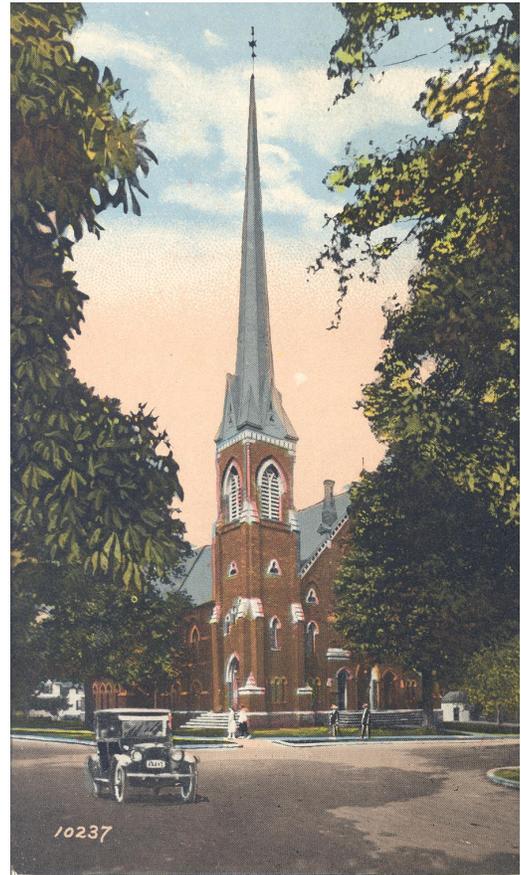


THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FAIRPORT

In the Joy School on Macedon Center Road on January 8, 1842, a small group of brethren and sisters adopted articles of faith and practice and resolved themselves into a Baptist conference. Elder Charles Howe was chosen as the moderator and Justus Beardsley as clerk. The brethren and sisters included John Budlong, John and Hannah Walker, Sylvia Curtis, and Cynthia and Ursula Noyes. The first baptismal candidates were immersed in a running stream on January 30; they were Joel DeLand, Lucinda DeLand, Bleeker Webb, and Louisa Smith. The first regular church meeting of the First Baptist Church and Society of Perinton took place on February 2, 1842, with twenty-eight members. In May of 1842, the first pastor, Franklin Woodward, arrived and stayed for three years at a salary of \$300. This active beginning, however, was not the first time that Baptists had attempted to organize in the Perinton area. There is evidence of a Baptist Society as early as 1816. A Certificate of Organization for a Baptist Society was drawn up at School #3 in 1832, but it was dissolved in 1836 and nothing more is noted until the 1842 meetings.

The articles of faith that the group adopted included Baptist principles of belief as laid down in the Scriptures. They also laid out strict rules for everyday life, declaring that church members are not ordinarily to sue each other at law, that alms are to be bestowed upon the needy members of the church...ö, and that heads of families are to give their children religious instruction and restrain them from balls and other vicious courses.ö Although they adhered to the resolution that believing the cause of temperance to be the cause of truth, we feel it our duty to require our members to practice according to the principle of total abstinence,ö it was never formally added to their articles of faith and practice. An initial resolution about slavery was proposed in 1842, but not acted upon. In 1846, however, it was resolved that slavery was the sin of the nation and the church and that we have no fellowship in it.ö Over the years there is evidence that these rules of life were not merely statements. In the 1840's, records show a number of members from whom the hand of fellowship was withdrawnö for various infractions, such as intemperance, neglecting to fill one's place in church, neglect of family, and even one for attending dancing school. On the other hand, members were restored after confession and amendment.

These early Perinton Baptists first met in the East Church Street schoolhouse and also in the Universalist (later the Episcopal) Church on East Church Street, but very quickly purchased land for their own building. In 1842 the lot on the corner of Church and Main Street was bought from Lyman and Eleanor Hall for \$500. Apparently the construction of the small wooden building was quite a festive event. As the walls were raised, the children watched and the women brought hampers of food and prepared a meal. To insure the building, a tax was levied on the pews, or öslips.ö This proved to be such an easy and convenient way of raising money that it was used for a variety of other purposes and evolved into pew or slip örental.ö By the 1860's, pew rental day had become quite a social event with a free supper. While several pews were set aside for the poor or for strangers, by the 1890's, pews were assigned to each member for life, which caused some problems as the only way to get a seat was for someone to die. Eventually the pew rental system was replaced by the pledge system of raising money and all seats were free and unassigned.



