

Gaines Congregational Church History **1834-2009**

Time, oh time
Turn back your pages,
Tell of our church,
Down through the ages!

The first recorded religious activity, in Gaines, was a Sabbath-School held in a schoolhouse in 1817. This was also the meeting place for Congregational & Baptist Missionaries and Methodist Circuit Riders who at this same time came along the road. In 1824, our forefathers built, in the village of Gaines, the first house for public worship between the Genesee & Niagara Rivers on the Ridge Road. The Baptists & Congregationalists met at this meeting house on alternating Sundays until 1834. In that year, the Congregationalists decided to erect a building of their own, which they did at a cost of \$2500, on the site where the present building stands. The new church was a wooden structure with tall steeple standing 80 feet from the ground. This was a landmark in the community for over 100 years.

At a meeting, on March 26, 1846, it was voted that anyone wishing to build a carriage shed could do so – at their own expense – on the North or west sides of the lot. “Sheds must be HOG PROOF!!”

In 1847, the Congregationalists were divided as to their feelings about slavery & temperance. One group broke away and in December 1847, the 1st Free Congregational Church of Gaines was formed. (Free to denote it from 1st Congregational Society AND to show their stand against slavery & the use of intoxicating liquors) The organization started with a list of 12 members and by 1854, had grown to a membership of 99. The Congregationalists had in the meantime joined with the Presbyterians of Gaines. Also during this year, a 900 lb. bell was placed in the steeple.

In 1864, the 1st Free Congregational Church ceased. By February of that year a new religious society was formed uniting members from the Congregational Presbyterians & the 1st Free Congregational Church. This group became The Congregational Church of Gaines.

Throughout the next few years some members were brought before the board for Breach of Covenant. They had to answer to charges of intemperance, Sabbath breaking and general Christian deportment. If they did not repent of their sins & return to Christian duty, they were excommunicated without further action.

To offset monies needed for the ministers salary, the members paid annual pew rentals. The members drew lots for the pew seating. This was eventually eliminated because they didn't want to discourage anyone from coming to church. In 1899 they adopted raising money by the envelope system.

Starting in 1900, the church was redecorated and repaired many times. It was wired for electricity. Many memorial items and donations were given. Included were an organ, a communion table, pews, new carpet, dishes, and an oil stove for the kitchen. In 1914, a large stained glass window at the front of the church and three windows on both the east and west sides were installed. Also donated were Collection plates made of olive wood purchased in the Holy Land by a member while visiting there.

Reported November 4, 1929 – the average weekly collection was \$1.00.

November 18, 1929, a special meeting was held, resolved church to be closed on account of finances. In September 1930, a local retired minister started working at a rate of \$10.00 per Sunday. By December of 1931 the treasurer reported the church was no longer in debt.

December of 1934, the Church Centennial was observed at the annual meeting. Rev. Charles Burroughs, a former minister, returned to give the address at this special occasion.

Due to weakening & disrepair, the tall steeple had to be removed in 1938. It was replaced with a new belfry to house the 900 lb. bell. For a number of years, church attendance and activity was at a low – due to WWII etc. The church could not afford a full time pastor so they shared a minister with another local church for the Sunday worship services. In 1945 it was decided to obtain the services of student ministers from the Rochester Colgate Divinity School. The church began to come alive again.

The years 1947-50 saw the entire interior of the church redecorated, the front porch repaired, new heating system installed; Sunday school grew, and a choir was organized. And as the winter of

1950 approached, the people of Gaines Congregational Church and their pastors were proud of their accomplishments.

Then at 4am Christmas morning 1950, a passing motorist discovered THE CHURCH WAS ON FIRE and set out an alarm. The church and its entire contents burned to the ground. The firemen were able to save the house next door because they pumped water from a 100,000-gallon pond. A pond, which the Gaines Grange had built on the south side of the Ridge shortly before this time for such occasion since there were no water lines yet. It was said that the inside west wall of said house was too hot to hold your hand on it. People from the community who had gathered, said the stained glass windows were absolutely beautiful with the fire burning behind them. Members of the grange immediately offered their hall for church services. And while the church ashes still smoldered Christmas services were held in the morning and a Cantata was performed that evening. Sunday services continued there for many weeks.

