

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WATKINS GLEN, N.Y.

1968

*150th Anniversary in Watkins Glen
100th Anniversary in Present Building*

A Brief History
by Abigail O'Daniels, Historian

*Received into the membership
of this church September 25, 1904
by the Rev. Louis F. Ruf*

Our church, now incorporated as the United Presbyterian Church of Watkins Glen, was organized 150 years ago in a barn on the farm of Captain John Diven, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, who with his family and the Baskin family had migrated from northern Pennsylvania and settled on the hill about one and one half miles west of the head of Seneca Lake about 1802 or 1803.

Other settlers also came to establish homes in this land of promise recently wrested from the Iroquois Indian Confederacy by the army of General John Sullivan and soon land clearings and small homes and cabins dotted the land where bears, panthers, deer and other wild animals roamed.

There must have been much loneliness and need of companionship but the need of gathering together in divine worship became especially apparent and so on the 8th day of September 1818 a group of five men and eleven women met in the barn, which was probably the largest building in the neighborhood, to organize a church society.

The meeting was presided over by the Rev. David Higgins of Bath and the sixteen present were: William Baskin and wife Catherine, John Diven and wife Eleanor, Elijah Bacon and wife Ruth, Charles T. Brown, Bradley Thompson, Mrs. Sarah VanZandt, Mrs. Anna Norton, Mrs. Polly Smith, Mrs. Patty Phinney, Miss Jane Baskin, Miss Elisabeth Diven, Miss Olive Bacon and Miss Sarah Thompson. They were examined by Rev. Higgins and by each other concerning their knowledge of doctrine, experimental and practical religion, and their willingness to enter into solemn covenant with God and one another to observe the import, duties and ordinances of the gospel. All agreed to receive and adopt the Presbyterian confession of faith and system of discipline. Elijah Bacon and William Baskin were elected elders.

The church thus organized was known as the First Presbyterian Church of Reading, then a part of Steuben County, and was placed under the Presbytery of Bath. Two days after the organization of the church divine services were held at which the Lord's Supper was celebrated and thirteen of the children of the charter members were baptized.

For the next 15 years the life of the church was marked by the usual variety of experience incident to pioneer churches in partially settled communities. Services were held irregularly in the homes of its members, the school house and the barn where it was organized and the following ministers served the struggling parish: Rev. David Higgins and Rev. Samuel Parker 1818; Rev. Lyman Barrett 1821; Rev. Joseph Crawford 1822; Rev. Henry Ford 1825; Rev. Samuel White 1826; Rev. Jabez Chadwick 1826; Rev. Richard Williams 1829; Rev. David Harrower in 1831 and Rev. Charles Goodrich 1832.

By 1833 the society was able to erect a frame building with a seating capacity of 400 in Savoy (now N. Monroe Street between Cross and Partition Streets) at a cost of \$1000. Here they worshipped until 1847 when it was sold to the Catholic Society and a new and larger frame structure was completed on the present site of the Manse; the land being given by Mrs. Samuel Watkins. This building had a tower and in it was hung the first bell used in Jefferson as the village was then named. Of these two buildings the first stood until 1897 when it was torn down and the second was moved in 1868 to the school grounds and used as a school house until it burned in 1898.

During these years the church was served by Rev. Egbert Roosa 1835, Rev. Royal West 1836, Rev. Samuel Scott 1838 and Rev. Samuel Stryker 1843.

In 1846 the church became a part of Chemung Presbytery which was later merged with Steuben to form the Presbytery of Steuben Elmira. It is now in the Presbytery of Geneva.

On September 28, 1847 the first regular pastor of the church, Rev. S.B. Shearer, was installed, all who preceded him having been stated supplies. He was paid \$400 yearly and remained until 1855 when he left the ministry (according to the record) to marry a wealthy woman. The Rev. Benjamin Russell became stated supply continuing as such until 1860. Since then all the ministers serving this church have been installed as pastors according to the Presbyterian law and usage except Rev. William Lowrie 1876 and Rev. Milton Waldo 1877.

