



WESTERNVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Brief History



“We, the Subscribers, being impressed with the necessity of having a convenient house to meet in for divine and social worship in the Town of Western...”

With this public pronouncement in 1810, the founding fathers of the Town of Western put forth a subscription program to raise funds for the construction of a house of worship. The church was to be shared among the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists in proportion to the amount of funds pledged by each denomination.

The church opened its doors in 1818, and worship services have been held in all the years since. In 1831, the remaining construction debt was satisfied by a town businessman and the church became exclusively Presbyterian.

Many physical alterations were made to the original structure over the years. A steeple with bell tower was added in later years and a chapel was built adjacent to the sanctuary in 1898. The basement used for receptions was dug out by hand by church members in 1949. In 2018, on its 200th anniversary, a new addition — the “Bicentennial Hall” — was dedicated. These renovations also added handicapped access to the sanctuary and basement.

Many preachers graced the pulpit over the centuries. Among the most notable was the renowned evangelist Rev. Charles G. Finney who, in 1825,

preached a series of revivals in the church which are said to have launched his rise to national fame as a revivalist. Rev. George W. Gale supplied the pulpit in the 1820s. Gale later founded the Oneida Institute of Science and Industry and Knox College in Galesburg, Ill. The Welsh pastor, Rev. Robert Everett, held the pulpit for several years, becoming known as a leader in the abolition movement emerging in mid-century. Rev. Wilson Parmalee was called intermittently from 1858 to 1902. Rev. William A. Griffith preached from 1923-1941. The longest-serving pastor is Pastor Emeritus Rev. Chester Lippy who led the church from 1965 until 2003. The first female pastor to be called was Rev. Sarah Schmidt-Lee from 2005 to 2013. The current pastor is Commissioned Ruling Elder Donna Schonewetter.

As with so many churches, membership waxed and waned over the decades, but the Westernville church in the 2020s is seeing a growth in membership and attendance with the joy of new members, infant baptisms, and a flourishing Sunday School. We are confident that in our third century, the Westernville Presbyterian Church will continue to be a beacon of worship in the Town of Western. †