



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
22 CHURCH STREET  
GOUVERNEUR, NY 13642

FPCGH-10A

FROM CENTENNIAL SOUVENIR  
HISTORY OF GOUVERNEUR 1905  
PAGE 173

## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

On May 24, 1817, seven years after the organization of the Baptist Church, and eleven years after the arrival of the first settlers, the Presbyterian Church had its birth. Hence it has a history lacking but twelve years of a century.

The church was founded with six name upon her roll: William Cleghorn, Jonathan Colton, Elijah Hough, William Colton, Mrs. Betsey Colton and Mrs. Hannah Colton. These names deserve to be perpetuated, as they are the beginning of a church life, whose influence for good in this community is beyond the computation of any man.

The church was formed under the supervision of Rev. Nathaniel Dutton, of Champion.

Two months after the church's inception the first sacrament was administered to twenty-two members.

Nearly three years elapsed before the church was legally constituted a society with corporate power, which was accomplished April 20, 1820. During these three years they had neither pastor nor stated preaching.

Reading meetings were held nearly every Sabbath, and even printed sermons were so scarce that "Burder's Village Sermons" were read and re-read to the congregation, but it is recorded that religious privileges were highly appreciated and thankfully enjoyed.

So far they had no house of worship. In 1820 the first meetinghouse was erected. It is thus described: "It was enclosed, a floor laid, seats were constructed of slabs with the flat side upwards, and stool legs." Here, with unplastered walls, without a stove in winter, the congregation worshiped for five years.

In carts and sleds drawn by oxen, these people came to this tabernacle punctually and regularly, some of them from a distance of five miles.

Thus they struggled on until their hearts were made glad by the settlement of Rev. James Murdock as their first pastor. He served the church faithfully for four years, and it grew and prospered.

In 1824 the first rude structure was replaced by a more comfortable building. Up to this time the membership did not exceed seventy-five. In 1825 the church

experienced a work of grace, which is historic through the labors of the noted evangelist, Rev. Chas. G. Finney, with the result of eighty persons added to its number.

Mr. Murdock was succeeded by Rev. Richard C. Hand, who continued in the church six years. He was greatly beloved by the people and richly blessed in his labors. Following his pastorate, the church was without a pastor for two years.

In 1843 Rev. B. B. Beckwith was called to be the pastor. "Here seemed to have ended the troubles of the church and it now entered upon a career of steady and useful habits, growing and strengthening from year to year."

The same year in which Mr. Beckwith became the pastor of the church, the building of a new house of worship was begun, and completed in 1844. After a long and fruitful pastorate of twenty-three years, Mr. Beckwith was compelled to resign by failing health. He was succeeded by Rev. N. J. Conklin, March 12, 1866. The ministry of Mr. Conklin is fresh to a large number of the present membership, and precious to all who were associated with him. Of rare executive ability, strong in faith and love for Christ, a genial friend and faithful pastor, the church during his ministry enjoyed great prosperity. A new parsonage was built and the church enlarged and the membership grew from 179 to 297. Mr. Conklin preached his farewell sermon in 1879.

A call was then tendered Rev. Tryon Edwards, who entered upon his labors February 1880, and closed them in 1886. A scholar of exceptional learning, a writer of no mean ability, a gracious and godly man, his memory is cherished here with esteem.

The present pastor, Rev. William F. Skinner, received from the church a unanimous call and was installed in June 1887. He came to us in the ardor of his youth. He remains with us in the strength and vigor of maturity. It behooves us not to speak too much here of his warm heart, his thorough culture and his true piety. Suffice it to say that we hope he may long be the last pastor. Through his faithful labors, the church has nearly doubled its membership since his ministry began, numbering now 445, and more than double its beneficences. Through his influence the people were inspired to build and pay for the spacious and costly edifice it now occupies.

Of the Sunday School with upwards of 300 members, its missionary work and its Christian Endeavor Society, there is not space to speak here.

The beautiful parsonage just east of the church is a recent gift to the Presbyterian Society from Mrs. Myra A. Dean and her daughters. END