

## Fredonia's Methodists : The Early Years

By Douglas H. Shepard, 2011

The United Methodists of Fredonia quite rightly date their formal beginnings from 1811, the first organized class in the village. However, some acknowledgment should also be paid to those who went before and, in a sense, paved the way.

Although Western New York was within the bounds of the Philadelphia Conference from 1796 to 1812, in 1808 the Holland Purchase Circuit was established, taking in most of the territory west of the Genesee River. George **Lane** was given the charge. Learning of some Methodists newly settled in Sheridan, he set out to meet with them. He left Buffalo in a one-horse sleigh in late December 1808 or early January 1809 and overtook Mr. and Mrs. Daniel **Gould**, who were just returning from a trip to the east. The three finally made it to the **Goulds'** home in West Sheridan, where **Lane** stayed for a few days of preaching. While he was there, he formed a class, the first in Chautauqua County. It was made up of the **Goulds**, Stephen **Bush**, and Elijah **Risley**. So Fredonia may quite properly claim local participation in this early historic event.

The **Risleys** had taken an article from the Holland Land Company on 30 September 1806, moved to Fredonia in April 1807, and built a log cabin about at today's *257 West Main Street*. The location should be noted as the pioneer home of the first Fredonian to be formally identified with the Methodist faith. By 1810, Justin **Hinman**, who had come to Fredonia in 1806, joined the West Sheridan class. In the summer of 1810 he accompanied John P. **Kent** of the Villenova class to Lyons, NY, where the Genesee Conference was meeting, to try to secure a preacher for Chautauqua County. Three were appointed to the "Holland Purchase," two of whom served Chautauqua County: "Billy **Brown**" and Elijah **Metcalf**.

It was in 1811 that a Fredonia class was formed, which included Mr. and Mrs. Justin **Hinman**, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel **Gould**, Mr. and Mrs. William **Ensign**, Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah **Baldwin** "and a few others." (The **Risleys** had moved to Parkman, OH, at this time to start a distillery and did not return to Fredonia until three years later.)

To stay in touch with and to add adherents from the far flung, isolated settlers depended on two strategies, the circuit rider who brought the word through endless travel, making his rounds from cabin to settlement to cabin, and the camp meeting where it was the preachers who stayed put and the people who came to them for a gathering of singing, exhortation and professions of faith.

We have a brief reference to such a gathering in or near Fredonia in July of 1816. Unfortunately, these gatherings also attracted those who came only to scoff, threaten and physically attack the believers. The Rev. James B. **Finley** referred to them as "a band" that had gathered "and drove the people away." Other difficulties attended that 1816 camp meeting and they are summarized in an open letter of 18 February 1817, which was printed in the *Chautauque Gazette* of 11 March 1817:

*To all whom it may concern. Whereas, we the subscribers, after the Camp-Meeting held in the town of Pomfret, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> days of July last, did report things unfavorable to the characters of two Methodist Preachers, viz.*

*Messrs. Lemuel Lane & Robert C. Hatton, [probably the Rev. Lemuel Lane of Bradford, PA, and Robert C. Hatton, a preacher in the Erie Circuit in 1815 and 1816.] and whereas, after this, being convinced of our error, we did agree with Messrs. Jeremiah Baldwin, Daniel G. Gould and Thomas Morton, to drop the affair, and converse no more on the subject, and for the future, to be on our guard with respect to the interrogations we might receive from others — and in consequence of a friendly conference held this day, at the house of Thomas Morton, with Messrs. Jeremiah Baldwin, Daniel G. Gould, Lemuel Lane and Thomas Morton; by which we are convinced, and hereby acknowledge that we have not been on our guard as we ought to have been, when accosted by interrogators. [signed] Charles Morton, Cornelius Osborn, Pomfret, Feb. 18, 1817.*

Although we wish we knew more about this and other early camp meetings, we are certain of one thing. On 18 February 1817, Charles Morton, Cornelius Osborn, Jeremiah Baldwin, Daniel G. Gould, Lemuel Lane and Thomas Morton gathered at Morton's home, a large frame farm house on the site of today's 108 Central Avenue. (The current owners have discovered the foundations of the old house in their basement.) Thomas Morton was a brother-in-law of Richard Williams, Hezekiah Barker's partner in building the first saw and grist mills in Fredonia. Morton came here in 1812, six years after his sister and family had settled.

