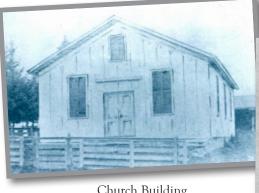


In celebration of Pearce's Sesquicentennial 2010



Church Building 1860-1888



The chill of the long December Western New York nights seemed to mirror the mood of the country. The election of Abraham Lincoln on November 6, 1860, with only 39.7 percent of the popular vote in a four party race for president reflected the division of the United States over the issues of the day, which included popular sovereignty and slavery. South Carolina was poised to exit the Union and did so on December 20, 1860. Ten other states followed by February 1, 1861.

Western New York was not immune to divisions over the issues that polarized the nation. The Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church struggled with how to maintain some unity while many of the leading pastors and laymen were divided over such issues as "how to address slavery" and "how to maintain fidelity to the founding principles of John Wesley." In the midst of these issues, several clergy boldly spoke against slavery and for the principles of free seats in churches, transparency in church business actions, and preaching that spoke to religion that changed peoples' lives. Many of those clergy and laymen faced censure in the Genesee Conference and were eventually forced to leave the Methodist Episcopal Church. In August of 1860, a group of those clergy and laymen held a gathering meeting in Pekin, New York, to organize the "Free Methodist Church."

The name "Free Methodist" was chosen for a number of reasons. First, the new church stood firmly against the institution of slavery.

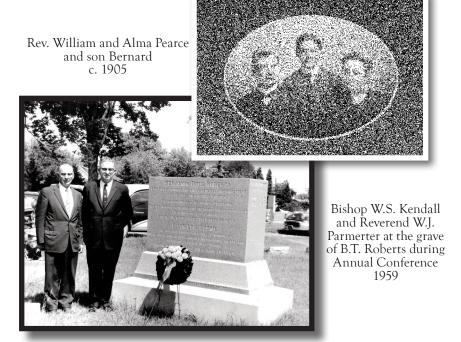


Another issue of the day was the payment for pews. It was a common practice in a number of churches, including the Methodist Episcopal Church that pews were rented as a method of raising funds for the church. The better seats in a sanctuary (closest to the source of heat at the front) were rented for larger amounts and were usually occupied by the wealthier members of a congregation. Free Methodists opposed the use of rental of pews for both its favoritism to the rich and the lack of offerings to support the work of the ministry. Two other issues that sparked the name "Free Methodist" included a desire to have the business of the church done in open meetings rather than by those members who were also in secret societies who had the habit of making church decisions in secret meetings. The last issue was a desire for "free worship" as opposed to services that were lifeless and dead in formality.

One of the men expelled by the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for attending a Layman's Convention in 1858 where the issues of the day were discussed was Claudius Brainerd from the North Chili Methodist Episcopal Church. North Chili was a small farming community on the western edge of Monroe County. An inn that served as a stage stop and a few farmhouses plus the Methodist Episcopal Church made up the community on the road to Buffalo. The members of the church followed the controversy in the Genesee Conference closely. It was a time when even attending a layman's convention to find out more information divided groups into "for and against." From 1858 to the fall of 1860, some of the North Chili congregation met in a "band" at Claudius Brainerd's home under the leadership of Levi Wood, who was an elder in the Genesee Conference.

In the fall of 1860 this group decided to align with the fledgling Free Methodist Church. On January 15, 1861, the First Society of the Free Methodist Church of North Chili (which is still today the official name of Pearce Memorial Free Methodist Church) was formally organized with 12 members. Those first members were Mr. and Mrs. Claudius Brainerd, Mr. and Mrs. John Prue, Mr. and Mrs.





William Porter, Mr. and Mrs. James Stowe, Thomas Hannah, Martha Hutchings and Mrs. Loder. Shortly thereafter, the first church building was erected on the north side of the Buffalo Road just east of the North Chili Cemetery. This building was approximately twenty-eight by forty feet. For an old history of Monroe County, a Mrs. Sally Hutton Wheeler recounted her memories of that first building and her father, who was the song leader for those early worshipers. Mrs. Wheeler noted that her father, James Hutton, knew his song book from "cover to cover."

