

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CROTON FALLS, N. Y.

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Few records are available, but probably the 1st congregation formed as early as 1764, or sometime during the Revolutionary Era. The original church building stood on the north side of the road leading from Salem Centre to North Salem, somewhere in the vicinity of the old North Salem Schoolhouse. It was an independent organization inclined to congregationalist customs in government and form of worship.

The owners of several farms in Upper Salem — Peter Benedict, Thaddeus Crane, Solomon Close, Ezekiel Hawley (Road), Jesse Truesdale (Lake), Jones Wallace (Road) formed the church on May 11, 1779 . . . "to get preaching." There was no regular preacher; they probably had supply preachers as were available. They met on June 24, 1786 to form the Congregationalist Society of Upper Salem.

Not until September 25, 1832, was it included as a Presbyterian Church under control of the Bedford Presbytery.

The first pastor was the Rev. Joel Benedict, from 1783-87. Next, the Rev. Amzi Lewis, the first principal of the North Salem Academy (our present Town Hall) signed on as pastor and conducted services in the Upper Salem Presbyterian Meeting House. Early school teachers at the Academy were often Presbyterian ministers.

By 1840, a new meeting house was necessary because the original church and grounds were sold. A new church was built in 1847 near St. James Episcopal Church, which was built 30 years earlier. It was a sturdy, substantial wooden edifice with no ornamentation and was surmounted by a square tower. The number of communicants were never large, as few as 22, with semi-monthly services and finally discontinued. It was declared extinct 1/17/1889.

The Presbyterian Church of Croton Falls was organized in January, 1846. Like so many Presbyterian Churches of that period, it came into being as a result of the historic division of the Presbyterian Church of America in 1838 into what was known as the "Old School" and the "New School." This doctrinal controversy split the Presbyterian Church of Somers, and in January, 1846, twenty-two members of the church withdrew under the leadership of Rev. Joseph Nimmo, who was the pastor of the church, to form the "Old School Presbyterian Church of Croton Falls." The charter members of the new church were: Benjamin Mead, Anna Mead, Clarissa Brown, Aner Mead, Ann B. Green, Abigail Crosby, Nancy Owen, Anna Owen, Charlotte Coffin, Maria Bouton, Helen M. Patterson, Susan E. Green, Horace Jones, Clarissa Jones, Hannah Nimmo, Clarissa Smith, Thomas R. Lee, Mary Lee, Margaret McCord, Elizabeth Crosby, and Sarah Finch.

Within two years the little congregation had built and dedicated a house of worship (located on a strip of land by the Croton River, half-way between the Upper and Lower Highway Bridges) which was used till the present church was built in 1900. The success of the little group in those early years was largely due to the untiring efforts of Mr. Nimmo who retired from the pastorate during the summer of 1848 because of ill health.

The next few years in the history of the church find it holding its own but making no outstanding progress. Several ministers came and went during these years both as Stated Supplies and regular Pastors. In the year 1872, under the leadership of Rev. Joseph Beers, an experimental union with the Somers church was tried. The congregation was to be united under one pastor, the services to be held alternately between the two churches every six months. The plan did not work with any degree of success and following Mr. Beers' resignation in 1873 it was discontinued.

With the coming of Rev. Robert P. Gibson to the pastorate of the church in March 1885, the story of the Presbyterian Church changes for the better. For thirty-one years this strong man of God labored with marked success in Croton Falls. Up to his ministry, the longest pastorate had been only five years. Mr. Gibson came to Croton Falls in poor health but found the climate of the community so agreeable that his health improved steadily during his ministry. During the years that he served the church many new members were added, organizations grew and prospered, and the spiritual life of the church was greatly strengthened.

Along toward the end of the century, the city of New York bought up the property adjoining the Croton River and its tributaries in order to secure purer water for its use. The property on which the Presbyterian Church stood was therefore condemned and the congregation faced the task of building a new church edifice. On June 7, 1898, the church and sheds were purchased from the city, dismantled and moved to its present site on State Road next to Dr. Ritchie's house (which was Dr. Hitchcock's and also moved from its original site at 4 corners). The old building and materials were utilized and rebuilt following plans by Howard Crosby Butler. The cornerstone was laid November 8, 1899.

Following Mr. Gibson's ministry there was a period of several years in which the church struggled through discouragements, had no regular pastor for months at a time, and in general seemed to be going downhill. But in 1922 Rev. E. N. Comfort, a Texan who had come East for his education, was called to become the minister of the church and once more the course of history changed for the better. Mr. Comfort was well-liked by the people and was a hard worker and a brilliant preacher. The church was quick to respond to his leadership and during the two years of his ministry many gains were made and much lost ground recovered.

