

# *The History of the First Presbyterian Church Ontario Center, New York*

*1800's*

Two thousand years ago the three wise men cast their eyes to the East and followed a star to the manger in Bethlehem, wherein the Christ Child, Jesus was born. Thus, the first crusade to save the souls of men, a crusade carried on throughout all history and still going forward with as much fervor as when the angels sang, "Unto us this day a Savior is born."

Many have followed the command of Jesus, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Carrying out this command of Jesus, a small group of people met over a hundred years ago under the leadership of Rev. Bliss in the old brick school house situated on the Ridge Road in the Village of Ontario, New York. At this meeting the First Presbyterian Church was organized. This organization dates from January 1, 1833.

The first society was composed of seven members: Mr. and Mrs. Richard Sutphin, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Curtiss, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Mack and Wilhelmus Decker. During that year meetings were held at the school house. The members increased to 11. In June 1834 the society changed from the Presbyterian Form of Government to the Congregational Society. In 1840 the membership numbered 38 which was as follows: Mr. and Mrs. Richard Sutphin, Mr. and Mrs. Alger, Mr. and Mrs. James Gardener, Scotter Whitcomb, Mr. and Mrs. Kingman, Mr. and Mrs. Tervilligar, Mr. and Mrs. Loren Whitney, Mr. and Mrs. Loammi Whitcomb, Sedney Whitcomb, Mr. and Mrs. George Preston, Mr. and Mrs. Barker, Abigail Algar, Mr. and Mrs. Erastus Foote, Mary Lyon, Mr. and Mrs. Southard Harkness, Phoebe Brant, Margaret Brandt, Rhoda Clark, Mrs. Myers, Marietta Sabin, S.E. Curtiss, Rachael Allen and Ruth Chapman. (Only 34 of the 38 are named)

For several years meetings were held in the school house at Ontario Center. There are no records of the Society from 1838 to 1842. Perhaps, during that period, it had not been very successful in keeping up meetings as; in 1842 it was deemed necessary to effect a new organization.

"At a meeting of the inhabitants of the Town of Ontario, held agreeable to a public notice, the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1842, Richard Sutphin was appointed Moderator and Southard Harkness, Clerk. Whereupon it was resolved that we proceed to organize ourselves into a society to be known as the Congregational Society of the Town of Ontario, New York. Resolved that Southard Harkness and Loammi Whitcomb be a committee to

report a constitution and by-laws at our next meeting. Adjourned to meet at school house next June 4<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m.”

These two meetings were held in the Ontario Center school house. No further records of these meetings have been found; but at this time, the project of building a church was underway, and a stone edifice was decided upon. The following subscriptions were made and they probably represent all the money that was raised for the purpose. The lot for the church was donated by Dr. Loammi Whitcomb and he headed the list

with a subscription of \$30. Richard Sutphin gave \$20, Scotter Whitcomb \$10, George Preston \$15, Loren Whitcomb, \$50, Southard Harkness \$12, Harvey Clark \$5, Thomas Kingman \$30, Theodore Curtiss \$5, Ruth Chapman \$10, Mary Whitney \$5, Armina Whitney \$2 and Orril Sage \$2, making a total of \$209. Of this amount \$20 was paid for shingles, \$23 for pine, \$30 for windows and \$40 for paint. The balance of \$96 was probably all that was available to pay for incidentals and for expert mason work.



Walter Cone, who owned a farm on the Ridge, said he would give them all the stone they wanted, if they would pick them up and draw them. The members of the Congregation decided that the best way to get the stone in place was, to have a bee. So one morning a large number of men and boys with teams started in to see what could be done with the stone. They soon got interested in the work, and, as the most of them seemed to have imbibed the idea that he individually could do a little more work than his neighbor they soon got to racing and work went off lively. But before they were able to decide the important of who was the champion, they found they had picked and drawn enough stone for the body part of the church. The cobblestones for facing the walls, and the sand for mixing the mortar, were drawn from the lake. Harvey Clark did a large part of the mason work.