The first pastor to this new congregation was Rev. Daniel M. Sinclair, who was also appointed pastor to the Rochester Free Methodist Church. By the next year, the North Chili congregation was assigned to the Parma District and shared pastors with churches in that district, with one pastor living in Parma Center and another pastor living in Greece. It was not until the year 1904 that the North Chili congrega-



tion had its own solo pastor appointed to the church. The first pastor appointed to the church was Benson Howard Roberts, who was also serving as the president of Chesbrough Seminary, the forerunner to Roberts Wesleyan College.

By 1886 the congregation had grown sufficiently to need a larger facility. An article in the Free Methodist written by Benson Roberts reported, "The time has come at last when we are to have a new church in Chili. The money is all pledged, and the work will begin, I suppose, after harvest. This has long been needed. The congregation has long since outgrown the capacity of the present church building. We shall be glad to have a decent and commodious house for worship for ourselves and for our friends." This second church was erected near our present location and was approximately thirty two by sixty feet. When the main building of Chili Seminary burned in 1890, the church became the location of the seminary campus until Roberts Hall was built in 1894. Ellen Stowe Roberts (the wife of Bishop B.T. Roberts the founder of both the Free Methodist Church and what became Roberts Weslevan College) noted in her diary that she helped take up the carpets in the church building so that it could be used for the seminary.

The 1886 building was first enlarged in 1918 with the addition of a partial basement and two Sunday School rooms, a vestibule, and some stained glass windows. Also at that time, a furnace was installed along with electricity. The era of stoves and kerosene lamps came to the end in the North Chili congregation just as World War 1 was drawing to its close.

The Jazz Age and Roaring Twenties were marks of the years following the Great War. The congregation at North Chili continued to grow as its members responded to the changing world. Although street lights and telephones came to the community, as well as radio and modern communication, the desire of the North Chili Free Methodist Church remained focused on bringing people to faith in Christ. In 1936, in spite of the Great Depression and its effects seen both in the local community and around the world, the church build-

> Second Enlargement of North Chili's Building

1936



Church Building 1936-1945

ing was again enlarged due to both growth in the congregation and the desire to reach more people for the Gospel. The building was moved about 45 feet north of its location on the corner of Buffalo Road and Orchard Street and became the center of a much larger building. A full basement was constructed that contained Sunday School rooms, a coat room, restrooms, library and a secretary's office. Film archives on the campus of Roberts Wesleyan College show some of the construction of the church with a team of horses being used to dig out what would become the basement. That building was dedicated on August 22, 1937. The leaders of the congregation hoped that soon the church would be able to accommodate 500 people—a remarkable step of faith considering that the entire North Chili community was about 500 people at that time.

Sunday, December 7, 1941, was a dark day for the United States. People in the North Chili community heard the startling news in the afternoon that the United States had been attacked at the naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Surely those gathered to worship that Sunday evening wondered at how the world would change over the years of war. The young men of both the college and the local community





William Pearce (center) as seen in the May 31, 1942, issue of the Democrat and Chronicle on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Chesbrough Seminary.

would be called to serve and die for their country. The congregation prayed for their sons and daughters at war and continued to serve the community by their steadfast faith. That faith was firm even in the face of the disaster of February 1945; just as the news from the war was becoming ever more positive, the church building in North Chili burned to the ground. Just eight years old and in good repair, a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the building completely despite the efforts of volunteer firefighters. Immediately, Roberts College offered Cox Chapel as a place for the congregation to worship—repaying an almost 50-year-old favor.

As plans were first formulated for a new church building, some thought was given to building an auditorium and classroom building on the Roberts campus with the church using a college facility on Sunday and Wednesday evenings for church events. However, after much consideration, it was decided that a new church building on the church site would be erected with ten classrooms for the college to use during the week. Plans were then drawn for a new church building in the shape of a cross. Contained in the building would be a large sanctuary that could seat 500 at worship along with two side rooms that could be used for overflow crowds. In addition to the sanctuary and classrooms, there was kitchen space, designated pastor offices, and library. During the week, the classrooms were to be known as



New Building Dedicated & Named Pearce Memorial Church

Pearce Hall and used by the college, which, through gifts, loans and fund raising efforts, paid for about half of the cost of the structure. The church congregation, through sacrificial giving and a mortgage of \$75,000, raised the rest of the funds for the construction. In addition, the men of the congregation, under the leadership of Pastor W.J. Parmerter and building superintendent Jessie Worbois, donated thousands of hours of labor to the project to keep construction costs as low as possible. Mr. Worbois and the men of the congregation made the pews for the sanctuary in Mr. Worbois' shop on Orchard Street. Nearly 1,000 people attended the dedication service of this new building and paid tribute to the hard work, dedication, and cooperation of both the college and the church in erecting a facility to be used to God's Glory.

