

CHARTER MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

organized May 2, 1834

It was on May 2, 1834, that a small group of people gathered in the town of Warren to organize the first Baptist Church of Warren. The records vary somewhat as to the names of these first Baptists but the following list is as authentic as possible:

Mary Comstock	Elisha Doty	Hannah Geer
Emma Comstock	Polly Doty	Oliver W. Shaw
Mrs Louiza Wheeler	William Morse	Maria Waters Shaw
Pond Curtis	Elizabeth Morse	Polly Waters
Parmelia Curtis	W. Gildersleeve	Polly Strong
Fannie Curtis		

Who were these people and how did they happen to be in Warren in 1834, ready to unite in a Baptist organization? Our definite information is meager, pieced together from various fragments.

Warren, in 1834, was a town less than 40 years old.. In 1795, to encourage settlers to come to this region, the State Legislature had decreed that a town should be surveyed and laid out in streets and lots at the mouth of the Conewango Creek, this town to be called "Warren". There was no separate county government until 1819. The early adventurers down the Allegheny River, the surveyors, the Quaker missionaries from Philadelphia sent to the Cornplanter Indians, had reported back favorably on the Allegheny country to relatives and friends in the east. Lansing Wetmore of Warren, in his "Reminiscences" tells the story of John Chapman (later known as Johnny Appleseed because he went about planting apple seeds and setting out apple trees) He set out from the Wyoming Valley (Pa.) on foot and a lone in November 1797 to come by the overland route. The great dangers and hardships of the journey are described but he arrived in this vicinity about a month later. For some time he maintained an apple tree nursery near by which remained for years to come.

Many Scotch-Irish as they have been called immigrated to America in search of freedom, as many as 25,000 coming in the years 1771-1773. With other hardy pioneers from New York and New England they pushed westward over rough, primitive roads until the upper waters of the Allegheny were reached. Then with the aid of canoes and flatboats they floated their wives, children and household goods down the stream while their horses and cattle were being driven or led along its banks. Olean was then famous as the usual place of embarkation for a trip down the Allegheny, for thousands, even, who did not propose to stop at Warren or any other point along the river but who continued on their way to more fertile lands and a milder climate in Ohio, Indiana or Illinois.

Occasionally the population ^{of Warren} was increased by small parties who ascended the West Branch of the Susquehanna and Sinnamahoning Creek as far as they could go in canoes and then struck boldly across country to the Allegheny. Some of our Baptist brethren came with one of the groups of settlers from Camden, Oneida Co., N.Y. who arrived here in 1816 and in 1834. About 1832 people from Alsace, France, began to come in groups to this area. Among them we recognize names now familiar in Warren - Lesser, Leonhart, Offerlee, Messner. By 1834 Warren was a village with a population of 358 people with about 100 houses, some of them log. They were a hard working people, with none of great riches.

There seems to have been no religious worship regularly before 1819. In that year Abner Hazeltine came to Warren. He had been in the habit of attending church

in his former home in Vermont so he invited any who desired to do so to come to his home on Sunday and he would read a sermon to those assembled. This led to the organization of a Presbyterian church in 1822. It is most likely that the Baptists of the community had been gathering together in a similar manner before their organization in 1834. * Wm. Gildersleeve, a traveling preacher

* Wm. Gildersleeve, a traveling preacher and missionary, one of our Baptist group, had, no doubt, been influential in bringing the Baptists together.

is said to be the first to find coal in this region, happening on a vein when he was digging a well on his land on Quaker Hill in 1834.

There were three Comstock sisters in the Baptist list. Their father Adanus Comstock had come here in 1819 from Oneida Co., N.Y. His daughter Louiza Comstock, born about 1817, had married the innkeeper, Isaac Wheeler who had also come from Oneida Co. Isaac Wheeler died in 1851 having contracted cholera on the steamer, Mt. Vernon, between Cincinnati and St. Louis. In 1834 Mary Comstock, born in 1820, lived with her sister Louiza Wheeler at the inn and it is likely that Emma did also. Emma later married Mr Blackman and went to Iowa in 1853.

Elisha Doty was born about 1776 in New York State. When he came to Warren we do not know but he lived in Conewango Twp. with his wife Polly who died in 1842.

Ass Geer, the father of Hannah Geer, was a Revolutionary soldier from Connecticut, born about 1759. He was in Warren Co. as early as 1806, died in 1836 and is buried in Starbrick cemetery. Hannah Geer was his 14th child. She married Mr. Brown and moved to Michigan.

Oliver W. Shaw is listed in the 1850 census. He married Maria Waters in 1833 just the year before they became charter members of the Baptist Church in 1834. Polly Waters is no doubt Mrs Shaw's sister. Mr Shaw went West in 1852 and sent back letters which were published in the Warren Mail. He died in Stockton, Cal., in 1880. Of Wm. Morse and Eliza Morse and Polly Strong I have no definite information as yet.

When we note from the foregoing the number of deaths that occurred and the number that went on farther west from this little Baptist group we do not wonder at the difficulties of the next few years and the courage required to hold together when there was no regular pastor until 1842 and they met at the Court House and later at the Academy, having no church building for twenty five years, not until 1859, when the church building was brought from Kiantone and reerected on Liberty St. next to the present Y.M.C.A.

An act was passed by the Pennsylvania State Legislature April 18, 1795, providing for laying out of towns at Presque Isle, at the mouth of the Conewango Creek and at Fort Le Boeuf.

Relating to the town to be laid out at the mouth of the Conewango Creek;- Commissioners to be appointed by the Governor shall survey 300 acres for town lots, 700 acres for out lots. No town lot shall contain more than 1/3 acre, no out lot more than 5 acres, reservations for public uses not more than a total of 10 acres, the town to be called "Warren".

Nell G. Sill
March 1961