

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF FAIRPORT

The Methodists came early to the Perinton area. Methodist circuit riders in their stove pipe hats were a familiar sight as they came to hold services, to which all were invited, and to baptize and marry lonely and isolated settlers. There is evidence that meetings were held as early as 1808 at Bennett Joy's home on Macedon Center Road, and a Methodist Society was organized in Egypt in 1810, meeting in a large two-story hall on Pittsford-Palmyra Road.

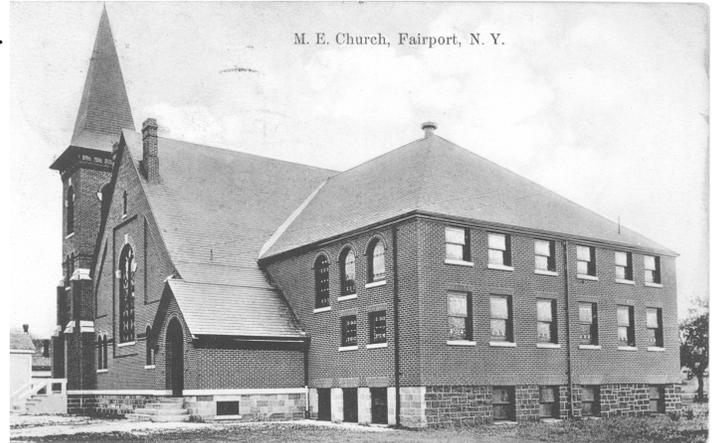
The first Methodist Society in Fairport village was formed in 1825 and this group built a small frame church on North Main Street. Among those early members were Jacob Sperbeck, Warren Caulkins, Martin Sperbeck, and Eban Sherman. There are few records of this early group, and they did not prosper, succumbing to the dissension created by the Millerites, who, in the 1830's, predicted that the world was going to end in 1843. The society disbanded in 1838 and the church building was sold to Jeremiah Chadwick who used it as a carriage and wagon shop.

By 1881, the Free Methodist Society, led by the Rev. Mr. B.T. Roberts, was meeting in Fairport village at 14 Cole Street. Mr. Roberts had been "read out of meeting" in 1860 for his "strong and different opinions" and had, as a result, started his own version of Methodism. His more conservative and dramatic and exuberant style attracted some and repelled others, but the sect was short-lived. By 1910, most had rejoined the regular Methodist Church. The house had various owners until it was razed in 1939, but the back lot was still used for Free Methodist revival meetings.

Another Methodist society formed in the southeast portion of Perinton in the 1830's and met in the schoolhouse there before building and dedicating a church building in 1837. That building is home today to the South Perinton United Methodist Church.

The current Methodist church in Fairport village was formed with twelve members in the home of Dr. and Mrs. C.H. Greene on South Main Street in 1876. The group met for three years in the former Universalist Church on East Church Street, a "...weak, struggling band at first, but being composed of earnest leaders and wide awake workers, the church soon obtained a substantial foothold, and in 1879 the original brick structure [on West Church Street] was erected...." Much of the labor on the building was performed by church members themselves, and the society moved into the church long before it was completed. The old seats, pulpit, and windows from the First Baptist Church were donated, as was the first communion set consisting of two glass goblets and an earthenware pitcher. Levi DeLand gave the first gas lighting plant and set of fixtures. For several years there were no carpets on the floor, and "the ladies of the society used to get together at regular intervals and mop and scrub the large floor, occasionally the work falling on two or three of the most faithful members, who would sometimes labor until the midnight hour, in order to have the church bright and clean for Sunday morning services." To secure children for the Sunday School the women of the church "literally went out into the highways and byways to bring in those who were out of touch with the religion of Jesus." They also brought in the nearly destitute, and organized sewing circles to provide them with needed clothing. As one recorder noted, "this was heroic missionary work right here in our own village...."

Of the early pastors, The Rev. Porter McKinstry stayed only four months. The Rev. Benjamin Copeland stayed a mere two weeks, saying that the society could not support a church. The Rev. John Cline came in from South Perinton every Sunday for six months to hold services, and few subsequent



pastors stayed more than two years. The Greenes, who were original members, often housed short-term pastors in their home, leading some to refer to their house as “Greene’s Methodist Hotel.”

The Fairport Methodist church entered a period of growth and prominence as the twentieth century began. Under the pastorate of the Rev. Mark Kelley, who came in 1899, the church building was finally dedicated on September 20, 1901, after sufficient funds had been raised to pay off all indebtedness, including a \$4,000 mortgage. The building was remodeled in 1904 after the Akron Plan, which provided for circular seating on a graduated floor, and a new heating plant was installed. In the early teens, Miss Para Woolsey donated a new organ, which enhanced the already strong tradition of music in the church. A distinguishing characteristic of the early Methodists was their singing, and after all, Methodist founder Charles Wesley had written over 6500 hymns and songs for all occasions and all times of the day.

The church was a center of social as well as religious activity. There were church suppers and picnics. There were regular weekly Bible study and prayer meetings as well as meetings of various groups. The Women’s Missionary Society raised money for the foreign and domestic missions, and also had speakers from places like Japan. Goods for the needy at home and abroad were collected by the Ladies’ Aid Society, who also raised funds for outside needs, as well as those of the church itself. In 1921, there is record of a “Rally Day,” where the congregation, using all autos and carriages available to them, reached out into the community and “compelled the people to come in.” They provided rockers for the elderly, infirm, and mothers with babies, and there was a special Sunday school program. As with most Methodist churches, the Christian education and youth programs were always vital and active.

The church continued to grow with the Perinton-Fairport community during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1955, the first part of a major renovation occurred. A large church school addition was built to the west of the sanctuary, which was at that time located at the corner of South Avenue and West Church Street. The second phase of the renovation was completed when, after purchasing the remaining lots between Filkins and South Avenues in the early 1960’s, the old sanctuary was demolished and a new one built on the corner of West Church and Filkins Streets. Two windows from the old church, the Good Shepherd window and the window of Christ knocking at the door, were preserved and incorporated into the new building.

In 1968, another kind of growth and change occurred when the Methodists and the Evangelical United Brethren merged to become the United Methodists.

The First Methodist Church is a dominant landmark on West Church Street and continues its outreach and concern in the community by supporting endeavors like Advent House and the Perinton Food Shelf, as well as holding a once-a-month Sunday dinner for those in need in the community. The church’s outreach extends as far as the Democratic Republic of the Congo where they are working with other groups on economic development. The church’s active youth groups plan regular services and volunteer in a variety of ways in the community. They also take part in a yearly mission work camp trip, offering their skills and enthusiasm to those in need. The current pastors are Margaret Scott and John McNeill.

