

# Chronicles of a Congregation

## - Historical Notes -

The following interesting information with respect to Lot No. 151, Middletown, on which Lot this Church is located, was found by Mr. Clark Cipperly, Attorney-at-Law, in the Van Rensselaer Survey Book and Ledger in the New York State Library at Albany and the Rensselaer County Clerk's Office.

May 20, 1800	Timothy Bowerman lives on this Lot—has about 20 acres cleared.
May 21, 1827	Leased for two years to Daniel Bowman for rental of two loads of beach maple wood.
December 2, 1844	William P. Van Rensselaer and wife sold Lot Nos. 151 and 153 to Richard J. Knowlson, Gideon Butts and George Horton for \$900.
August 4, 1852	Richard J. Knowlson and Gideon Butts conveyed to George Horton 2/3 interest in Lot Nos. 151, 152, 161 and 142; excepting the Meeting House and School House. Lots conveyed March 26, 1852. (According to information, this deed was never recorded and was lost.
December 30, 1865	Property sold by Mr. And Mrs. George Horton for the sum of \$150 to Henry Werger, John Werger, and Jacob Shipe, Trustees of the Evangelical Protestant Church of Sand Lake with the stipulation that "The premises above conveyed are to be used and occupied for Evangelical Protestant Meeting House and for no other purpose whatsoever."
December 20, 1866	Mr. and Mrs. George Horton sold to Frederick Marmerro, Peter Hoffman, and Carl Hoffman, Trustees of the German Evangelical Protestant Church Cemetery Association, one acre of land. "The above described land is conveyed, to be used expressly for a cemetery or burial ground and for no other purpose, and it is understood expressly that the Trustees of said grounds are to make, maintain and keep it well fenced at all times."

In January of 1852, the Rev. G. Bochert, Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ghent, Columbia County, visited this area for the purpose of inviting the German speaking natives to worship in the small log Meeting House standing on the wooded hillside between two ponds, the Big and Little Bowman Ponds, named after David Bowman, former lessee of this property.

Two weeks later, it was decided to have Rev. Bochert conduct services in the Meeting House every two weeks. Despite the stormy weather and the distances many had to travel, the young congregation gained in membership. At the first Easter Service, seventy persons participated, an excellent record for the times. A special collection, amounting to \$6.00, was taken for the purpose of buying necessary items to be used at the services.

It would seem as if peace and harmony had been established with the founding of a Christian church. Unfortunately, human nature took a hand in the spiritual growth of the

small congregation. Rev. Bochert reported that a spirit of opposition and slander prevailed in the Sand Lake Church so that the attendance at the services, and the deep interest of the members in things spiritual, was seriously affected. The Pastor made an earnest effort to lead the Little Flock back to the Fold—but to no avail. This breach of Christian fellowship was responsible for the resignation of Rev. Bochert. With his resignation quite a few members left the Church to attend services in the Methodist Churches in West and East Sand Lake. The doors of the Sand Lake Church were locked, and the “Gospel of the True Light” dimmed.

It was only during the winter of 1865-66 that a goodly number of the folks who had left Zion's after Pastor Bochert's resignation decided to return to the Mother Church. They and the few families who remained loyal reorganized the congregation. On December 30, 1865, the Trustees were authorized to purchase, for the sum of \$150, the acre of land on which the Meeting House was situated. One year later, the members bought an acre of land on the hilltop adjacent to the Church for the burial of their loved ones.

On September 25, 1866, this church started being served by full time pastors. On this date, Pastor Frederick Heinle conducted his first service, continuing his pastorate until October 1867. (The church records were neglected during this period.) Rev. Bruno Dietrich, who was his successor, served Zion's until January 1878. From February 1878 to August 1879, Rev. F.H. Sydow endeavored, under somewhat strained conditions, to carry on the propagation of the Gospel. After a little over one year, he felt it necessary to seek other fields of labor.

For the next three years, September 1879 to October 1882, Rev George Vetter served the Charge. On New Year's Day of 1882, a 300-pound bell, costing \$90, was dedicated; and on Christmas Day of the same year, an organ, valued at \$70, was installed. In the summer of 1882, it was found necessary, because of the poor condition of the foundation, walls, and roof of the old Meeting House, to make extensive repairs. On September 5, with a large congregation in attendance, the Pastor rededicated the renovated House of God. The following month, the Pastor resigned.

