

SOUTH PERINTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH & CEMETERY

Responding to the religious fervor of the “Second Great Awakening,” Methodist circuit riders were holding services in Perinton in 1816 and possibly as early as 1808. A congregation formed in the village of Fairport and another in the south eastern portion of Perinton. Prior to 1837, a group of residents in the vicinity of Wilkinson Road had met to hold religious services in the local schoolhouse, where two of them, John and William Wells, also established a church school. Two Baptist ministers, John Rose and James Woolsey, reportedly officiated at these early meetings. The group called themselves the “South Perinton Methodist Episcopal Society,” and formally organized in February 1837. The church membership book records that Susan Wilkinson, age 15, was the first person to join on that February date. She was joined by Mary Wilkinson, John and Joseph Wilkinson, Mary, wife of Joseph, and Lorenzo and Martha Woolsey. Other charter members included the Wells, Snedeker, Rose, Wing, Mosher, and Cline families, all of whom lived in the area.

In 1839, Nicholas Mosher transferred a parcel of land on Wilkinson Road to church trustees George Wing, Isaac Snedeker, John Cline, and Nathan Comstock. They built a small Greek Revival building in front of the South Perinton Cemetery, and dedicated it on October 19, 1837. The church itself was but a single room, sparsely furnished and heated by a box stove. Early trustees included John Rose, William Potter, Lorenzo Woolsey, and John and James Wilkinson. In 1839, Joseph Wilkinson paid off a remaining mortgage balance of \$1,000. The church shared a pastor with a Methodist church in Victor until 1859, when it affiliated with Macedon Center, a connection which continues today.

The church experienced significant growth in the late 1860's as a result of another religious revival. Forty-five new members joined the church when they were baptized in nearby White Brook. The record notes that “four preferring the rite of baptism by immersion, two by pouring, and the balance by sprinkling.” To accommodate the larger congregation, a two-story Italianate addition to the front of the building provided a vestibule, a bell tower, and an upper room for the Sunday school. In 1894 an organ was purchased at a cost of somewhat over \$100, a sum raised by the Epworth League through such fund raisers as lawn parties and ice cream socials. Pliny Sexton donated a piece of property which was used to build “a fine row of sheds” for horses and buggies. The sheds were built and dedicated in 1896. In 1909 new concert steps were added.

Continued growth led to the addition of a kitchen and dining annex in 1915. A bell for the tower was given by John Woolsey in memory of his parents around the same time. Memorial stained glass windows were added in 1936 and dedicated to Lorenzo and Martha Woolsey, Robert and Helen Wilson, Mitchell, Sara, and Lewis Wilson, Earl and Eliza Marquis, E. Augusta Woolsey, Charles and Catherine Blazey, and Charles J. Blazey. and a carillon in 1961. . Another addition was dedicated in 2001 to accommodate the increasing size of the congregation. Old oil lamps (now electrified), original benches, and an embossed tin ceiling in the entrance hall as well as in the sanctuary, serve as reminders of the past. Despite many updates and on-going maintenance, however, the church has managed to retain many of its original features as well as its historic ambiance.

South Perinton Church on Wilkinson Road was a center of community life in the 19th century, providing not only religious services, but also Sunday school classes, choir, youth groups, lectures, ice cream socials, and even meetings to scrape lint for Civil War bandages. Evidently, the church also had



*South Perinton Church with horse barns
and before additions*

an influence on other area activities, as Lorenzo Woolsey's diary states that "There was horse racing, ball playing and card playing in front of where the church service was held, but through the efforts of a few zealous Christian families and the Rev. T.J. Champion, a Methodist minister from Victor, a revival was the result of changing these conditions."

Over the years, the parish has been served by many dedicated pastors. Jonathan Benson served as the first pastor. William R. Benham was pastor during the revivals of the 1840's when the church gained a number of new members. The Rev. John Cline, who was born in Victor and was married to Phebe Wilkinson, daughter of charter members Joseph and Mary, was the Sunday School Superintendent and an assistant minister for over 50 years, from the 1850's to the end of the century and had a significant impact on Methodism in the area. He served not only the South Perinton church, but was instrumental in the formation of Fairport's First Baptist Church. For three years in the 1870's he rode the 16 miles into the village of Fairport to minister to that new congregation. Most pastors served for a period of two to three years; however, the Rev. John MacGuidwin served for 14 years, from 1917 to 1931 and the Rev. Donald Turk was with the parish for nine years. The current pastor is the Rev. Laura Schaal

This church also has the distinction of being the only church in Perinton to have an adjacent cemetery. The first person to be buried there was Thomas Richardson, a Revolutionary War veteran, who died in 1813. War of 1812 burials include Jeremiah Richardson and Aldophus Aldrich. Civil War veterans include Stephen Austin, killed at Winchester, Virginia; Lewis Smith, wounded at the Wilderness; Egbert Hart and John Harrison, both of the 33rd New York; and Reuben Crosby, a prisoner at Andersonville. John Pannell, after whom nearby Pannell Road is named, is buried there, as is the Rev. John Cline. Members of a number of the founding families of the church, including the Wilkinson, Snedeker, Woolsey, and Mosher families, also have plots in the cemetery.

The South Perinton Historic District preserves a church and a cemetery in a lovely and unique rural setting which is central to the history of Perinton as an agricultural community and to the social history of this part of the country. The church is also a vital part of 21st century Perinton as it continues to be an active and thriving congregation.



*S. Perinton Methodist Church choir: Mr. & Mrs. Henry Cline (standing)
Mitchell Wilson, Bertha Bowerman Stevens, Minnie Wilkinson Wilson, Cora Pannell*

