years later, a more adequate parsonage was built about a block up hill from the church building and on the same street. The small original parsonage was torn down and the land used for a playground for a Day Care Center using the lower floor of the church building.)

Rev. Warner finished his construction work and left for the "South 48 States" on December 24, 1940. Two days before, the first missionary pastor had arrived. Here we pick up the story of the founding of the Community Baptist Church of Kodiak. The church building was adequate for those first year; Rev. Warner had done an excellent work. The main sanctuary still is in use; a section has been added to the building for class rooms and church office and Pastor's Study, and a few helpful alterations in the sanctuary. In 1940 the cost of the church building and lot was \$16,000 and the Parsonage and lot cost \$4,000.

While Rev. Warner was erecting the church building and gathering the first congregation, Dr. G. Pitt Beers, Executive of The American Baptist Home Mission Society, was searching in the "48 States" for a minister to go to Kodiak, Alaska, as the first missionary pastor. The result of his search was that the Board of The American Baptist Home Mission Society asked Rev. and Mrs. Gregory S. Morony, of Sacramento, California, to go to Kodiak as the first pastor and wife. They accepted the invitation, believing it was in the will of God for them to do so.

In those years all travel to Kodiak was by ship. From Seattle, Washington, to Kodiak was a trip of eight days. The Moronys made the trip on the S.S. Baranof of The Alaska Steamship Company, whose vessels were both passenger and freighter, and thus stopped at many ports in southeastern Alaska, and also at Seward, where passengers and freight to Kodiak and westward were transferred to another ship.

On December 22, 1940, Rev. and Mrs. Morony and two children – Mary Lou age 4 and Michael age 15 months – arrived on the S.S. Denali at the U.S. Naval Base along Women’s Bay, Kodiak Island. Some passengers were men going to work at the Naval Base. The passengers for the town of Kodiak disembarked at the Naval Base and were taken to town by bus. The Moronys arrived in the town of Kodiak about 6 p.m.

The bus driver knew the Rev. Warner and knew where he lived – which was in a house owned by the Kodiak Baptist Mission (the Children’s Home) on top of a small hill between the main street and the shore. Thus it was that the Moronys found the Warners who had been told the Kodiak passengers would disembark the next day at the Kodiak dock. The Moronys and their children received a warm welcome by Rev. and Mrs. Warner.

That same evening – Sunday evening, December 22, 1940 – was the Christmas program at the church building, and while there had been morning services in it, this was the first time the new church building had been used for any evening activity or service.

The next day Rev. Warner showed Rev. Morony about town, told him what was necessary so Mr. Morony could close building accounts, and gave other helpful information. All the while that day the Warners were also busy saying goodbye to people. That evening they boarded the same ship on which the Morony family had arrived, and it sailed the following morning.

The new parsonage was not finished, so the Morony family lived for some weeks in the old house where Rev. and Mrs. Warner had lived. Although the new parsonage was finished structurally, the inside all had to be painted, and all the outside, and about 50 feet of ditch dug for the water line. The Moronys – Gregory and Evelyn – did the painting and he dug the ditch in January, working through frozen ground. About February they moved into the new parsonage, which was much appreciated. Michael and Mary Lou both had been sick with the flu and the old house did not lend itself to healthy conditions. The care by Dr. A. Holmes Johnson for the sick children was much appreciated.

For the record of history, recorded here is the fact that on the small hill where the old Mission – owned house was, also was a small, plain building in which the staff at the Children’s Home conducted Sunday School for the few children in town whom they could get to attend. With the building of the new parsonage and church building up the hill on Mill Bay Road, the City of Kodiak purchased the house and small building and lots for \$3,500, and that small building became the first city hall of Kodiak. These two structures are long since gone, as is that hill.

There was a group of sincere Christians attending Sunday Services. It was not large, but it was more than adequate for beginning a church. Rev. Warner had gathered these folk, but he had not organized a church as he had been busy completing the building program. The developing of the congregation and the organization of the church were left to Pastor Morony.