It was in the July following the 1816 camp meeting that another one was held in Fredonia, again threatened by a hostile group but with a very different outcome. The Rev. James B. Finley kept a diary of his circuit riding, including his attendance at various camp meetings in the summer of 1817. It gives some detailed insight into the practical workings of camp meetings of the time as well as a vivid picture of this one in particular. The Fredonia gathering ran from 24 through 28 July. "Brothers James M'Mahon and Smith accompanied me [Finley] to labor in word and doctrine. At this meeting we expected from the wicked much opposition, as they collected together a band the previous year [1816] and drove the people away. One of the rules for the government of the meeting was, that at the sound of the trumpet at nine o'clock at night all were to retire to their tents, and those who had no place to lodge were requested to leave the ground. At dark the rabble gathered, and one of their number was designated as their captain by a piece of white paper attached to his hat, and a white club in his hand. The company made but little disturbance until preaching was over. Seeing that there were indications of hostility on their part, I blew the trumpet, and requested all to go to their tents, while those who had none must leave the ground. The captain of this banditti refused to go, and summoned his men to come to his aid. I ordered the constable to take the captain a prisoner, but he swore he would knock down the first man that touched him. He had hardly finished the declaration when I seized him and threw him on the ground, and, disarming him, gave him over to the officer. The company seeing the fate of their captain fled in dismay from the ground. In a conversation with the prisoner I learned what his plans were, and how sadly he was disappointed in not being able to carry them out. He plead so hard for mercy, and promised so faithfully never to engage in such a wicked work again, that I let him go. We kept up the watch all night, fearing they might return, but they did not disturb us. Some were in favor of an attack, but one of the company reported that as I was a Kentuckian, I carried a long dirk in my waistcoat pocket, and that I would as soon stab a man as not. The hour for preaching arrived, and as there were rumors coming in from various quarters that the rowdies were gathering, I preached on the subject of civil and religious liberty. Of course

this led me to speak of our pilgrim fathers, and the danger and sufferings endured by them in crossing a watery deep to plant the standard of equal rights on this desert soil, and that they might leave unstained what here they found — freedom to worship God — they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their fame. I remarked if there were any in whom flowed the blood of '76 present to-day who would protect us in the exercise of our religious rights and privileges, to come over on our side and defend us from the rabble. Just at that moment Judge **Cushing**, who was sitting in the congregation, arose, and addressing the people, said, 'I have fought for this liberty, and I will maintain it with my life, and I give due notice, as a servant of my country, that I will enforce the laws of the State of New York to the utmost against anyone who shall disturb this people in their worship.' From this time on the meeting was the most orderly one I had attended. The Sabbath [July 27] morn broke upon the earth in all its sacred stillness. Brother **M'Mahon** commenced the morning services, and preached at eight o'clock in demonstration of the spirit and power. I followed at eleven o'clock, and Brother **Smith** at five. At every coming together of the congregation the work of the Lord progressed with power, and during the night in the tents many were born into the kingdom."

High drama indeed. It is particularly interesting to have confirmation that many other than Methodists attended these gatherings, and in this case specifically Judge Zattu **Cushing**, an unwavering Baptist. At the time he was 47 years old and had been a private in the Battle of Buffalo in the War of 1812.

Over the next four years the number and perhaps affluence of Fredonia's Methodists had increased enough that they moved to a more formal status. On 22 November 1821, no doubt after long and earnest discussion, it was agreed that six men meet to incorporate themselves as the "Trustees of the Bethel Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the town of Pomfret." The six were Isaac **Baldwin**, Otis **Ensign**, David **Gould**, Nathaniel **Reeder**, Griffin **Sweet**, and Sylvester **Wilson**. On 5 December 1821, **Reeder**, **Sweet** and **Wilson** representing the Trustees, had their declaration of incorporation recorded at the Court House. **Reeder** and **Wilson** signed; **Sweet** made his mark.

It would appear, then, from the wording of the papers of incorporation, that the Methodists in the area had already established themselves as the "Methodist Episcopal Church of Pomfret" although the exact date is not mentioned. Once the Trustees were in office able to do the business of the Congregation, a lot was purchased at today's *145 East Main Street*. The Rev. **Finley** has a diary entry for 1822 which notes, "Our people in Fredonia, N.Y., commenced the erection of a church this year, which was finished and dedicated in 1824. It was situated on East Hill, half a mile east of the village, on the south side of the Buffalo Road, most of our people living in that direction."