With the coming of Pastor M. Goffeney in January 1883, a new era opened for the Little Church. In May of 1883, the congregation joined the Evangelical Synod of North America and on November 11, 1883 the parsonage was dedicated. The first Mission Festival was held on September 17, 1887. Just one year later Rev. Goffeney resigned and was succeeded by Rev. J. G. Biegert, whose term of service came to a close on November 25, 1889, with the coming of Pastor F. Ewald. Under his leadership, the parsonage stable was built, the pulpit dedicated, a large stove installed and the cemetery laid out. In the spring of 1891, a hall was built, the cost being \$60. The Berlin district gave \$30, East Poestenkill gave \$18 and the Youth Organization gave \$8. The Sand Lake members did the rest of the work voluntarily.

At the congregational meeting in January 1891, it was decided to grant family cemetery plots for \$3 each to members only. If you didn't want to buy a lot, your dead would be buried as before—row-by-row, beginning on the north side to the south. If a member left the congregation, the lot would go back to the church.

The 9<sup>th</sup> pastor to serve Zion's Church was Rev. E.J. Schmidt, who delivered his first sermon on July 23, 1893 and left the charge in the spring of 1896. Pastor C.F. Fleck continued the work in the area until the autumn of 1904. In 1903, the wagon shed was constructed. His successor was Rev. W.E. Neumeister, preaching his first sermon on December 11, 1904. During this pastorate, further improvements were made, namely a new floor and roof for the sanctuary, a metal ceiling, repairs in the parsonage and 2 new art windows. Rev. Neumeister wrote: *"Pastor Ewald served this congregation for about 9 years. But misunderstandings occurred which made his job very difficult and impossible through embitterment. When I started, the congregation was divided and many members left this congregation and went to the Methodist Church. With God's help, I was able to bring them back again."*

On September 8<sup>th</sup> of 1906, the pastor's family experienced a deep loss of their son Leonard (10 years and 2 months old), who died of diphtheria. Rev Neumeister also wrote: *"Nobody was allowed to follow his little coffin, except my dear wife and little daughter. With my heart bleeding, I had to bury him with my own hands. I was disappointed not to get much interest in our sorrows about the loss of our little Leonard from the congregation. But we were comforted by strangers and from my pastoral brothers."* Rev. Neumeister left the Taborton charge in September 1907 due to failing health, which he attributed to traveling on bad roads between the churches he served.

Rev. George Kern began his pastorate on October 17, 1907. During his nine and a half years of service, 8 new art glass windows were dedicated, a new organ purchased, a new lighting system installed, a new carpet laid in the Chancel, and an Altar cloth procured. Incidentally, this pastor inaugurated the first English service, in 1908. The Church Council asked the Pastor to conduct evening services, in English, for the youth every 2 weeks during Lent. This ended with a festival on Easter night. This year was the first time in the history of the church that they held a festival (fair) without alcoholic beverages, which didn't do any harm to the congregation, grossing more money than ever before.

In June, the congregation tore down the old shed behind the parsonage and replaced it with a summer kitchen. Also in 1908, 8 windows were removed and replaced with colored, stained glass; the donors (and workers) being members of the congregation. The next few years progressed smoothly with English services becoming more popular as well as the summer festival. The Pastor did not want to have these festivals. He predicted (prophesied) they would be a disaster and were illegal. The festivals continued to bring in more income. In 1913, the year ended with its highest sum ever (\$838); the pastor received a raise of \$100. English services were being held once a month. Unfortunately, due to a serious illness requiring an operation, Pastor Kern was obliged to resign in the early part of the summer of 1917.

On August 20, 1917, Rev. Jacob Schoettle accepted the pastorate of the Taborton charge. He is responsible for founding a Young People's League and the introduction of frequently conducted services in the English language. He served until spring of 1919. On Sunday, June 22, 1919, Rev. Oscar Adolph Egli, a young minister just out of seminary, took charge of the Taborton parish, including the East Poestenkill and West Berlin Churches. He served this area for 27 years until his untimely death in the Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, on May 28, 1947. During his 27 years there was opportunity for much improvement on the church property including: erection of the parish hall (1921), landscaping, redecorating the sanctuary (1926), purchase of an

individual communion service, new hymnals, electrification of all church buildings including the parsonage, 4 new art glass windows, installation of heating plants in the church and parsonage, installation of a Hammond organ, complete renovation and enlargement of the church including new chancel furniture and a memorial baptismal font.