Following Mr. Comfort's resignation in 1924, the church extended a call to Rev. J. C. Sayres. The call was accepted and Mr. Sayres remained until 1928 as pastor of the church. Many new members were added to the roll during his ministry and the general life of the church was maintained in good condition.

However, when Mr. Sayres resigned as pastor of the church in the late summer of 1928, many of the members of the church felt that the time was ripe for a federation of the two churches in the community, a suggestion that had been considered by both churches for some time. A committee was appointed to meet with a similar committee from the Baptist Church to formulate a plan of federation. Adopting the report of this committee following the meeting, the Presbyterian Church became a part of the Federated Church of Croton Falls in January, 1929.

The following ministers served the Presbyterian Church as Pastor: 1846-48: Joseph Nimmo; 1849-50: David Irving; 1851-52: James B. Ramsey; 1853-58: Thomas S. Bradner; 1858-60: A. B. Bullions; 1860-62: Albert Chamberlin; 1863-64: James Sinclair; 1864-65: J. B. Stoddard; 1866-68: Henry B. Smuller; 1868-72: William J. Thompson; 1872-73: Joseph Beers; 1874-79: Robert A. Blackford; 1881-84: Richard B. Mattice; 1885-1916: Robert P. Gibson; 1922-24: E. N. Comfort; 1924-28: J. C. Sayres.

The Federation remained this way for 36 years using alternate buildings, then only the Baptist building. The Pastors resided in the Baptist Parsonage. Pastors serving the Federated Church:

Rev. John C. Howenstein 1929-34 P

Rev. Vance Johnson 1935-39 B

Rev. Earnest Yarrow 1940-42 C

Rev. Bertie Norman 1942-44 P

Rev. Laban Chamberlain 1945-58 B

Rev. Roger Charbonneau 1955-58 B

The Federation was dissolved January 1, 1958.

Under Rev. R. Alken Wilson (Assistant Director of Church Extension Synod of N.Y.) the church was revived, reorganized and reopened in 1959, with membership of 47 and Michael Miller as student minister. Plans for repair, landscape and parking were contemplated.

They hoped to add materially to their membership thru Sunday School and religious instruction thru Youth Group.

THE FEDERATED CHURCH

Late in the summer of 1928, Rev. J. C. Sayres resigned as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Croton Falls. At that time, Rev. A. F. Merrill, pastor of the Baptist Church, was awaiting appointment to a foreign missionary field and thus expected to leave the Baptist pulpit vacant soon. It was felt by some of the members of both churches that a federation of the two congregations to form one Protestant Church for the community would be a wise plan at this time. Both congregations were small; both churches were having financial difficulties. It was also realized by the congregations of both churches that as Croton Falls was not a growing community it could not reasonably be expected that either church would make much growth separately with the coming years. All of these things made the plan of federation seem more advisable. It was generally felt that one strong church would be better for the spiritual life of the community than two weak ones.

Therefore on December 10, 1928, a meeting was called of the representatives of the two churches to consider the wisdom of uniting the two congregations and to set up a proposed plan of federation. The plan suggested at this meeting was, briefly: That each church should maintain its legal organization and denominational integrity, each contributing to its own benevolent agencies, but meeting together as one congregation under one minister. That an Official Board be set up for the Federated Church consisting of the Deacons of the Baptist Church and the Elders of the Presbyterian Church whose duty it would be to maintain public worship in the church and to assist the minister in nurturing the spiritual life of the church. That a Finance Committee be elected by the congregation which should be responsible for the finances of the united congregation and for the upkeep of the church properties.

This plan was approved by the congregations of both churches and on Sunday, January 6, 1929, the first united congregation service of worship was held. Rev. Benjamin H. Everitt, Executive Secretary of the Westchester Presbytery, acted as supply pastor until the first minister of the Federated Church could be engaged. On January 16, 1929, a letter was sent out by the Official Board "to members of the Baptist and Presbyterian churches, and to all friends of religion in Croton Falls" announcing that the two churches had "taken a great step forward in the work of the Kingdom in Croton Falls" and urging the loyal support of all Protestant Christians in the community.

On April 1, 1929, the congregation extended a call to Rev. John C. Howenstein, minister of a Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania, to become the first pastor of the Federated Church of Croton Falls. The call was accepted and Mr. Howenstein took up his duties shortly afterwards.

The work of the newly united congregation went forward steadily during this first year of the federation. However, the financial depression which hit the entire country with such disastrous effects in the fall of that year, had its effect on the life of the church in this community. A number of families moved from the community, and in the wake of the depression, contributions dropped off to a considerable degree. After four years of an uphill struggle, Mr. Howenstein resigned as pastor of the church and moved to a new field of labor near Troy, N.Y.