It was at this time that the congregation, which numbered 250 plus college students during the school year, decided to be known as Pearce Memorial Church in honor of Bishop William Pearce, a North Chili resident who served for 39 years as a Bishop in the Free Methodist Church...the longest tenure of any Free Methodist Bishop. Bishop Pearce was born in 1862 in Cornwall, England, and emigrated to the mines of Michigan as a young man. Finding that mining work was not his life's calling, Pearce moved to California and in 1886 came in contact with the Free Methodist Church. The passion for lost souls of those early Free Methodists so engaged Pearce that he joined the Free Methodist Church and shortly afterwards began to preach by wagon and on foot to miners in the Gold Rush. After ministering in California for a number of years, Rev. Pearce and his wife Alma accepted an appointment to the Jamestown, New York, Free Methodist Church in 1904. They, along with their son Bernard, moved to the North Chili area in 1905 when he became District Elder. In 1907 his wife Alma was severely injured in a carriage accident on the gravel Buffalo Road near the cemetery. Although her injuries were cleaned, she developed lockiaw and died. When Pearce was elected Bishop of the Free Methodist Church in 1908, he was heard to remark, "If only Alma had lived to see this."





Easter 1953 in Parmerter

Bishop Pearce was known as an outstanding intellectual in spite of having limited formal education. His preaching was thoroughly grounded in Scripture, and he was known for his voluminous vocabulary as well as his joy to serve the Lord and to see souls coming to the cross of Christ. Many a more educated leader in the Free Methodist Church of his era looked to Bishop Pearce for his wisdom and knowledge both of the Bible and of men. Bishop Pearce retired from the bishopric in June of 1947 and died in September 1947, in Rochester, New York. His influence was so strong in the congregation at North Chili that it only seemed logical to the leaders of the church to dedicate the 1951 building in his honor.

Again, the congregation took seriously its commitment to serve the community and to lead people to Christ and by 1963, it was obvious that the church needed to be enlarged again. Once again, plans were drawn for a new sanctuary that could accommodate 1,500 with space for a choir, a large fellowship hall and modern kitchen as well as additional Sunday School classrooms, office space, and a library. Under the leadership of the senior pastor Elwyn Cutler, the congregation of some 500+ began to make plans for the addition that was completed in June 1965 and formally dedicated in October 1965. The former sanctuary was renamed Parmerter Chapel in honor of Rev. W.



J. Parmerter's years of ministry at Pearce. The sanctuary was remodeled in 1994 as the church continued to respond to changing needs in its congregation and community. In fact, some have said that the church is on a continuing remodeling project in order to serve the needs of each decade more adequately.

The leadership of the church continued to work to fulfill the mission statement of the church "to make disciples." A vibrant missions program has been part of the history of the church from its earliest days with local members of the congregation supporting missions work it has known from the 1880s to this present day. In the 1980s, members of the congregation began a nursery school as an outreach to the local community as well as a service for members of the congregation. Those efforts eventuated in the Pearce 4 Kids that we know today as a fully licensed day care, a before-and after-school program for elementary school children and the Pearce Nursery School that is known throughout our region as one of the finest nursery schools available for families.

Always responsive to the needs of society, Pearce Church initiated programs for those who grieve; those who face illness and cancer; Stephen Ministry, which is a ministry of listening; programs for those in addiction; a food cupboard ministry; as well as a site for a number of community services, including food programs for mothers and children and the Red Cross.