It is interesting to learn that local Methodists tended to be living on or near Fredonia's East Main Street at the time. For a brief picture of the street as it was then we turn to *The Fredonia Censor* of 28 January 1880. In it Levi **Risley** had an article called, "Fredonia in 1821 By an Old Resident," which gives us a detailed picture of the village. In his article he mentioned every building he could recall in existence in 1821. He began on the south side of West Main Street at today's village limits and worked his way east, then did the same for the north side, ending with the few buildings, homes or shops, on the side streets. For the south side of Main Street, he reached the old **Holly** tavern on the west corner of Eagle and East Main Street, then the drug store on the east corner, "next came the blacksmith shop of E. **Webster** [*45 East Main Street*].

From this to the hill the ground was low and wet, and all timber from the hill standing on that side to the corporation line.”

For the comparable section of the north side of East Main Street, **Risley** listed Dr. Squire **White's** office, then his residence — the large frame building that preceded part of today's White Inn — “ a little east was the house occupied by Arnold **Rupert** . . . . Then came swampy ground to the burying ground [Pioneer Cemetery]. East and over the hill was the Rev. Joy **Handy** place, and the last in the [modern] corporation was the Oliver **Barnes** place, afterward the **Moore** farm if that is in corporate grounds.”

There is little information about the church building itself. The *Censor* of 10 December 1823, in reporting on several buildings being put up, noted that “on the 29<sup>th</sup> ult. [29 November 1823] the new Methodist Meeting House, a small but neat building, also erected in this village during the past season was in like manner solemnly dedicated; the Rev. Gleason **Fillmore**, of Buffalo, being the officiating clergyman.” The only picture we have of the building is a sketch that was reproduced in the brochure for the Centennial Anniversary of 1911. Neither the source, nor artist, nor date is given for the sketch, which might be thought to be a generic rendering of a simple, old-style building, except for the unusual double doors at the entrance. The 1911 brochure mentioned that in the old church buildings “up until the last the custom prevailed of the men sitting on one side and the women on the other.” It is possible the doors represented two different entrances.

The brochure describes the church building as about 40 feet wide by 50 feet deep. Ellen **Adams** in her *Tales of Early Fredonia* says that it “was turned into a barn when the second church was built.” That may have been later in its career since the *Fredonia Express* of 1 July 1848 carried an ad for B.& C.E. Barkley & Co., furniture dealers, who were using the old church building, now moved to the east side of Green (now Cushing) Street and East Main Street, as their furniture store. Late in 1871 it was moved again. *The Fredonia Censor* of 17 January 1872 reported that “the old building on the corner of Green and Main streets, which in early days was a Methodist church, has traveled across the street on the H. D. Crane's Main street lot, where he will refit it for a dwelling house. **Crane** has sold the now vacant corner to James P. **Irving**, a D.W.&P. R.R. officer, for whom Capt. E. A. **Curtis**, architect, is now perfecting plans for a handsome residence to be erected there in the Spring.”

The Centennial Anniversary brochure adds that “after it [the church building] was abandoned as a church [it] was used for various purposes — paint shop, store house, barn, and later as a part of the old watch factory. That refers to the Howard Watch Co. at 88-96 *East Main Street* where Crane had moved the church building in 1872. The Howards bought the property and moved some of their buildings from their original location behind the Baptist Church on Temple Street in March 1880. They left in 1883, replaced by the Tabor Felt Factory. The Sanborn Insurance Company map of December 1896, the first to cover that part of the village, has a detailed outline of the buildings then on the ground. It is possible that the one-story room at the right rear on the Sanborn map was the 1822 church building. The entire complex burned down in September 1889.

There is one other piece of evidence provided, again by Ellen **Adams**. Her *Tales of Early Fredonia* were originally articles in *The Fredonia Censor*. The first one appeared in the issue of 16 October 1930. The one in which she mentioned that it “was turned into a barn when the

second church was built” appeared in the issue of 1 January 1931. However, by the time she came to write the piece on “Vanished Business Places” in the issue of 24 April 1934, she was able to add “Mr. Frank **Howard** tells me that the old Methodist church [building] was turned into a barn or store house and attached to the rear of the Felt Factory, not moved to his home lot.” (Frank **Howard** had remained in Fredonia after his brothers moved the watch company to Peoria and the patent medicine company to Buffalo. Miss **Adams** is saying that the old church building was attached to the back of the structure that became the Felt Factory after the watch company moved out.)