Baptisms had traditionally been by total immersion in a running stream. They were usually done in Irondequoit Creek or Curtis Pond on Macedon Center Road. Winter did not deter the faithful. In February of 1863, it was noted in the records that "although it was a very cold day many persons witnessed the ordinance (of baptism) which was solemn and impressive and all the converts went away rejoicing and happy." Later that year, however, in a second round of building improvements, an inside baptistry was added, although as late as the 1870's, some still preferred to go to the stream to be baptized.

Between the 1840's and the early 1900's a number of revivals helped add to the growth of the congregation. Revival meetings were often held in January and sometimes before Christmas. In 1899 four leaders of the church called on many residents of the community which resulted in sixty-five members being received and twelve being baptized. In 1914, the Burgess and Butts revival campaign drew over one hundred new members. This growth led to the need for a new larger church. An additional piece of land on West Church Street was purchased from the Chadwick family. The pastor's house was moved to 48 E. Church Street. The session house was advertised for sale in the local paper and was purchased for \$100 and moved to 11 Filkins Street. The original meeting house was moved to the back of the lot, and eventually it was made into a home by Harrison Wooden. It burned in 1890.

The new brick building, built at a cost of \$35,000, was an imposing and elegant addition to Fairport village, and the ninety-foot spire served as a significant landmark. The brick work was highlighted with trim of Berea sandstone, and the front doors were flanked by Scotch granite columns. The lovely rose window was given by the Henry DeLand family, who also gave \$12,000 to the building fund. The auditorium of the church was finished in oiled chestnut and included a thirty foot long baptistry. The church was dedicated on Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 1877. Immediately, a drive began to raise money for a pipe organ, which was dedicated in 1881. It was described as "very tasty in appearance as well as adapted to fill the large audience room with the harmony of music." The first choir seems to have been formed in the 1850's under the direction of Mr. Scofield. Emma Bortle served as organist for forty-four years, retiring in 1917. It is recorded that there was often a male quartet who sang regularly, and on special occasions there was a four to six piece orchestra added.

Soon after the organ was installed, plaster moldings fell from the ceiling and damaged some of the pews. It was decided to remove the plaster and install a wooden ceiling. This second ceiling proved to have such poor acoustics that a third and lower ceiling was finally installed. Twice in the history of this building, the spire was struck by lightning. Despite some discussion as to whether or not to remove the spire, both times it was repaired. In the 1950's, the church considered moving out of the village, but with the purchase and remodeling of the Hupp automobile dealership next door for much needed classroom and fellowship space, it was decided to stay in the village. The new building was named the DeLand Center after the family that had contributed so much to the church over the years.

First Baptist Church has a history of social involvement and religious education. In the early years of the church, prayer meetings were regularly held on Saturday afternoons and Wednesday evenings, but by the coming of the automobile, according to church records, people abandoned the custom of weekly prayer meetings and attended only the Sunday service. The Sunday school was organized along with the church itself, in 1842 and included adult classes as well as Bible study groups. Social events included an annual Christmas supper, complete with fresh oranges sent from Florida by Henry DeLand, and the midsummer picnic, which was a grand event with lots of food, a band, and singing. An active youth group met regularly on Mondays and was known as the Covenant Band, the Young Peoples' Union, and the Christian Endeavor Society, among others. There was great interest and concern for the missions, both foreign and domestic. The Women's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, formed in 1871, met and supported those who worked in overseas missions. In 1911, the first missionaries sent by the church, Mr. and Mrs. David Graham were given a gala farewell before they left for China. Several women served as teachers with the Home Mission Society, doing Bible School and Americanization work with newly-arrived immigrants. All were supported with funds and goods by the Missionary Society. In addition, the group

also contributed to the upkeep of the church itself. The King's Daughters Circle, the Fruitful Circle, the Scattergood Circle, and the Whatsoever Class, (named after their motto, "Whatsoever Thy Hand findeth to do, do with Thy Might.") raised money and collected goods for the needy and for the upkeep of the church.

The First Baptist Church of Fairport continues to have a dedicated congregation and to be active in the community as supporters of the Perinton Food Shelf and the Fairport Baptist Homes, among others. The church building has been added to the National Register of Historic Places and is also a designated Fairport landmark, insuring that this elegant structure will continue to stand and welcome people into the village of Fairport and to the church itself.



"Busy Bee" Sunday School class