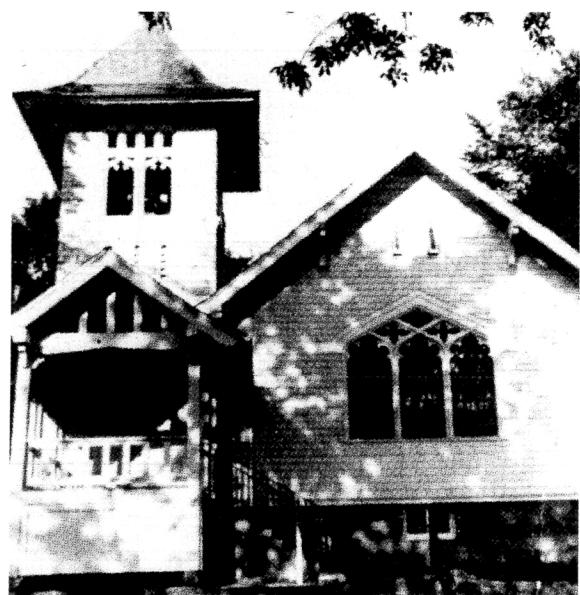
After a period of several months in which many candidates for the pulpit were heard, the church extended a call to Rev. N. Vance Johnston, minister of the First Baptist Church of Parkesburg, Pennsylvania, to become its pastor. The call was accepted by Mr. Johnston and he began his ministry in the church on the first Sunday of June, 1934.

The years of Mr. Johnston's ministry have not been marked by spectacular successes, but they have been years of steady work and gradual accomplishments. Sixteen members have been added to the church by baptism and letter. Two successful Vacation Church Schools have been held, young people's groups have been maintained each year, a monthly meeting of the Bible School Officers and Teachers has been established which has resulted in a higher standard of work in that organization, and other phases of the church work have been carried on with a fair degree of success.

The outstanding achievement of the early years had been the renovation program of the church during 1937-38. Where formerly each church had been responsible for the upkeep of its own property, a plan was inaugurated in the fall of 1937 to raise the sum of \$1500 as one body to be used for installing a new furnace in the Presbyterian building and for painting the Baptist building and the parsonage. Members of both groups in the church responded admirably to the plan and the work has been carried out, the total cost being near to \$1700.



1955 - "Brown" Church



1962 - "White" Church



THE FIRST Presbyterian Church in Croton Falls was built in 1847. It was located between the Croton River and the present Route 100. In 1872, the Croton Falls church

was united with the First Presbyterian Church of Somers, but the union was short-lived; 'interceme differences' was one of the causes

cited for the rupture. The site was taken over near the end of the century by New York City as part of its water system drainage area.

Presbyterians Buy Manse In Croton Falls

CROTON FALLS — Croton Falls Presbyterian Church will have open house today (Sunday) from 4 to 6 p.m. at its newly purchased manse on Sun Valley Heights Road.

Rev. David Lewis, minister of the church, and his wife and 11-month-old son, Daniel, moved into the new house this week. They had previously occupied rented quarters.

Croton Falls Presbyterian Church has operated as a separate body since a federation with Croton Falls Baptist was ended several years ago. The congregation has 70 members, compared with 43 when it was reactivated. Church members have just finished giving the church a fresh coat of paint, its first in some 50 years.

Mr. Lewis, a native of Batavia, came to Croton Falls in 1960 after graduating from Union Theological Seminary.

