

Our Jubilee Year “Ponderings From the Past” – April 2007

During our Jubilee Celebration year, Joan VanPatten, a member of the Communications Ministry team will dig into the archives to feature some piece of history every month in Focus.

On a beautiful, warm, sunny day, April 25, 1959, Reverend Harry Mikels married Doris Empie and Calvin Thayer in the newly formed Shenendehowa Methodist Church. He was very pleased when they approached him with their wedding plans. Doris was a charter member of the church and they were about to be the very FIRST couple married in the new sanctuary.

The church had not yet been landscaped and there were still a few scattered bricks to be seen. The round window over the altar was of clear glass the night of their rehearsal. However, on their wedding day they happily discovered that it had been replaced with a beautiful stained glass one. Apparently it had been hastily installed, because a hammer or mallet had been left on the windowsill. No one seemed to notice it, but when the wedding pictures were developed, it showed up as a strange dark line.

The Thayer's first home was an apartment in Waterford. Because Cal was raised in Troy, they went church shopping. They went to both Presbyterian and Baptist churches but when time allowed they would go back to Shenendehowa Methodist Church. Their daughter Gail was born in 1961, and they decided to have her baptized by Reverend Mikels. They knew then that they had finally found their church home, and shortly after that, with Rev. Hoch serving as pastor, Cal joined the church. Happy 48th anniversary, Cal and Doris.

Doris has other memories of past church events. When she was growing up she lived only two doors away from the Crescent Methodist Church, fondly known as the Church Hill church. It was a large brick building with a large hall on the back that was used for winter services, church suppers and Sunday school. The kitchen was also used for Sunday school. The church had a very small congregation; thus, the members had many tasks. Doris remembers church suppers when the kitchen had no running water. The water was brought in milk cans and the dishwashing water was toted in from the cistern next door.

During the winter months they held services in the back hall, as it was too costly to heat the sanctuary. Heat was provided by a coal stove. However, it always needed replenishing, which could be quite noisy. This was the task of the custodian, William Steenburgh, who was fondly known as Willie. It didn't matter that the minister might be preaching and Doris often wondered if Willie would figure out what they were all snickering about. Doris found Willie a constant source of entertainment. She doesn't know if it was her youth or perhaps the long sermons.

Willie also had the task of pumping the organ in the sanctuary. It was a huge organ that almost reached the ceiling. That organ is presently at the New York State Museum. The pump was on the left side of the organ, which left a two foot space from the wall. In that space there was a small stool for Willie to sit on.