

Our Jubilee Year “Ponderings From the Past”

by Joan VanPatten

The Shenendehowa Methodist Parish was formed from four independent churches - West Crescent, Grooms, Newtown and Crescent Methodist churches in 1957. There is a difference between a parish and a church. A parish is a community and a church is a building. There can be more than one church in a parish and a pastor may serve more than one church. Gerald Morris, Dr. Dow Clute, District Superintendent and Reverend Jasper McIntyre of the West Crescent Church met with representatives from six area churches to see if there was interest in forming a central church. These four churches accepted the challenge.

The Troy Conference of the Methodist Church purchased five acres of land for \$2,000 on Route 146 in Clifton Park across from the school on May 26, 1955, for this new church. It was originally purchased by Leland Empie, a licensed real estate broker. Leland Empie was the father of Doris Thayer, and he sold it to the Troy Conference at the exact cost he paid. On May 26 of 1957 Rev. Harry C. Mikels was appointed the first minister. Dr. Mikels preached his first sermon on June 2, 1957, at 9:00 a.m. at the Grooms church and at 10:30 a.m. at Newtown. Shenendehowa was included in the name because it was the name the Indians had used to describe the area and it meant “Great Plain.”

Why did they need a new church? Some of the four churches were inadequate, there was no electricity, no heat, no running water, the community was growing and the birth rate was rising. They wanted a full time minister which a united church could provide, and they needed proper facilities for weekday religious education. In addition, there was a need for a complete educational, recreational and fellowship facility. Working together, the four churches devised a parish plan, to have one minister serving all, to have two consolidated church services, a new parsonage and land for a new church. The Shenendehowa Parish was organized with a membership of 361. That same year, a fund drive was started for the new sanctuary.

Their objective was to raise a minimum of \$30,000 over a two year period. They were so successful they raised more than \$40,000. And from loans, grants and the sale of property they hoped to raise an additional \$30,000. A parsonage was purchased for \$15,000. It was a small house across the street just two doors from the school driveway. This would be used until a new parsonage could be built nearby.

The groundbreaking service was held on May 11, 1958. Four hundred persons were present for the ceremony and construction was planned for the near future. The new building would be diamond shaped and the sanctuary would have a seating capacity for 300 persons. Included in the plans were a sanctuary, a hearth room, an office, nursery and kitchen.

The Shenendehowa Methodist Church was constructed and officially consecrated on May 10, 1959. It was established to serve the people of the Shenendehowa Area in the Worship and in the Service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Groundbreaking Ceremony for an education wing was held on 11/24/63. The Date Stone Ceremony for the Educational Building was 5/3/64. The second parsonage was built in 1966 on a two-acre lot west of and adjoining the church property. In 1976 the church acquired another parsonage on George Drive and sold the small house on Route 146.

In 1972, members voted to add a fellowship hall, full kitchen, rest rooms and storage space as well as a basement under the kitchen and rest room area. Groundbreaking was 4/23/72 and consecration was 12/4/72. More construction followed in 1997 when it was decided the church needed to expand the sanctuary, double the size of the kitchen and add several other rooms. The Groundbreaking Ceremony was held on 4/27/97 and consecration was on 12/28/97.

What a 50 year journey!