Newspaper article -
The Patent Trader
August 23, 1959

Newspaper article -
The Patent Trader
June 25, 1961

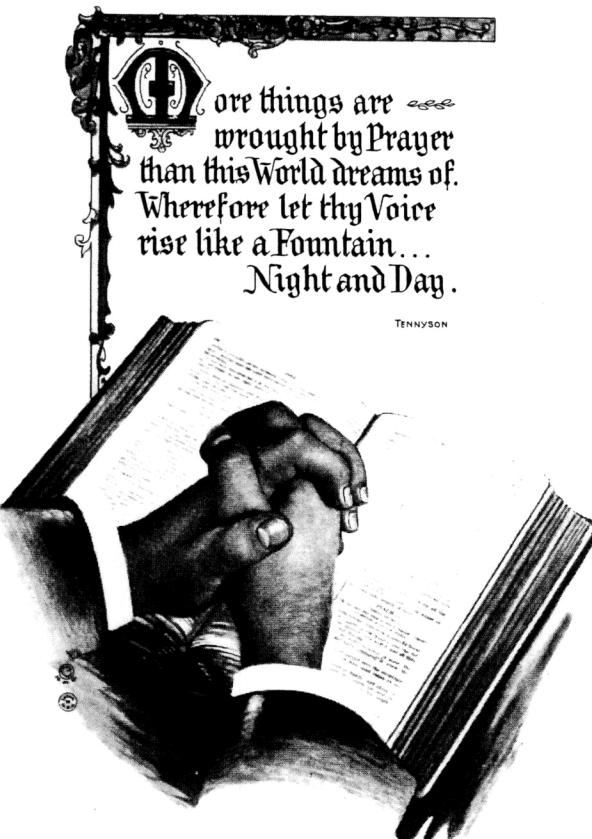
FEDERATED CHURCH OF CROTON FALLS, NEW YORK	
Reverend Laban H. Chamberlin, Minister.....	Croton Falls 524
Mr. Charles J. F. Decker, Official Board Chairman.....	CF 363
Mr. E. C. Purdy, Treasurer.....	CF 341
Mr. Romaine L. Lenz, Church Clerk.....	CF 402
Mr. Charles J. Tompkins, Finance Comm. Chairman.....	CF 392
THE OFFICIAL BOARD	
Charles J. F. Decker.....	CF 363
Elbert C. Purdy.....	CF 341
Charles J. Tompkins.....	CF 392
F. Lee Maltby.....	Mahopac 792
Charles Ferguson.....	Katonah 317
William A. Purdy.....	CF 470
Kenneth W. Ritchie, Sec'y.....	CF 523
Wesley D. Needham.....	CF 746
Daniel J. Juengst.....	CF 352
The Pastor.....	CF 524
CHURCH BIBLE SCHOOL	
Mr. Wesley D. Needham, Supt.....	CF 746
Mrs. William Kertok, Sec'y.....	CF 519
Mrs. Gladys Haight, Treas.....	CF 379
LADIES AID SOCIETY	
Mrs. Emma L. Schworm, Pres.....	CF 486
Mrs. Edward Schworm, Treas.....	CF 390
WOMENS MISSIONARY SOCIETY	
Mrs. Fred Schultz, Chairman.....	CF 618
Mrs. C. J. F. Decker, Co-Chairman.....	CF 363
Mrs. Louise A. Haight, Treas.....	CF 507
SEXTONS	
Mr. D. J. Juengst.....	CF 352
Mr. Edward Schworm.....	CF 390
ORGANIST and CHOIR DIRECTOR	
Mrs. Harold Tapley.....	Mahopac 2085
All the Church Officers, as well as the Pastor, may be called upon at any time for help or consultation and everyone should feel free to do so.	



Bulletin Cover - The Federated Church - Feb. 4, 1951

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT CROTON FALLS	
1846—1959	
This Church formerly called "The First Presbyterian Church of the Town of Somers," and also heretofore known as the "Union Society," was Incorporated "The Presbyterian Church at Croton Falls," on 20 January 1846, in the Town known as Owensesville, under the leadership of Rev. Joseph Nimmo, its first pastor. The existing Sanctuary was built in 1899. Founded for the Glory of God and the Service of His Kingdom, the Presbyterian Church at Croton Falls seeks to preserve all that is best in the heritage of the past, and to advance boldly toward the fulfillment of its mission for the present generation.	
CHURCH OFFICERS	
THE SESSION Meets 3rd Sunday, 2:30 P. M.	
Clinton E. Purdy, Clerk	Delmar B. Ritchie
Everett Moore	David L. Kelley
THE TRUSTEES Meets 3rd Monday, 8:00 P. M.	
Emelie Schworm, President	Edna Boehme
A. Purdy Outhouse	Olive Kelley
Ada Outhouse	Inge Kraut

TREASURER	Clinton E. Purdy CROTON FALLS 7-3583
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CHURCH CALENDAR	
Morning Worship	9:30 A. M.
Youth Fellowship	6:30—7:30 P. M.
CHURCH DIRECTORY	
Clerk of Sessions: Clinton E. Purdy, Reed Road, CROTON FALLS 7-3583	
President of Trustees: Emelie Schworm, Route 22, CROTON FALLS 7-3390	