Working with a few of the leaders, Pastor Morony began discussing the organizing of a church. Toward the end of January, 1941, those attending agreed a church should be formally organized, and a start was made: Sunday evening, February 2, was set as the day and time to meet for this purpose and a committee was appointed to prepare the necessary constitution, nominate officers, and care for other matters.

February 2, 1941 – Sunday evening: the weather was bad, rain and freezing conditions. Nevertheless the meeting was held; those attending came in clothing appropriate for bad weather. Twenty (20) people attended and formally completed the organization of the church, selecting the name “Community Baptist Church of Kodiak.” February 2, 1941 is the official date of the organization – birth – of this church.

The charter membership is twenty – one (21), and this did not include any children from the Baptist Children’s Home. (The children were not ready for church membership, but in a few months the first children were baptized.) There were twenty (20) present that evening, and the charter membership was left open for two weeks; during that time one more came into the group, making the charter membership of twenty – one (21).

These are:

Mr. Toleff Bakke – workman at the Navy Base

Miss Mildred Berglund – on staff at the Children’s Home

Mr. Nelson Chamberlain – Supt. Of the Children’s Home

Mrs. Nelson (Ella) Chamberlain – at the Children’s Home

Mr. R.L. Clifton – Supt. Of Kodiak School

Mrs. R.L. (Irma) – Clifton – housewife

Mr. Cy Crawford – house painter in Kodiak

Miss Mae Halstenrud – nurse at Kodiak Hospital

Dr. A. Homes Johnson – Kodiak physician – surgeon

Mrs. A. Holmes (Frostie) Johnson – housewife

Robert Johnson – son of Dr. and Mrs. A. Holmes Johnson

Miss Charlotte Kendrick – at Children’s Home

Mrs. Frank Lahtonen – housewife (her husband was bookkeeper at Kraft Store)

Mrs. Janet McDonald – housewife (her husband owned and operated the local motion picture theater)

Rev. Gregory S. Morony – Pastor

Mrs. Gregory (Evelyn) Morony – housewife

Miss Rosalie Olsen – at Children’s Home

Mrs. Pickett – housewife

Dr. A. R. Roberts – local dentist

Mrs. A.R. Roberts – housewife

Mr. Knute Solberg – rancher, raiser of foxes, builder of fine log homes.

There are no children on this list; and the only young person is Robert Johnson, a teenager.

At this February 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting the following officers were elected:

Church Clerk –	Mrs. Frank Lahtonen
Treasurer –	Miss Mae Halstenrud
Deacons –	Toleff Bakke
	Nelson Chamberlain
	Dr. A. Holmes Johnson
Deaconesses -	Mrs. Irma Clifton
	Miss Rosalie Olsen
Trustees -	Nelson Chamberlain
	Cy Crawford
	Dr. A. R. Roberts
Sunday School Superintendent -	Mrs. Evelyn Morony
Young People’s Counsellor -	Mrs. Pickett

That first year, 1941, there were several items to be finished on the buildings. It has already been stated that the parsonage had to be painted inside and out and the ditch dug and the water line laid in it for the parsonage. The lower floor of the church building was not finished. A ceiling had to be put on it, and the ceiling and concrete walls and floor painted. There was dampness seeping through the walls and up through the floor. After seeking information regarding what to do, we secured the recommended material to brush into the walls and floor to seal the concrete (it worked, and dampness disappeared). Also upon advice, the concrete floor was dug up in a ditch lengthwise and another crosswise and drain tile laid; the floor was patched with concrete along those places. Thereafter, all was dry and no more seepage nor dampness.

Perhaps this is the place to record several gifts to the church.

1 – Mr. and Mrs. W.J. Erskine of Kodiak gave some land for the church; the remainder was purchased.

2 – A Communion Table and three chairs were received in February, 1941, but there is no record from whom. Apparently they were a gift from some one in the “South 48 States” who desired to do something nice and also needed for the church.