It was in response to the needs of our community that the church embarked on an ambitious addition to the church facility in 2000 that included a full size gym, additional classrooms, a coffee shop, and a large foyer that could accommodate fellowship and friendship opportunities. Dedicated in September 2001, midst the grief of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the addition serves the community as well as the college and church daily. No longer do church buildings serve primarily on Sunday and Wednesday nights, rather the ministry of the church takes place daily and the use of the buildings reflects that desire to serve.

Of course, at this point in Pearce's history it is difficult to envision





what lies ahead. Who could have foreseen, back when the congregation's founders met in the Brainerd home in 1858, the impact the church would have in the coming decades? Just think if those original twelve members could walk through Pearce's facility today, sit in one of the Sunday morning worship services, or hear the stories of the many individuals whose lives have been touched by this ministry.

One cannot even begin to imagine what Pearce may look like in 2160. But if the Lord does hold back the climax of history and grant another century and one half to this congregation, the transformation of Pearce will probably be as dramatic to today's members as these past decades have proven to be.

So as members of the congregation pause at this time in Pearce's history, it is appropriate to invoke God's continued guidance and blessing on this particular church. Perhaps the prayer for Pearce this day, should include the sentiments of the Apostle Paul as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, a congregation he had helped found and a people he dearly loved. He asked God: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established together in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:16-19, TNIV)

Oh, may it be so!



Pearce Lead Pastors

1860-61 Daniel M. Sinclair 1862-62 J. W. Reddy, A. Phelps 1862-63 William Manning, James McAlpine 1863-64 A. G. Terry, G. W. Humphrey 1864-65 S. H. Lowe, I. C. White, Robert Able 1865-66 A. H. Greene, Robert Able 1867-68 A. H. Greene 1868-69 G. W. Coleman, W. H. Tretrise 1869-70 J. W. Reddy, W. H. Tretrise 1870-71 J. W. Reddy, J. Robinson 1872-74 O. O. Bacon, Levi Wood 1875-76 William Manning, J. Walton, Levi Wood 1877-78 C. C. Eggleston, M. C. Burritt 1879-80 W. Inglesby, A. B. Matthewson 1881-82 W. Inglesby, O. O. Bacon 1882-83 G. W. Worthington, A. B. Burdick, O. O. Bacon 1884-85 A. Burgess, E. E. Adams 1885-86 J. G. Terrill, William Jones 1886-88 W. W. Browne, L. D. Perkins 1886-88 E. C. Best, S. K. J. Chesbrough 1889-90 LeRoy Barmore 1890-92 R. S. Phillips, LeRoy Barmore, O. C. Blowers 1893-94 L. D. Southworth, J. Robinson 1894-95 J. Robinson, F. W. Southworth 1895-97 William Manning, F. W. Southworth 1897-99 A.H. Bennett, W.T. Wess 1899-1902 W.W. Browne, L. Barmore, C. E. Pike 1902-03 F. A. Perkins, C. E. Pike

20

1903-04 Benson H. Roberts 1904-05 C. H. Eggleston 1905-06 F. E. Pond

Pearce Lead Pastors Continued

1906-10 J. H. Harmon 1911-13 C. L. Howland 1913-15 C. W. Bacon 1915-18 W. G. Worboys 1918-19 C. A. Kress 1919-22 L. A. Southworth 1922-24 T. S. Simpson 1924-28 W. J. Parmerter 1928-31 W. G. Worboys 1931-33 B. N. Miner 1933-34 R. M. Cooley 1934-39 C. B. Wilkins 199-43 H. E. Moorhouse 1943-46 F. M. Hendricks 1946-55 W. J. Parmerter 1955-61 Lowry McKeown

1961-72 Elwyn Cutler
1972-78 James A. Mannoia
1978-84 Raymond L. McGinnis
1985-1993 Gary R. Walsh
1993-2000 Arthur Brown
2000-08 Peter Knappen
2008-2017 Walter S. Fleming
[2017-present Roger Haskins *added after original printing]

Originally the church was part of the Parma District and shared pastors with other congregations within the district. The pastors traveled on a rotating preaching schedule sharing this responsibility. It was in 1904 that the North Chili congregation first had its own pastor. From 1962 on the church has had a staff of multiple pastors; however only the lead pastors have been listed here.

Written by Kathryn Martin



Pearce Memorial Church

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