However, there may be still more to this saga of the first church building. A Universalist Association had been formed in February 1824 calling itself the “Universalist Society in the Town of Pomfret.” An 1834 entry in *Religious Records* at the County Court House mentions that the Universalist Society meets at the School House in [School] District 33. There are several notices in the *Censor* of meetings in the village including this striking one: “NOTICE. — Rev. David **Pickering**, of Buffalo, will preach by favor of Divine Providence at the Universalist Church in Green street, on Sabbath next the 23d inst. At 10½ o’clock in the forenoon, and 1½ o’clock in the afternoon. The Methodest [*sic*] Congregation will occupy the Stone School House [45 Temple Street] instead of their usual place of worship. Sept. 18, 1838.”

It very much looks as though the first Methodist church building had already made its way to the Green Street corner and was being transferred to or just used by the Universalist Society while the new Methodist Church building was being readied. Considering the relative size of the new structure, it is very likely that the older building was simply too small to hold the enlarged congregation.

On 6 January 1838, Trustees of the Bethel Society (Philo H. **Stevens**, Edward B. **Kingsley**, Otis **Luther**, Barzilla **Gould**, and Chauncey **Stone**) purchased from John **Samson** a lot (today’s 44 Center Street) on the west side of Nassau (Center) and the south side of Barker streets. The building was up and dedicated on 31 August 1839. The brief historical account in the 1911 Centennial Anniversary brochure refers to it as “more pretentious” than the earlier one. “The structure seems very plain to us today [1911], but for those years it was a large and desirable church property.” An account in the *Censor* of 28 May 1924 said that “at the time [it was] one of the most pretentious church buildings in the county.” By contrast the 1924 dedication program commented, “Although severely plain, it was adequate for the work of the Church at that time; and it gives us an interesting insight into the Methodist ideas of Church architecture at that period.” The accompanying photograph, which had also appeared in the 1911 publication, shows a large, two-story frame building on a very high foundation. After the building was given up, the *Censor* of 4 May 1870 commented that “the old Methodist church on Center street was a fair representation of the ideas of the Methodists preceding this generation, concerning the architecture of their church buildings. Severe simplicity was the rule.” That comment about architecture is made clearer by Ellen **Adams**.

“This church was rather unusual in arrangement, the assembly room not being on the ground floor, but reached by short stairs after entering the building. The pulpit was at the front so that the preacher stood with his back to the street and people entered from each side of the pulpit.” What the photograph shows is a flight of outside stairs on the broad side of the building leading to an entrance. That means that there was still another flight of stairs inside reaching to the second floor where the services were held. This odd interior arrangement may have been

changed at some point because, when the building was to be remodeled in 1858, *The Fredonia Censor* of 19 May 1858 reported that “the entrance is to be in the basement from which flights of stairs each side lead to the main room. The pulpit has been reconstructed and the gallery taken away, as the plan of congregational singing is adopted. The vestry room which was formerly in the upper story, has been transferred to the basement.”

Odd architecture or not, the building served for many years and in those years were many challenges and changes. One of the most divisive issues concerned slavery. Methodists, among others, struggled with it as a legal *vs.* moral issue, finally leading to the breakaway at the conference in Louisville, KY, in 1844, which led to the separate designation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

There were other, lesser problems as well as positive signs of local sociability. M. W. **Case**, writing about “Olden Time Methodism” in the *Censor* of 5 May 1897, focused on Portland during the pastorate of Elliott **Chapin** (1843-1844) and his successor, Rev. E. J. L. **Baker** (1845-1846), “an unsocial, austere man, the antipodes of **Chapin**.” The story continued, “It was perhaps during the first quarterly meeting of his pastorate that he showed an arrogant spirit and want of tact that made him still less popular.” (The account that follows is interesting more for the details it gives about church meetings in those days than the Rev. **Baker’s** lack of tact.) “In those days Portland and Fredonia circuits were closely united, in social ties at least, and when quarterly meeting was held in one town, many attended from the other circuit.