3 – A large two – manual Mason-Hamlin organ was given to the church. This was the kind pumped by feet. It was a gift from John Hayne of The American Baptist Home Mission Society. It was not a new organ, having been their family organ. John Hayne’s father, Coe Hayne, was a long-time missionary in the American mid-west. While not a new organ, it was a considerable improvement over what was there.

4 – A fine outdoor bulletin board was given by Lt. Roberts, USN, of the Kodiak Naval Base, March, 1941. It was made at the Base, with a glass door on the face so moveable letters could be used.

While there were sufficient folding chairs, there were no pews in the sanctuary. So in March of that first year we started a campaign to raise funds for the purchase of pews. The effort was successful, and the pews were ordered, and delivered in June. The cost totaled about \$1,500.

There was no hot water heater in the church building and no kitchen stove there. Mr. Frank McConaghy, of Seattle, Washington, and a faithful Baptist, operated a salmon cannery in Kodiak. Each spring several of his big tenders came to Kodiak from Seattle with cannery supplies, during the season worked the waters gathering fish catch from local fishermen, and then in the fall returned to Seattle. In the late fall of 1941, when his tenders returned to Seattle, Mr. McConaghy said he would arrange for a stove and hot water heater to be sent up via the Alaska Steamship line for the church. However, before this could be accomplished the United States had entered World War II, and such items became difficult to secure. He did secure a kitchen stove which arrived in January or February, 1942. It was several years before the hot water heater could be secured.

Although at the founding session on February 2, 1941, church officers and boards were elected, the first annual meeting was held May 16, 1941. This was because at that time the annual year of the Northern Baptist Convention (later American Baptist Churches) was from May 1 to April 30 next. At this first annual meeting church officers and boards were elected. There were some changes because some folk found they preferred a different place to work, and some were planning on leaving Kodiak. The officers and boards elected at this May 16, 1941, annual meeting were:

- Church Clerk - Cy Crawford
- Treasurer – Mae Halstenrud
- Deacons – Toleff Bakke  
Nelson Chamberlain  
Dr. A.R. Roberts
- Deaconesses - Miss Rosalie Olsen  
Mrs. Van Meter
- Trustees - R.L. Clifton  
Cy Crawford  
Dr. A. Holmes Johnson

A budget was also adopted for the year 1941-42:

- Local Expenses - \$750.
- Missions - \$125.

It had been suggested from the northwest offices of the denomination that the Kodiak church accept a mission goal of \$25. However, the officers of the church judged this was too low and recommended \$50. In the several weeks prior to this first annual meeting, financial pledges had been given for total church operating expenses, which pledges totaled over \$1,400. Therefore, the church voted the goal of \$125 for Missions.

Note: any extra money above local expenses and Missions would be used to do some of the work needed to complete the downstairs of the building.

Here is a good place to give figures for the next several years, although this history only concerns the first two years.

1942-43 –	Local Expenses \$1, 200.
	Missions 200.
1943-44 -	Local Expenses \$1,965.
	Missions 250.
1944-45	Local Expenses \$2,640.
	Missions 300.

This year the church started paying 46% of the pastor’s salary, the Mission Society paying the balance.

During the church year 1944-45, the church actually spent for local expenses \$3,820., and sent \$1,008 to Missions, and began paying one-half of the pastor’s salary.

Sunday School attendance was good in those years, running between 95 and 105. In 1944, five new classes were started to better grade the School. Although this crowded the available space for classes.

Vacation Bible School was conducted each summer. Because there was need for class rooms, and because we could better staff a Vacation School by doing it, we had the Kindergarten and Primary children (3 years through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) in the afternoon, and the Juniors through Adult (3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up) in the evening. As just indicated, the evening session made it possible to have a good adult study class. Both 1941 and 1942 attendance was 78. The long daylight evenings made possible the evening sessions.

