



Jane Nordberg/Daily Mining Gazette
Visitors gather between services at the Central Mine Methodist Church during the 2004 reunion. This year's reunion marks the centennial service for the former mining community home to Cornish immigrants.

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— Pete Manderfield, tenor
Central Mine Reunion choir

Central centennial draws more to reunion

By JANE NORDBERG
DMG Writer

CENTRAL — A popular tribute to Cornish miners is reaching a milestone this year as the Central Mine Methodist Church holds its centennial reunion service Sunday.

In keeping with tradition, two non-denominational services will be held at the church, one starting at 9 a.m. and the second beginning at 11 a.m.

According to a history of the reunion written by Central Mine Church board member James Brooks, the reunion began a few years following the closure of the Central Mine in 1898. At that time, most of the town's inhabitants ended up at either

Osceola or Calumet.

In 1907, the Keweenaw Central Railroad began passenger service between Calumet and Mandan, enabling people to return to Central. A committee was formed to organize the first "homecoming" which took place on July 21 of that year.

According to Brooks, although the homecoming was originally intended as a reunion for the former residents who had since scattered, over the years the occasion gradually widened into a tribute to the 1,200 hardy Cornish mine workers and their families who settled the town.

The popular Rev. Dr.

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Reunion scheduled

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Daniel Rosemergy will return to the area to give his eighth reunion service. A descendent of two families that lived and worked at Central, Rosemergy now lives in Nashville, but returns to the area annually to give the reunion service.

Rosemergy's service usually focuses on a specific theme, such as how the Cornish miners survived the winter, or how the community's children spent their days. Children at the service are always asked up to the altar to meet with Rosemergy, where he will have some special gift for them, such as a saffron biscuit or a piece of copper.

For choir member Pete Manderfield, though, the day is less about the church service and more about connecting with the past.

"It's a fun getting together with different people and coming together to learn about the history here," said Manderfield, whose wife, Debbie, is also of Cornish descent. "There's such a family connection with us and so many other members of the choir."

Manderfield couldn't remember exactly when he joined the choir, but said he could remember reunions back to 1991.

Some of the same choir members are still there, while others from down-

state or out of state have made annual pilgrimages to the area.

"We have a lot of fun, and with so many of these people, it's the only time we see them again for another year because this is what draws us all together," Manderfield said.

Keweenaw County Historical Society President David Thomas said preparations for the centennial have been underway for some time, with a restoration of the church basement being finished last year and the church receiving a new paint job this summer.

Also new this year is a pasty picnic, which will take place at 10 a.m. between the two services, and a group photograph of all in attendance, Thomas said.

Manderfield said that for him, the reunion helps him connect with his Cornish great-grandmother who lived in Central and raised the subsequent generations there.

"I think it's good to hear about our ancestors and past generations, the struggles that they went through to not just survive in this environment, but thrive in it," Manderfield said.

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