“Amongst those who never failed on these occasions to put in an appearance in Portland from Fredonia was Bro. **Moore**, a tailor, who surely is held in remembrance by many now living.” (James F. **Moore** was a tailor who opened his shop at 2 *West Main Street* in December 1835. He relocated in Portland by 1845 and was still there at the time of the 1850 Census with his wife, Emily, sons Wesley [of course] and Fletcher and daughter Mary.) “It was a bleak, cold, stormy day when the congregation met in Portland church for Quarterly Meeting. Love feast precedes the public service when members are supposed to report progress in the divine life. Usually the doors are closed during this service in order to maintain quiet. On this Sabbath morning Rev. **Baker** had ordered the doors closed but Simon **Burton**, who was stationed at the East door through which men entered the church (in those days men and women were not permitted to occupy the same pews), was not very obedient in keeping the door closed on account of the stress of weather. This did not please Bro. **Baker** and he peremptorily ordered the doors to be kept closed.

“Bro. Simon **Burton** went to his seat, but mild mannered a man as he was, he showed that the way he had been ordered by the Parson did not please him. Soon a team from Fredonia arrived, and Bro. **Moore** was one of the passengers. Now Bro. **Moore** had not for years missed a love feast in Portland and to go on without him was to play Hamlet without its star actor.

“So a brother in the church who did not properly revere the powers that be, opened the door for the benighted (I beg pardon, belated) Fredonians who had driven eight miles through storm and wind. Had Bro. **Baker** not been a preacher, one would have supposed by the way he ordered that rebellious brother not to open that door again that he was a trifle out of good humor. After love feast closed there was an intermission of half an hour before preaching, and Rev. **Baker** lost no time in collaring the brother who opened the door, and informed him that any more disobedience on his part would not be tolerated. The erring brother was not a rival of

Moses in meekness and he talked back, I regret to record, in a way that did not please the parson. To make matters still more unpleasant others joined in, excusing the act under the circumstances and that did not in the least soothe the parson. After the sermon, the audience was thunder struck to hear Rev. **Baker** allude to the morning scenes and he closed his remarks by saying that those who did not wish to abide by the rules of the church had better quietly withdraw and not sow the seeds of disorder and dissension. Bro. **Baker** in turn was thunder struck when the recalcitrant brother arose and said: ‘Please remove my name from the church paper Bro. **Baker**.’”

When the Sheridan Methodist Episcopal Church held its Centennial Celebration in March 1909, it included an address by George E. **McLaury** about what he called the Methodist Church economy and management of fifty and more years ago. The excerpts given here provide another picture of those early times.

“Many good people in these days are looking backwards to the pioneer days of Methodism, and longing for the gracious revivals, the shouts of victory, and the ingathering of the harvest of souls, to be repeated in these our days. They seem to see a halo of brightness surrounding those past events while they sing ‘The old time religion is good enough for me,’ and speak of ‘their Mother’s Bible,’ as though it contained the latent elements of righteousness sufficient to land them in the celestial kingdom with very little effort on their parts. They do not seem to realize that those were strenuous times, in which a strenuous people fought the battles of life to the finish, and did not compromise with the evil one as to their life here or their expectations as to their future lives.

“Let us examine the rigorous surroundings of those first years of the century and see what they tell us of comparative poverty, hard handed toil in barren fields, and continuous duty on the picket line facing the world, the flesh and the devil.

“First, in regard to the preacher:

“When one felt that he was called to preach the gospel, he went before his quarterly conference and procured a recommendation to the annual conference, where he remained two years on trial. . . . By the direction of the discipline he is to rise at 4 in the morning, spend an hour in reading the scriptures, meditation and prayer; also another hour in the same way in the evening. To spend at least five hours each day in reading useful books. . . . Not to eat more than was necessary as it tends to drowsiness; to choose water in preference to other drinks, and fast every week. In the public services not more than five or six verses should be sung at a time, the opening prayer not to occupy more than eight or ten minutes at most, while the love feast is to be limited to one and one-half hours. . . . The instructions are very explicit in regard to visiting from house to house by saying that ‘family religion is wanting in many branches’. . . . Having briefly taken into consideration the surroundings of the preacher, what shall we say of the membership? . . . . If the pastor led a strenuous life, so did the people. If the pastor was intensely religious, so were the people. If the loaves and fishes ran short in the pastor’s storehouse, so did those of the people. . . . All members were required to attend class meeting and while seekers were cordially invited to be present no loungers were allowed. . . . The class meeting was not for the purpose of giving testimonies alone, but the leader passed around the room and pausing before each member, and calling them by name, they were expected to stand and answer the question: ‘How does your soul prosper?’ . . . . Willful neglect of class was looked after by the preacher and, if persisted in, resulted in exclusion from the church, or the society as it was called in those days.