In 1860 Rev. Franklin S. Howe entered upon a pastorate that continued for ten years and during which the present church edifice was erected. Hon. John Magee, having become a resident of Watkins and transferred his membership from the Presbyterian Church of Bath July 29, 1864, and being a man of abundant wealth and deeply interested in the welfare of his church, purchased the present church premises and in 1867 began the erection

of the stately and commodious building in which we now worship.

So to the Presbyterian Church of Bath we extend deep gratitude for the part two of its members have played in our existence and growth -- Rev. David Higgins who came from Bath to sponsor our organization and John Magee who likewise came from Bath and provided the beautiful edifice in which we have worshipped for a hundred years.

In 1868 the building and lot were presented to the Board of Trustees of the church and the dedication services took place May 14th. The first service to be held in the church however was the funeral of the donor who died April 5, 1868 shortly before the completion of the building. The organ, carpets and furniture of the church were provided by the congregation.

A little later the manse was built on the site of the former church and given to the society by General George J. Magee and Mrs. Duncan Magee to which the site of the old M.E. Church property on the east was added by the trustees.

In 1874 a change was made from the perpetual term for elders to a limited term in accordance with a resolution of the General Assembly.

During the next 25 years the church was served by the Rev. J.S. McNair 1870, Rev. William Lowrie 1876, Rev. Milton Waldo D.D. 1877, Rev. George D. Meigs 1882 and the Rev. Bryce K. Douglas 1888. It was in this period that the Missionary Society and the Social Union were organized.

In 1893 Rev. Louis F. Ruf became pastor remaining 11 years and being succeeded by Rev. Selden L. Haynes who was installed in 1905. Five years later the Rev. James Elmer Russell became pastor serving until Dec. 1915. Mr. Russell was a man of deep spiritual insight and a much beloved minister.



Building on the John Diven farm in which the church now known as the United Presbyterian Church of Watkins Glen was organized in September of 1818. Above picture was taken in 1918.



During the period of 1847 - 1868 the Presbyterian Church was located on the East side of Decatur Street at the corner of Fifth Street. (The site now occupied by the Manse).

In 1916, two years before the celebration of the Centennial of the organization of the church, Rev. Arthur B. Herr, D.D. began his pastorate which continued for 17 years, at that time the longest in the history of the church and a period in which growth and changes took place. During this period the church interior was remodeled and redecorated and Mrs. Emma S. Magee gave the church one of the finest pipe organs in this section as a memorial to her husband General George J. Magee and their daughter Anna Boissevaine.

The next twenty-five years leading up to the 125th anniversary were characterized by the remembrance of the church and its societies by a number of gifts and memorials. Mr. George J. Magee left an endowment of \$20,000 and Mrs. Emma Magee made a bequest to both the church and the Social Union for their support. The flags in the church are memorials, the American flag to Mrs. Anna Arbuckle given by the Loyalty Class for her years of faithful devotion and service, and the Christian flag in memory of Mrs. Alice Cowing by the Women's Bible Class for her many years of teaching and leadership. Both were faithful servants of the Lord. A beautiful white marble baptismal font was given by the Abbey family in memory of the many members of that family who have served in the official life of the church. Bequests of money were given by Mr. and Mrs. Cassius Ernest in memory of their daughter Cleda Culligan and to the Missionary Society by Mrs. Carrie Probasco. Other gifts were two hundred hymnals given by the Rev. M.W. Stryker in memory of his father, an early minister of the church, a piano from the estate of Miss Elizabeth Waugh and two communion services from the disbanded churches of Montour Falls and Pine Grove were also received.

Two beautiful paintings by the famous artist Capt. James Hope were also gifts -- "The Ford of the Jordan River" (where Christ was supposed to have been baptised) given by the artist himself, who was a staunch and regular member of this church, and a still larger canvas of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives given by his widow. (They had been taken by his grandson for needed repair and were badly damaged at the time of the 1935 flood.)

Rev. Clayton T. Griswold became our pastor in 1934 and because of his ability in organizing and directing was called by the Presbyterian General Council in 1939 to direct the Youth Budget. He was succeeded by Rev. William J. Cartmell the same year.