During the interval of the "passing on" of Rev. Egli and the Invitation and Call of a new minister, both the congregation and the Synod arranged to fill the pulpit every Sunday. On one such occasion, a member of the Evangelical and Reformed clergy preached a "trial sermon". It was during the week of August 11, 1947, that Rev. Edward Fuhrmann was invited to conduct the service. (In 1908, his family built a summer home on the east shore of Big Bowman Pond. During his childhood, he had attended Sunday school and worship services during the summer months, having vacationed there annually.) During many vacations, he substituted for the late Pastor Egli. He always looked forward to the wonderful experience of preaching the Word of God in the "Little Church in the Hills". After a service on August 17, 1947, the Board asked him to take charge. He gladly accepted and asked permission from the Synod to be Rev. Egli's successor. Permission was granted and he was elected at a special congregational meeting on September 7, 1947.

In the next few years, needed improvements were made in the church, parish hall and parsonage. These included lavatories with running water, hot water heater, space heater, extra large sink, floor covering, new dishes, cutlery, tables and benches, an extra door on the dance floor leading to the fire escape, painting of the interior of the hall and the exterior of the church.

The parsonage and kitchen had some renovation work done in October of 1953. One of the church members, Harry Shoemaker, completed all the work. New hymnals were purchased for the Sunday school during 1954 and in November of 1955, a donkey was purchased to be added to the outside manger scene.

The church entrance had repair work done by Robert Hoffay in 1956 and a tone cabinet was purchased for the organ. In September, nine dozen chairs were purchased for the dining hall. (These chairs must have served us well as there is no mention of other chairs being bought until the year 2000!)

In 1957, another figurine was purchased for the manger scene and new aluminum windows were purchased for the Parsonage. Rev. Spencer took over at this point and stayed until January 1958. In March of '58, Rev. Beach performed the mid week Lenten services and Rev. Allison was there for the Sunday services until July. Rev. Beach then took over full time until September 1959. A highlight of Rev. Beach's service with us was the use of chalk drawings that were incorporated into his sermons.

Rev. Heller moved to Taborton in 1959, taking over the helm at Zion's. His service continued with us until 1966. In October, linoleum was purchased for the parsonage and insulation material installed. In December, a donation was made to one of the Sand Lake Community Churches, the Averill Park Methodist Church, because rebuilding was taking place after a fire destroyed the church. Zion's church in East Poestenkill discontinued all church services and all activities. Membership there dwindled until there were only a few members left, and they felt they were not able to maintain and support a church.



Several things took place between 1963 and 1969. New hymnals were purchased for the church as well as a cabinet freezer. New floor tiling was put in the Parsonage and a donation was made to the Berlin Baptist Church Building Fund to help them rebuild after the Propane Truck Disaster that took place in that area. In October, additional hymnals were purchased in memory of a departed member. From 1963-1966 the church carried on with normal transactions with no major happenings. In April of 1966, a new organ was purchased and Rev. Bodeen took over the reigns of our church. He remained with us until 1969. In October, curtains and linoleum were purchased for the parsonage at a cost of \$23! (Oh, for those good old days again!) In November, new electrical fixtures were installed in the Parsonage. The church steps received some repair work. In 1968 our long-time organist, Emmott Perry, retired. In September of 1969 a new well was dug. Rev. Frenyear filled the pulpit from March of 1969 until January 1970.

Rev. Warfield joined us in January, 1970. In June a new cooler was installed. In 1971, paneling work was completed in the parsonage, the parish hall received a new ceiling and had roof repairs completed. A new water tank and sink were purchased for the parsonage in 1972, and in 1973 new offering plates were purchased.

Between 1973 and 1979, there were several repairs, which included renovations in the hall kitchen and parsonage as well as new siding on the church in 1975 and a new heater in 1979.

Rev. Clark started his service with us in 1980 and stayed until 1984. It was during this time frame (1981) that it was decided that we should try to document our church's history and a more detailed scrapbook was established. From this point forward, most of our church's history has been documented with pictures, clippings, write-ups, etc. So much of our prior history was lost so hopefully our history will now be saved. In November of 1980 we held our first Christmas Bazaar and we realized a profit of \$1,362. We were all elated but we quickly spent that amount, plus additional funds, to purchase new insulation for the Church Hall. This was a much-needed expenditure and the savings in fuel costs more than justified the expense.

In May of 1981, we celebrated our first Memory Day with pictures and memories of days gone by. In June and July changes were made in the Pavilion. The church sheds (pavilion) were closed in on the side that faced the road and opened up in the back facing Little Bowman. This was a much needed safety factor so that no one would be in the roadway and possibly be struck by a passing car. The volunteers came forward for this project and also helped to paint the Hall. In August, our famous "Taborton Picnic" took on a new name and became the Summer Festival. Same activity, just a new name! However, to this day, the first Saturday in August is still referred to by many as The Taborton Picnic. Old habits are hard to break!