Admittance to love feast was by ticket furnished by the preacher in charge to members in good standing and they were required to fast on the Friday preceding the love feast. . . . It was emphatically directed that no tickets should be given to those who wore high hats, enormous bonnets, ruffles or rings.

“Then there was the Band, a religious society formed in 1738 and which flourished for about 100 years. Those societies were formed wherever four men or four women — never both together — could be found that were desirous of joining, and all must be married or all single. . . . They were to fast every week, wear no rings, earrings, necklaces, lace or ruffles, and they were to tell each other all their faults, both what they had seen themselves and also what they had heard from others. . . . As to the general rules in regard to the public services at the church, I find in the discipline of 1804 and also 1832 as follows: ‘There should be no exception to the rule requiring men and women to sit apart.’ Other denominations had enclosed pews for family sittings, but until 1860 Methodist men and women sat apart.

“Another matter to guard against was talking in the congregation before and after service. This was termed a great indecency. . . . In regard to singing, I found but little. It was to be congregational and led by the preacher or someone appointed by him and without an instrument. . . . The singing at quarterly meetings and camp meetings with good leaders was grand and inspiring, but in ordinary church services there was too much uncertainty as to where the leader would land before he got well under way.”

Unfortunately there are far too few accounts of this kind available to give us a sense of the real people and their real concerns behind the occasional brief newspaper item. One of the more practical concerns for Fredonia’s Methodists was the decision, which must have come only after long and careful consideration, to invest in a permanent parsonage. The property at today’s 35 *Barker Street*, across from the church building, was acquired and occupied by the various ministers for some sixteen years. The church building itself was extensively remodeled in the spring of 1858 and “open for worship” on 23 June 1858. This expensive effort was probably a direct outcome of the revivals called the Great Awakening of 1857-1858. One of the earliest local references to this national phenomenon is in the *Censor* of 10 March 1858. “A religious revival is in progress in this place at present with very promising results. There has been no apparent excitement attending it, but a deep feeling seems to pervade the religious part of the community. The only outward indication of it is the full attendance upon the meetings of the several churches, and the neighborhood meetings which have been commenced in different parts of the village. The Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist churches have had several accessions to their numbers. Last Sabbath seventeen were baptized and united with the Baptist church, 14 were connected with the Presbyterian, (3 by letter,) and some 25 have recently joined the Methodist church on probation.”

The article goes on to note similar events in Dunkirk and Jamestown and “We hear, also, of a similar state of feeling from other parts of the country.” Two weeks later the *Censor* reprinted an article from the *Jamestown Journal*. “We are informed, as to the results of the Religious interest in this place, that nearly four hundred have professed conversion. Of these nearly two hundred have joined the M. E. Church, and nearly one hundred the Baptist.” And the next issue noted that “the ‘great awakening’ as it is familiarly called, continues to extend with unabated interest.— In this village [Fredonia], meetings are held nearly every evening, and two prayer meetings are held each morning, which are well attended. An increasing interest appears



to be felt in this most important subject. A union prayer meeting will be held tomorrow, at 9, p.m., at the Presbyterian church.”

Another union prayer meeting was to be held at the Methodist church in Fredonia on 22 April 1858. From the Fredonia Academy's *Academist*, reprinted in the *Censor* of 21 April, came the report that “about one hundred persons have recently united with our various churches upon profession of their faith, and perhaps fifty more are intending soon to assume these sacred obligations. As new cases of conversion are almost daily disclosed, it is believed that the interest is not yet abating. Of the above about forty are members of this Institution [the Fredonia Academy].

“Prayer meetings are held in two of the churches at sunrise of each day, and a ‘Union Meeting’ on Wednesday afternoon of each week. There are also numerous evening meetings, not only in the churches, but also at private dwellings. A number of the young ladies and gentlemen of the Academy are accustomed to meet separately, for social prayer, at the vestries of the adjoining churches, during a part of each day’s intermission.”