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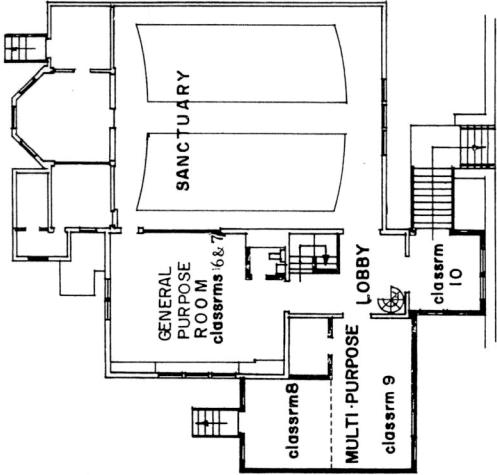
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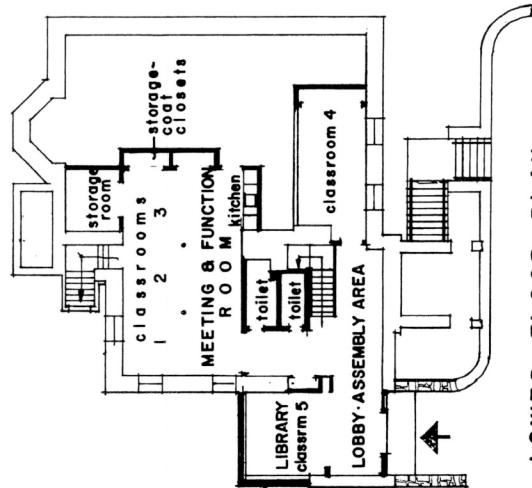
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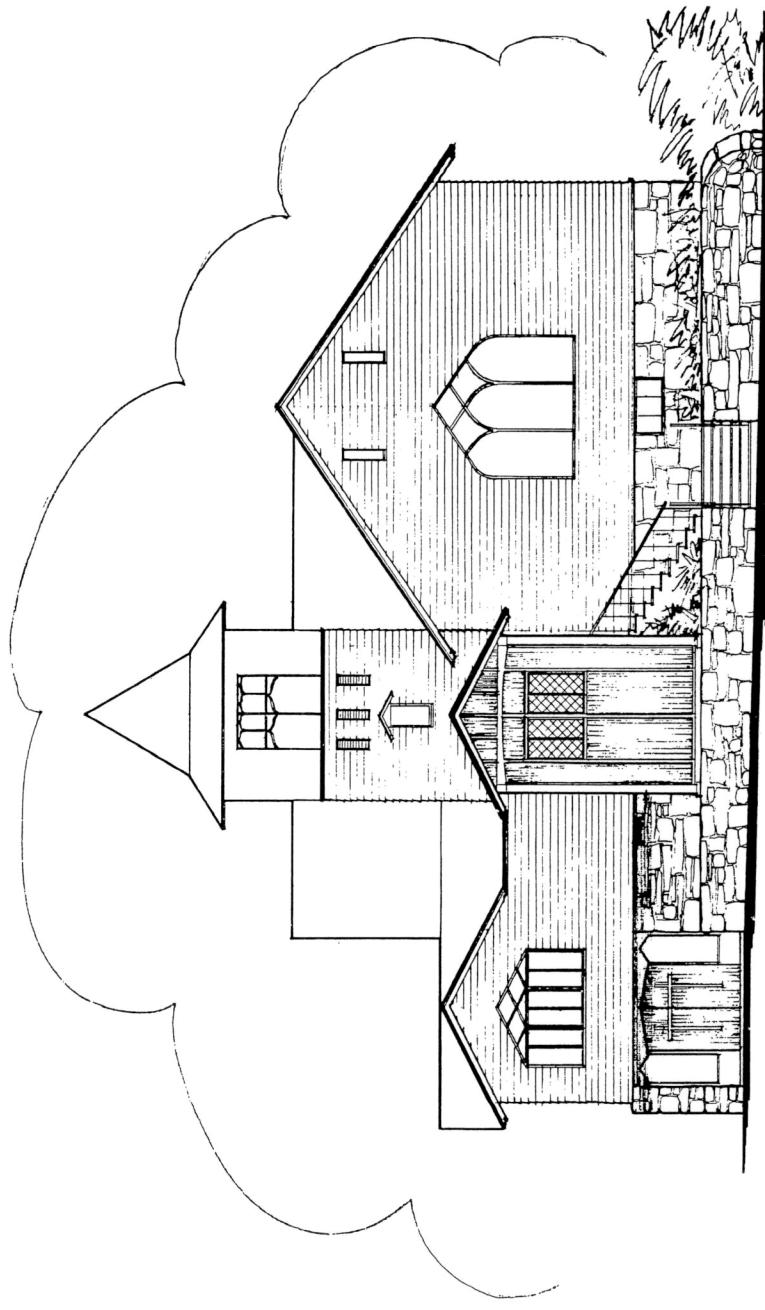
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