As already recorded, the church was organized with a charter membership of twenty one (21). From that day to December, 1941, forty-one (41) members were received (including the charter members.) Of this number five were by baptism. In 1942, there were 43 members received; of this number eighteen (18) were by baptism.

From these statistics of people uniting with this church, it would seem that the membership should have grown fairly large. However, people were always leaving Kodiak, and after the United States entered World War II, many civilians left Kodiak for the “South 48” States. The result was that in September, 1944, the resident membership was 55, which was good for the time and place and situation.

The spring and summer of 1941 witnesses two major events: the setting of the corner stone and the dedication of the church building.

The corner stone had not been laid at the proper time in the erection of the church building because the fall weather had set-in, and it was judged a poor season for an outdoor ceremony. Hence, it was delayed until the next spring, 1941.

So the corner stone setting ceremony was held on Sunday, May 25, 1941, at 2:30 o’clock in the afternoon. The weather was good, and the stone itself a gift of an individual who desired to remain anonymous, and is to this day unknown, as no record was ever made, in accord with that request.

The committee appointed to plan this ceremony was Frank McConaghy, Dr. A.R. Roberts, and Rev. Gregory Morony, pastor.

The Mayor of Kodiak, R.H. Chadwick, and some of the City Council were present. The Mayor delivered a short but appropriate address. Rev. Gregory Morony, pastor, gave a short talk. There was some special music.

Mr. Nelson Chamberlain, Superintendent of the Kodiak Baptist Children's Home, placed the stone and gave a most fitting talk. Mr. Chamberlain was asked to do this because of the connection between the Children's Home and the Church. Mr. Heglund, a concrete and stone mason in Kodiak, helped do the actual setting of the stone in the mortar.

Miss Mae Halstenrud, supervising nurse at the Kodiak Hospital and formerly a worker at the Children's Home, offered the prayer. She was asked to do this because she was the church member who had been the longest in Kodiak.

The contents of the corner stone are:

A short history of the Kodiak Community Baptist Church, beginning back with the Kodiak Baptist Mission (Children's Home).

A copy of the "Kodiak Mirror" – the Kodiak newspaper, a weekly.

The church constitution.

The church officers.

The list of donors toward the pews.

Pictures of the church building and of the parsonage.

There may be a few other items.

There was a good attendance for this corner stone laying.

A second major event of this year was the Dedication of the church building on Sunday, August 3, 1941. By this time the lower floor had been finished as described earlier in this paper.

Dedication Sunday had three special services: One at 11:00 o'clock in the morning, when four girls gave a pantomime of the hymn "Near the Cross", while the choir sang it. Various people participated in the service in reading Scripture, offering prayer, commenting on the occasion of the day. Rev. Gregory Morony, as Pastor, gave a devotional message, and The Lord's Supper was observed.

That evening there was a pageant on "Places of Worship in the Bible". This was done with Hebrew and Roman costumes.

On that Sunday afternoon at 3:00 o'clock was the Dedication Service for the church building of the Community Baptist Church of Kodiak. The Invocation was offered by Toleff Bakke, chairman of Deacons. Both the Junior Choir and the Church Choir sang. Letters of greeting and rejoicing were read from:

Dr. G. Pitt Beers,	Executive of The American Baptist Home Mission Society
Miss Alice Brimson,	Executive of The Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society
Dr. Harold Jensen,	Pastor of the First Baptist Church Seattle, Washington
Dr. W.A. Elliott,	President of the Northern Baptist Convention (later changed to American Baptist Churches USA)



Bishop Baxter,	Bishop of Alaska for the Methodist Church
Rev. Walter Warner,	who had erected this building (see earlier in this paper)
Commander Coryell,	USN, Kodiak Naval Base, Alaska
Commander Perry,	USN, Kodiak Naval Base, Alaska
Colonel Lindsey,	U.S. Army, Fort Greely, Kodiak, Alaska
Captain Cook,	U.S. Army, Fort Greely, Kodiak, Alaska

Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple and Psalm 122 were read by Cornelius Van Zee. The Hymns sung were: “The Church’s One Foundation” and “I Love They Kingdom, Lord”.