There was no question whether the church should be rebuilt. Plans were put into action at once. Donated lumber from nearby woods was secured. Volunteers came forward to help and the new church was started in 1951, on the same foundation as the old church. The outgoing support from the surrounding communities was unbelievable. A fund was established for the many donations, insurance return and the income generated by the numerous fund raising activities. It was a memorable occasion on January 27, 1952, when the first service was held in the dining room of the new church. The sanctuary was completed with a dedication service September 14, 1952, using folding chairs and no carpeting.

In 1956, a decision was made to build a new parsonage, west of the church for future ministers. With volunteers, donated timber and a lot of hard work, by the summer of 1957 the minister & his wife were able to move into the partially completed new parsonage.

For several years the church continued to have bare floors and used folding chairs instead of pews in the sanctuary. During this time donations and memorials were given of furniture and equipment. In 1962, the sanctuary was completed with installation of wall-to-wall carpeting and pews.

The membership of the Church School had outgrown the available space by 1964. Plans were discussed to expand to provide more classrooms. The plans were approved and again with many invaluable volunteers hours, the dedication of five new classrooms took place on February 13, 1966.

The church remained very active for several years. The beauty of the church sanctuary was enhanced greatly with the replacement of the plain windows by stained glass windows starting in March 1977. The last window was installed November 30, 1979 with a dedication service held February 3, 1980.

Several improvements were made over the years including a minister's study in 1986, created from one of the upstairs classrooms.

The Gaines Congregational Church was able to glorify God by the placement of a steeple on our building. This was made possible through memorials and donations for the cause. It was a very cold morning, December 29, 1989, when a truck pulled up carrying our steeple. Several church members witnessed as the men who brought the steeple, worked effortlessly raising the steeple to the roof. And lastly, carefully hoisting the brilliant gold cross to be placed at the very top. We were all happy to partake of a hot venison lunch afterward.

In 1991, the stairway leading from the kitchen to the sanctuary was removed as the start of a complete facelift for the kitchen. This enlargement gave extra room needed when putting on dinners.

In October 2003, we proudly added a ramp and new entrance to the west side of the church, so everyone could attend events at the Gaines Congregational Church. At the dedication service, we also dedicated the foyer carpet, red doors and the large print bibles. The latest improvement to the building was the installation of an elevator, which again helps us to become more handicap accessible.

We are so lucky to have such a rich church history of dedicated and devoted people, who carried on the Lord's work, not only within the church, but also in our community for 175 years! May the Gaines Congregational Church family continue our faithful devotion to the work of God for years to come!

Ministers from 1831 - 2009

Congregational - Prior to 1834

Fairbanks
Cook
Winchester
Rawson
Evans
Goodyear
Bates

Starting 1834

Presbyterian

Byington, Joel
Hurlbert
Burge, David
Hovey, J. Parsons

Congregational

Buttolph
Short, H.N.
Dewey, William
Shafer

Presbyterian

Bottolph (Feb & March)
Barris, J.S.
Paine
Judson, D.F.
Hoyt, J.D.B.
Keeler

Congregational

Wilder, M.H.
Higley, H.M.
Eggleston, R.S.
Burt, C.W.
Anderson, George

Fry, Holland
Merrick, S.G.
Johnson, C.C
Ashley, A.W.
Heal, Edward G.
Burroughs, C.H.

White, George
Miller, John
Pickett, Louis
Kelley, Irvin
Dick, Robert
Rote, Carl
West, Richard
Place, Ronald
Minott, John
Branton, James

Asst. Pastors

Olsen, David
Broadhurst, Art

Stokesbury, Edward

Asst Pastors

Pridonoff, John
Harris, Gary
Barrett, Jim
Johnson, Marty

Shaeffer,
McQuinn, Kenneth
Nichols, Frank
Covell, Roger
Spann/Kuester, Hilda
Guenther, Nancy
Thomas, Scott
Hodges, Susan
Mowatt, Robert
Eilers, Richard
Sage, Mary

Nichols, Frank
Samborski, Neil
Gardner, James
Rieley-Goddard, Jon