On 5 May 1858: “The Religious interest in this village and vicinity still continues. On the last Sabbath, there were thirty-three received into the Presbyterian Church in addition to the fourteen received at the previous communion. Some fifty have been received into the Baptist Church by baptism, and about the same number on probation in the Methodist Church. Several more are expected to join these churches soon. There has never been known to be so much religious interest manifested in the churches in this place, as has been exhibited the past winter. As in other places the feeling has been manifested with little external indications of excitement, but a deep feeling has prevailed among the members of the churches, evincing the workings of a higher power than merely human agency.” (This and earlier comments about “excitement” are indications of the distrust many in the Protestant community felt about excessive emotional displays.)

The entries in the *Censor* about revival activities cease abruptly, and it is difficult to know if other news took precedence or if the revival fervor did in fact wane. After all, in a small village those who heard and responded to the word would soon be recorded and few would be left to add to the numbers. In fact, there is one set of records of the Fredonia Methodist Church’s success in the revival season, and its decline. The records of baptisms, probationers, marriages, etc. can be found covering the period from the late 1840s through the 1870s. Not every minister was as diligent in keeping the records up to date, so for 1854 to 1858 there is a gap in the record of those who were baptized. On 27 August 1854 the baptism of Catharine A. **Van Kleek** was entered in the record by the officiating clergyman, G. W. **Chesbrough**, who noted that those who stood witness were Mr. and Mrs. **Van Kleek** and the “Congregation.” Then followed the gap after which the revival period records begin with a long list of those baptized on 25 April 1858 by Jon. R. **Lyon** and witnessed by, what the Rev. **Ryan** entered as, “a Multitude.” That “Multitude” stood as witness on 27 June 1858, after which the record returned to the more usual entries of individuals and the congregation witnessing the rite. That revival had ended.

Of course there were other concerns that called more and more for people’s attention: slavery, abolition, free soil and states’ rights. As the 1850s gave way to the 1860s, the inevitability of war loomed larger and larger. Finally the Civil War was upon us, seemingly never to end, but it did, at last. In 1865 it was time to heal and time to return to more local

concerns. There were discussions in the latter half of 1865 about a new church building, and in August 1865, “the **Crane** property” was sold by D. and C. A. **Crane** to J. J. **Hummason**. The **Crane** house was to be the parsonage, and on that lot, adjoining the Baptist Church, the new Methodist Episcopal Church was to be built. The *Censor* of 16 August 1865 reported on this, and added that subscriptions had already been received “including some from the new comers to our village from Oildom [the Pennsylvania oil fields].”

Planning and building went on from that point, but the parsonage aspect was changed. What the *Censor* called the “**Crane** house” was a frame structure built by 1820, originally the home of Joseph and Ralph **Plumb**. On 11 October 1820, Joseph **Plumb** sold the house and lot to Stephen **Savage**. On 9 February 1830, **Savage** sold to Judge John **Crane**. The house can be seen on the 1851 map as a long rectangle in the middle of the lot, set well back from the line of Church Street. In the southwest corner a small square represents the one-story brick building used by Judge **Crane** as his law office. Both are marked on the 1854 map of the village. On the 1867 map of the village the house is identified as the “Meth. Parsonage” and the small building as the “Office.”

Originally, the *Censor* of 16 August 1865 reported, the intention was to make “the house a parsonage, and the lot adjoining the Baptist Church, the site of a new church edifice.” The lot between the **Crane** house and the Baptist Church can be seen on the 1867 map. It was then decided to put the church building further toward Center Street. To do that, the **Crane** house parsonage had to go. In order to clear the lot to allow the new church building to be put up, the front part of the parsonage was sold to H. T. **Wilbur**. The *Censor* of 28 August 1867 reported that he had moved it to his lot on the corner of Water and Canadaway streets, *45 Water Street*. (It can be seen on the 1881 village map and on the Sanborn Company maps from 1886 on.) The rear of the parsonage was moved and attached to the rear of the brick office. The 1875 Sanborn Company chart shows it as an L-shaped building, and, according to the color coding, it was a brick front portion with a wooden rear portion. It became the next parsonage and can be seen on the 1881 map of the village as well.

Although the lot was purchased in August 1865, and although the old parsonage at *35 Barker Street* was sold in April 1866, and although the old **Crane** house was then used as the parsonage, it took much longer for the new church building to be raised. Along with the subscription efforts, plans had to be drawn and accepted. The *Censor* of 15 May 1867 reported a set of plans had been made (and, presumably, accepted) “and it is proposed to proceed to the erection of the edifice this season. By 9 October grading on the site was under way “under the charge of Mr. **Wiley**. The contract for building will probably be closed very soon, as the walls are intended to be erected before winter.” A 19 February 1868 article about various building plans in the village said the Methodist Church foundations had been laid the previous fall, adding “Capt. [Enoch] **Curtis** is making most of the plans [for buildings to go up in 1868 including the church].”