Mrs. W.J. Erskine, who with her husband had been long – time residents in Kodiak, gave a talk giving the history of “The Mission” (the Baptist Children’s Home) from its establishment to the establishment of this Kodiak Community Baptist Church.

Pastor Morony gave the dedication sermon on the theme “We Dedicate This Temple” and offered the dedicatory prayer.

During the first sixteen months following the organization of this church, a number of activities and ministries were begun:

A Women’s Society (February, 1941).

The first Vacation Bible School (summer, 1941).

Church Choir – Mrs. Frostie Johnson and Miss Estelle Marlin helped with this.

Junior Choir – conducted by Miss Estelle Marlin, who had come to join the staff at the Children’s Home.

A Boy Scout Troop – Scout Masters were:

Sgt. Peterson – U.S. Army

Sgt. Bill Shara – U.S. Army

Sgt. Joe Izenstark – U.S. Army.

\*Note: All were Eagle Scouts; it was most unusual to have three such leaders.

A Boy Scout Cub Pack.

By December, 1941 : the attendance at the Morning Worship Service had doubled over January, 1941.

: the Sunday Evening attendance was as large as the Morning attendance had been in January, 1941.

: Sunday School averaged 100.

: the Women’s Society had grown from 8 to 20-25

: there were three youth groups:

A Junior High Group

A High School Group

A Young People's Group of young employees at the Naval Base, soldiers, and sailors.

The next year, 1942, saw these groups strengthened and other activities developed.

Beginning in the fall of 1941 Sunday evening suppers were served in the lower floor of the church building, for civilians from the Naval Base and for soldiers and sailors. A charge of \$0.15 was made, as these fellows desired to give something. And these suppers were continued through the war years of World War II.

By June, 1941, we had opened the lower floor of the church building as a community reading and recreation room. There were: a phonograph and records; the latest news, religious and fiction magazines; and ping pong, darts, and table games. The last of 1941 and the first part of 1942, Alvin Erickson, a Navy radioman with a flair for cabinet making, made and gave the ping pong table, the magazine rack, a library table for writing, and also Sunday School screens (used in the same large recreation room). It was well used by Servicemen and civilians from the Navy-Army Base, and some from town.

Early in 1941 the church gave permission for a Kindergarten to use part of the church lower floor. Mrs. Sutliff conducted this Kindergarten, which continued through 1942. Thus the church had begun making its facilities minister to the community needs in ways not religious, as well as religious.

In those first years there were no street lights, no paved streets, and no telephones. The only way to get hurried messages to the "outside" was through the Alaska Communications System, a military related operation. This was via telegrams.

Kodiak had an electric plant. However, in the summer of 1941 the electric plant burned, so there was no electricity in July and August; electricity was restored in September. Daytime in buildings with windows there was no problem in seeing. Stores with refrigerators had a problem. It was a problem in the church building on the lower floor as the windows did not admit enough light in the evening hours, and even in the sanctuary it got dim by the end of the evening service. Coleman lamps were used in the church building and parsonage.

However, the electric problem was not nearly the problem we had from late December, 1941, to sometime late February, 1942. During that period of time we had drought. The water supply came from a reservoir in the mountains behind Pillar Mountain. The weather usually alternated between freezing and snow and rain. The rains kept the reservoir filled. That winter there were no rains and hard freeze also interfered with water flow. Result: in much of the town there was no running water, and in those areas water used for any purpose was carried. There were a few springs in and near town and these were well used. The bath tub in the parsonage was kept filled. Baths were sponge baths. Water for the parsonage and church use came from that bath tub, and all drinking water had to be boiled.