The 29 year pastorate of Rev. Cartmell beginning in September 1939 and continuing until August 1968 proved to be the longest in the history of the church.

During this time he patiently and slowly brought its members to look ahead to the needs of the future and wisely guided its officers in adjusting its program to serve the needs of a changing world.

This required many adjustments in the building itself to provide adequate facilities for enlarged activities. The large lecture room was divided into several units providing an attractive small chapel and a kindergarten room as well as a long hallway with space for choir robes and music storage cabinets as well as a robing room for the choir. The piano in the small chapel was given by Paul Kelley and Elmo Royce.

The original pew cushions becoming badly worn, new ones of foam rubber covered with dark green velour were given by the Clute family about this time.

Previous to this the old cellar under the sanctuary was deepened and Fellowship Hall with its modern kitchen and dining room as well as several Sunday school classrooms and cupboards for storage of supplies and records were made -- a stairway from Fellowship Hall to the upper front entrance hall to the church was also constructed.

The former dining room upstairs reverted to its former use as a gymnasium and recreation room for the youth of the church and the former kitchen was made into two beautiful class rooms for the Junior High Department of the Sunday School. The five thousand dollar bequest left to the church by Mr. Charles William Kress in memory of his mother was used for this project.

During this period many memorials and gifts for the beautification of the sanctuary were also given -- Maas Chimes given by Mrs. Warren Clute were added to the Magee Memorial organ in memory of her husband.

A lighted cross was given by Miss Hettie Miller as a token of her love and devotion to the church, a much welcome amplification system that has solved the difficult acoustics of the sanctuary was installed by his sons in memory of Mr. George C. Miller. A Pulpit Bible and brass offering plates in memory of Irma Richtmyer and a grand piano in memory of Arthur J. Peck Sr. were also given.

A beautiful communion table in memory of Mr. and Mrs. James Sproule was given by their family and decorative palms by Mrs. Roman Richards in memory of her husband. Also brass candelabra and flower vases were given by friends of the church and framed pictures of the barn in which the church was organized and the church building that preceded the present one were given by Miss Abigail O'Daniels to be hung in the entrance hall.

Following the death of Dr. Oakley A. Allen the beautiful parlor which he had desired for the church was planned and furnished by his family as a memorial to his more than forty years as an elder of this church.

A large lighted outdoor bulletin board that shines like a beacon at night, was placed near the southwest corner of the church by the family of Mrs. Mary Love Ellison in her memory.

In 1965 new windows were installed in the church sanctuary some of which were given as memorials and others by members of the church. Later all the windows in the church were likewise replaced.

On December fifth of that year a recognition service followed by a reception in Fellowship Hall was given honoring Mrs. David Love for thirty years service as choir leaders and Miss Abigail O'Daniels for fifty years service as

organist. Two windows on either side of the main entrance, one bearing the symbol of the organ and the other of Cecilia, patron saint of music were marked in their honor.

In September 1966 Mr. Ernest Tolman became choir director and Stephen Wood a former pupil of Miss O'Daniels became organist. Music racks in memory of Stephen's grandfather Phillip Kelley were installed back of the organ by his daughter, Mrs. Walter Wood. The following year Mrs. Ferne Barker became organist.

In 1961 the manse was redecorated making it a beautiful and livable home. At some time -- information as to exact dates seems to be unobtainable -- a new garage was built and the entire grounds surrounding the manse and church were landscaped and a parking lot for the use of the church members was made east of the church.

In June of this year Mr. Cartmell received a call to become Minister of Visitation for the First Presbyterian Church of Morristown, New Jersey, and decided to accept it to the sorrow of his parishioners here and at Moreland. On Sunday, June 23, following morning service a reception sponsored by the Women's Association of the Watkins Glen and Moreland Churches and the New Century Class was held in their honor in Fellowship Hall with about two hundred present including local ministers and their wives. A presentation of several money gifts was made to Rev. and Mrs. Cartmell and all wished them happiness in their new home and parish.

During this summer, 1968, the entire interior of the church sanctuary was renovated and refurbished with newly decorated walls, new pews and wall to wall carpeting bringing it up to date for the start of another period in our existence as a Christian church.