On 22 July 1868, we had the ebullient bulletin that “the main wall of the new M. E. church is completed and the towers are towering.” By 25 November it was “rapidly approaching completion.” Finally, on 12 May 1869 Bishop Matthew **Simpson** and the Rev. B. I. **Ives** conducted the dedicatory services in the new edifice on Church Street.

One of the most significant activities of the following years for members of the Fredonia Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as of other denominations, had to do with the Temperance Movement. Probably due to the increasingly public roles of women during the Civil War, what had been an almost exclusively male-dominated effort now saw women coming to the forefront. For example, the locally re-organized Sons of Temperance of June 1867 became the Sons and Daughters of Temperance. In December 1873, Dr. Dio **Lewis** gave a Friday lecture on healthy living for young ladies. He was then asked to speak on Temperance, which he did on Sunday at a union meeting which led to the formation of the Women's Temperance Union of Fredonia, later renamed the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. A good number of the founders were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Although the women had little success in ridding Fredonia of alcohol, they persevered. Unfortunately, their 1878 efforts at repeating the revival atmosphere of 1873 led to one of the most unpleasant periods in the history of Fredonia's churches. (It is ironic that just before the trouble started, the Rev. A. J. **Merchant** issued a *Hand-Book of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Fredonia New York* containing a Roll of Church Members. There were 206, with their street addresses included "to facilitate mutual acquaintance and Christian Fellowship.") The local W.C.T.U. invited reformed alcoholic and gospel temperance lecturer O. D. **Bacon** to speak at a union meeting on 10 February 1878 with the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian ministers sitting on the platform when he spoke. The Clerk of the Baptist Church, A. Z. **Madison**, noted, "Few, if any, in the audience, but what were shocked from the first, with the harsh declamatory & denunciatory manner of the speaker." **Bacon** claimed to be speaking what Jesus directed him to say. His method, a friend explained, "is to begin by denouncing all the ministers and church members as hypocrites and liars, and thus gain the sympathy of the lower and irreligious classes, get them converted by the **Bacon** method and then call in the churches to absorb the converts." This disruptive activity continued into June, although **Bacon** had to speak at Fredonia's Union Hall after the three churches refused him further access. Supporters and protestors drew further apart and the congregations were in a turmoil. Some forty of the original W.T.U. members withdrew from the organization while the current officers strongly supported **Bacon**. More women than men were his supporters, including Martha **Aldrich**, who had grown up in and been much involved in the Methodist Church. The Church's records note that she, along with a number of others, withdrew. "Supposed to have joined the Free Methodists." In fact she had joined the Dunkirk Forestville Class and in 1881 purchased the lot and helped establish the first Free Methodist Church of Fredonia on Free Street (today's Lambert Avenue).

**Bacon** finally left and the three congregations gradually got back to normal, although hard feelings must have remained for a good while. It was probably a pleasant relief to return to more mundane, non-explosive matters.

*The Fredonia Censor* of 25 October 1882 explained that a new "M. E. parsonage is now assured and Rev. Mr. **Kummer** and family have vacated the old building and gone to board with Mrs. **Van Ness** on Spring street [*10 Spring Street*]." The article adds, "the Society is wise in erecting a new building, using the material of the old one where it is available." Prescott **Martin** bought the wooden portion of the parsonage and moved or rebuilt it at *89 Center Street* on a lot he had earlier purchased from Mrs. Emily **Carroll**. (The lot is marked "Mrs. **Carr**" on the 1867 map of the village.) Both the new parsonage and Prescott **Martin's** building were being worked on according to the *Censor* of 5 April 1883, and the issue of 7 November 1883 noted that the

new parsonage, dedicated to the memory of John P. **Hall**, had been completed “this year.” Obed **Edson’s History** (1894), p.491, states that the parsonage was “partly furnished, the furnishing being completed during the short but popular pastorate of Dr. J. Z. **Armstrong** [1887].” It can be seen on the 1886 and 1891 Sanborn Company maps. In the period between 1891 and 1896 the building was enlarged significantly. It survived until it was razed in 1965. The old giving way to the new, but also a poignant reminder of what had come before that made the present possible.