In those years there was a Children's Home and Christian Center at Ouzinkie, Spruce Island, Alaska. Miss Mary Setzekorn was the supervising staff member there. She was responsible for all religious work done in that community. It became evident that her work would be helped if she was Licensed as a Minister. So after the proper procedure, on March 8, 1942, she was Licensed by the Community Baptist Church of Kodiak. The work at Ouzinkie was under the supervision of the Superintendent of the Children's Home in Kodiak.

During 1942 the military personnel at the Naval and Army Bases increased numerically – both sailors and soldiers. Many of these came to the church and participated in services and activities. Records show that from April, 1942, to April, 1943, 6,953 Servicemen came through the church's ministry. Thus it continued through all the years of World War II. Rev. Morony said he personally knew of over twenty (20) fellows who entered full-time Christian service after their discharge from Military Service.

The list of all the church members for 1941-1942 was in the church records, so it is not available for this history. However, in addition to those already mentioned in this paper, some other names can be given of people who during these years were active in the work of the church; not all of these were members; many of these were.

Mr. and Mrs. Louis Fowler; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dawson; Mr. and Mrs. Royal Munson; Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Alvine; Mr. and Mrs. Morris Burnham; Mrs. W.J. (Nellie) Erskine; Mrs. Mary Nilsen Steel; Miss Cecile Tucker; Olaf Halvorson; Edgar Burress; Miss Fossum; Tom Williams.

Many men from the Navy and Army not only attended but were active in taking responsibility. Among these were: Edwin Thornley, Max Roberts, Vernon Kendall, Marlow Magnus, Lloyd Dresser, Robert Lindemuth, Portis Wooley, Ebbert (Bert) Webber, Lt. Lloyd James, U.S Army.

To these add the many others who were strengthened in life, and those both civilian and military who found Christ as Savior and Lord; and add the many civilian workers and townspeople – and it becomes evident the Community Baptist Church of Kodiak, Alaska, has a glorious record in her ministry for Christ.

ADDENDUM

CHURCH DEEDS

In my materials I have copies of the deeds to the land the Community Baptist Church of Kodiak, Alaska, occupies. They are not sealed nor do they bear the proper and necessary government stamps. They are copies of the original deeds. The original deeds were sent to The American Baptist Home Mission Society, now The Board of National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA. I have made machine copies of my copies, and these are included herewith for whatever interest they have to readers of this history.

Gregory S. Morony

San Joaquin, California

November, 1979

Description

Sargent Deed

“ALL that certain lot and parcel of land, situated in the village of Kodiak, Kodiak, Precinct, Third Division, Territory of Alaska, and bounded and described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at corner No. 1, the northwest corner of said tract which is identical with the southwest corner of Lot No. 25 of the subdivision of U.S. Survey No. 562 as it appears on the map of said subdivision as made by Hubbell & Weller Engineering Corporation in November, 1939. Which is the point where the southern boundary or 1 – 2 line of U.S. Survey No. 562 intersects the east line of Shelikoff Road, formerly known as “Mill Bay Road”; thence southerly along the easterly side of said Shelikoff Road a distance of 80 feet to corner No. 2; thence easterly a distance of 115 feet to corner No. 3; thence northerly a distance of 185 feet more or less to corner No. 4, which is identical with the southeast corner of Lot No. 24 and the southwest corner of Lot No. 23 of the said subdivision of U.S. Survey No. 562: thence westerly along the southern line of U.S. Survey No. 562 a distance of 190 feet more or less to the point of beginning.”

Description  
Erskine Deed

“ALL that certain lot and parcel of land laying within the boundaries of the City of Kodiak, Third Division, Territory of Alaska, and bounded and described as follows, to wit:

That portion of Lot 25 Erskine subdivision; now indicated as Lot 95, described as follows:

BEGINNING at this southwest corner of Lot 25 at the intersection of the east boundary of Mill Bay Road with the south boundary of U.S. Survey No. 562, thence S 89°56' E 33.12 feet along said south boundary of U.S. Survey No. 562; thence N 63°00' W 29.52 feet to said east boundary of Mill Bay Road; thence S 27°00' W 15 feet to place of beginning.”