The second Memory Day was celebrated in 1982, a practice which continued until 1977. A major expense item in 1982 was the renovation and addition to the cemetery. More space was cleared and additional plots were made available. Donations were received to set up a Perpetual Care account. During the year, the church was insulated and once again we looked forward to some savings in our fuel costs.

The church was very busy with normal functions in 1983 and in July the first of many bus trips was taken. This trip found us in New Hampshire at the Cathedral in the Pines. The church struggled with high expenses and low income, but once again, everyone worked

together and it pulled us through. In October, many of us joined in on the CROP Walk to raise needed funds for the hungry and the Sunday school students walked for UNICEF to help raise funds for that organization. Also in October, the Sand Lake Historical Society conducted a tour of the Taborton area and Zion's UCC was an important part of this tour. In November, a Hunter's Breakfast was held and that turned out to be a success.

The establishment of the Improvement Fund in 1984 helped the church to secure funds for needed upkeep and improvements to its facilities. Unfortunately, we spent more than we had collected, so the balance had to be taken from another account. Our service organizations (Adult Fellowship, Men's Club, and Women's Guild) continued to help out with the many expenses and made monetary donations as well as donating their labor to help complete our many projects.

In 1985 Rev. Beach once again filled in for us while our Search Committee worked on the process of finding a new minister. In February, Rev. Ramback started his service at Zion's UCC and stayed until 1986. During the 80's we were very fortunate to have flowers donated to our church. A bouquet would be purchased in honor of or in memory of someone. This added additional income to our Treasury and made for some extraordinary beautiful scenes on our altar.

In March of 1986, a Sunrise Worship Service was held on the shores of Little Bowman Lake and this service still continues today. It was a crisp, clear, and cold morning, but oh how symbolic when two Canadian geese flew overhead as the service was being conducted. The Women's Guild served a hearty breakfast following this service and once again, we are still enjoying this today. A new sound system was installed in the church and vinyl siding was installed on the Church Hall. In May we joined in on the annual CROP Walk and Zion's UCC received the honor of having the most participation of the local churches and one of the highest in the amount of money donated. Our church on the mountain proved once again how willing we are to help others less fortunate than ourselves. Rev. Paterik became our Interim Minister and served us from September 1986 to February 1987.

Reverend Fran Duffley started with us on February 1, 1987. Pew cards were started to help keep track of church attendance and to give other information such as visitors and those who requested to be called on by the minister. A congregational picture was taken in June to mark the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church. Oil candles were purchased from the Memorial Fund for use on the church altar. The Stewardship Committee was established at this time. The envelope system for the Sunday school students was started in September. A new Constitution and By-Laws document was approved and put in use by the church in 1988. During 1989, a ramp was installed to make our church accessible to the handicapped and a Christian Education Committee (Sunday school) was established.

The church's driveway was blacktopped in 1990 and the Men's Club helped to complete this project. The first church cookbook was compiled and sold as a fundraiser. A Program Development Committee was formed to further enrich our church community.

New committees formed in 1991 included Finance, Membership and Grounds. Outdoor worship was tried and was celebrated once this year. The Men's Club disbanded during this year. Our sister church, Friedens United Church of Christ in Schenectady,

celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and approximately 50 people from Zion's UCC traveled to Schenectady to help celebrate this historic event. Peter Budesheim, a founding member of Friedens Church and later a member of Zion's, had several of his descendants attend the service, most of whom still are members of Zion's UCC.

With a special service and coffee hour, another milestone was celebrated on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1992: the Church's 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. On this day we also dedicated our new pew cushions, candlestick holders and steps, all as different memorials. Our Youth Group attended a National Youth Event at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. Rev. Fran left during the year and Rev. Lyman Potter came aboard as our Interim Minister. He had to leave in 1993 due to some family medical problems and Rev. Hunter became our new Interim Minister. Renovation and remodeling of the parsonage also took place during this time frame.

Rev. Scott Gordon MacLean became the pastor in May of 1994. Congregational approval was given to add an addition onto the church. The addition would house an additional meeting room, an office, and a handicapped bathroom. Work began in the spring of '94 with most of the work and equipment being donated. The framework was completed in just two days with the help of many dedicated hands, both members and non-members. The cost of this project was kept down due to the donation of equipment, material, and manpower from companies and contractors who were impressed by what we at Zion's Church - volunteers - can accomplish when they want to. Zion's UCC is very lucky for the fountain of talent and volunteerism that we enjoy.