When the masons and other workmen were laying the walls, Mrs. Loammi Whitcomb (board) them without compensation, so as to make the money go as far as it could.

The seats for the church, which were used 75 years, were made of butternut lumber and were contributed by William A. Fuller who did the greater part of the carpenter work on the building.

The church was ready for occupancy in 1843. When completed a long porch ran across the front, from which there were two doors for entrance which opened into a hall about four feet wide that extended the whole length of the north side. Two doors opened from it, into the audience room. As you entered this room, a raised pulpit stood on the north side. The congregation when seated faced the north. There was a raised platform on the south side for the Choir.

In 1857 this church, which was then running on an independent basis was taken under the care of the Lyons Presbytery, and it was virtually a Presbyterian church from then on.

About 1869 the basement, which had never been plastered, was done off by the Ontario Center Good Templar Society, who wished to use it for their meetings. Nelson S. Main did all the plastering and O.F. Whitney and J.C. Howk mixed the mortar and carried it to him. This work was done nights and without compensation.

In the early days of the church Dr. Loammi Whitcomb helped out the choir by playing a bass violin. In 1866 Mr. Huron Harrison loaned the church a melodeon. This instrument was used several years and then a Mason and Hanlin Organ was purchased.

In 1887 Peter Freer presented the church with the pulpit chairs which are still in use.

Mrs. Julia Freer, who had for years been a most devoted worker in the church, died in September 1891. By her will a greater part of her estate was left conditionally to this church. After years of litigation, upon final settlement the estate netted \$5,100 and became available for use. This amount is in the form of a trust fund and must be kept up under bond and mortgage under control, and by the trustees, and nothing but the interest can be used. This must be used especially to help pay the expenses of preaching the gospel. But in the event that there is no pastor and a Sunday School is maintained, it may be used to defray the expense of the Sunday School. If there is neither preaching or Sunday School, then the interest, year by year, must be sent, by the trustees to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign and Home Missions.

In 1898 the Society purchased the parsonage. About 1901 Mrs. Cobus by will of \$50 to the church. This was used to make a payment on the parsonage.

In 1868 was the first time the Elders were elected for the church; J. C. Howk, Andrews Fries, and Will Crammer were chosen. Some others who served as Elders are: Loammi Whitcomb, William Wall, William Hooker, Thomas Lolley, O.F. Whitney, William Fries, Edward Alborn, William Payne, Jacob Thomas, and Glen Cone.

The office of church organist has been held by Sarah Whitcomb, Mrs. Bigelow, Ray Nash, Edna Fries Purvis and Clara Pye. Sarah Whitcomb served more than 30 years.

During the early years of the church a Sunday School was established and has always been maintained. J. C. Howk was superintendent from 1867 to 1897. Others that served in that office are William Fries, Ray Eddy and Glen Cone.

A Women's Presbyterian Missionary Society was started in 1875 and has always been in active work, holding meetings monthly. The following persons were members twenty years or more: Mrs. Whitney, Sarah Whitcomb, Mr. J.C. Howk, Mr. Horton, Mrs. Fries, Mrs. Thomas, and Mrs. Harrison. Mrs. Whitney, Mrs. Howk, and Sarah Whitcomb joined when the society was first organized.

In 1889 a Christian Endeavor Society was organized by Mr. Hodgem, the pastor; who was its first president. It was in good running order and until the young ones became conversant with its management and then it was reorganized as a Young People's Society and turned over to them. Eward Russell was then chosen president. In 1901 a Junior Endeavor Society was instituted with 14 charter members. The first superintendent was Edna Purvis, followed by Mrs. Funnell, Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Millard.

Permanent improvements for the church have been received from the following sources: Mrs. Julia Freer gave the minister's desk; Mrs. Freer's Sunday School Class gave chairs; C.J. Nash gave lamps and a clock; Mrs. Nash's Sunday School Class paid for new windows and Mrs. Hoag's Sunday School Class gave communion service, consisting of individual glasses and table clothes. Mrs. Nina Howk's Sunday School Class purchased the new carpet for the church.