The new addition was finished and dedicated in May 1995. Turmoil once again hit our church and many issues were brought forward, culminating in the resignation of Rev. MacLean in August of that year. Rev. Hunter stepped in again for the remainder of the year as our Interim Minister. Our church was in deep pain and many members chose to worship elsewhere. Membership dwindled, resources declined and we were in trouble - spiritually, physically, and mentally. It was decided at this time that our by-laws needed revamping and some changes made.

In January of 1996, the New York State Conference Board sent us a "mediator" minister in the person of Rev. Kim Mislin. She came to us as an Interim Minister. Her charge was to try and heal our congregation and to try and make us whole again. Many, many meetings were held and under Rev. Kim's guidance, some healing started to take place. Rev. Kim still had her work cut out for her and she continued working on the healing process for our church. In April, we held Reconciliation Sunday and planted a Peace Tree. Our church was going to move onward and continue to look for peace within our membership. A Finance Committee was formed and will work at trying to turn our financial picture around, and stabilize our finances.

The year of 1997 brought about many changes. New members were welcomed and the size of the church family increased significantly. The New York State Conference Board of UCC modified their rules and allowed Rev. Kim to change her status from Interim Minister to Pastor of our church, and work continued in our healing process. A new boiler had to be purchased for the Hall and the parsonage septic system was replaced. The roof on the church also needed to be replaced. Work needed to be done on the parking lot and a fund was established so that donations could be made for this goal. One of our members, Iona Dickinson, announced her desire to go into the ministry and the Hudson Mohawk Association approved her as a "student in care" for our church.

Another "first" for our little church on the mountain. The "Save Our Summer" campaign was started and proved to be quite successful in bringing in additional money to help cover our many church expenses. In July of '97, our Dinner Theater Group made their debut. This year was also the start of our church hosting a turkey dinner for the volunteers of St. Henry's Parish. It has become an annual fundraiser for our church. The By-Law Committee continued to meet during the year and continued to work on updating our "rules and regulations".

In ~~February~~<sup>JANUARY</sup> of '98, an ice storm hit our neighbors up north in the Adirondacks. A relief group was organized and Zion's church members headed north to help in any way they could. Chainsaws, manpower and a huge truck full of food and supplies left Taborton for the trip north. Once again, the volunteers of Taborton came through. Our parking lot was repaired and replaced, again with the donation of many companies and individuals, a new piano was purchased for use in our services, and cabinets were purchased for the office area and Communion Center. On September 20, 1998, a special congregational meeting was held to vote on possibly the biggest project in our church's history. A proposal was made to move our existing pavilion away from the road and place it further back on the property. In making this move, we would try to preserve as much of the original pavilion as possible. After discussion, a vote was taken and the congregation approved this project with a vote of 53 yes and 3 no. Work would start in 1999. Another special congregational meeting was held in December so that all the changes to the By-Laws could be discussed and any possible corrections, additions, deletions, etc. could be made. After discussion, the proposed document was approved and would be voted on at the Annual Congregational meeting held in January of 1999.

Our new By-Laws document was approved at our 1999 Annual Congregational meeting. By far, the biggest news of this year was the Pavilion Project! The project started in April. There were many volunteers who worked every weekend and the women of the church provided lunches for the workers. Each phase progressed smoothly and the project was completed by mid summer. The dedication of the pavilion was held on September 26<sup>th</sup>. Worship service was held in the pavilion and a plaque was also presented that became a very prominent part of this project. Once again, church members, non-members, businesses and members of the community came together to volunteer many, many hours of time, labor, equipment and material to complete a project at Zion's UCC that not only helped to preserve our history, but also provided a very beautiful and useful building for generations to come. This project was a huge undertaking that proved once again what can be accomplished with the help of many. Zion's UCC is very fortunate to have such a wide range of talent and expertise always willing to come forward to help our "little white church in the hills". Another big event during 1999, was the formation of "Rings in Still Water", Zion's very own contemporary Christian rock group. Rev. Kim left us in December when she relocated to Scotland and married.

In the year 2000, Michael Rivest came on board as our Supply Minister and our Search Committee started the long process of looking for a permanent minister. A special congregational meeting was held in October and the congregation approved the purchase of new chairs for the Hall, a new copier for the office, new altar cloths, and approved the proposal for renovations to the parsonage. The Women's Guild purchased new silverware for use at all of our functions and a church member, Burt Ernst, made a silverware chest to store it in. The interior of the parsonage was also renovated during this period of time. The upstairs was sheetrocked and painted as well as interior doors