



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The former church on Ridge Road served multiple congregations in the town of Gaines. It's believed the building's last service was conducted in 1917.

Gaines church was a keystone for pioneers

OVERLOOKED ORLEANS: Building served many congregations

By **MATT BALLARD**
Orleans County Historian

GAINES — One of the region's oldest churches had an extensive history of faith and service.

Situated on Ridge Road, the church served multiple organizations during its lifetime, and is regarded as the first church constructed west of the Genesee River.

As pioneer settlers arrived in Gaines, they cleared land and established farms along the historic route. They also sought to establish their community with meeting halls and churches.

About 17 years after Elizabeth Gilbert settled her parcel along the Ridge Road near Brown Road, the Congregationalists and Baptists constructed the building to serve as a union meeting house. Each group agreed to share the edifice, conducting services on alternating Sundays.

In 1834 the Congregationalists purchased a site on the north side of the ridge, just east of the Gaines Road intersection. It was at this time that the congregation sold its interest in the building to two men, who later sold their interest to John Proctor.

The Baptists, meanwhile, remained active in the building despite losing a portion of their congregation fol-

lowing the establishment of the Baptist congregation at Albion in 1830. It was not long afterward that 13 of the Baptists at Gaines petitioned to start a church at Carlton — an incident that would greatly weaken the original congregation.

The Baptists continued to hold services until approximately 1860 when the building was vacated, remaining inactive until a Free Methodist congregation was established at Gaines in 1868.

A mere eight years after the first church in the denomination was constructed at Albion under the pastorate of Rev. Loren Stiles and nearly 10 years after the expulsion of Benjamin Titus Roberts from the Methodist Church, followers of Free Methodism in Gaines purchased the old union meeting house from the Free Congregationalists. The population of Gaines was first served by Rev. George Marcellus who not only oversaw the purchase of the building, but led the repainting of the structure and addition of stained glass windows.

The Gaines Free Methodist Church was served for a number of years by pastors from the church at Kenyonville, until that congregation disbanded. At that time, the

Gaines congregation purchased a house located along a north-running lane behind the church for use as a parsonage. During the nearly 50 years that the church was active, those in attendance received the word of God from a prestigious lineage of preachers in the denomination.

Samuel K. J. Chesbrough, regarded as the co-founder of Free Methodism, served two terms as pastor of the church. The congregation was also led by Joseph Goodwin Terrill, a contemporary of John Wesley Redfield, as well as the future first president of Greenville College, Wilson T. Hogg.

Alanson Kimball Bacon, a local resident who lived in the cobblestone home constructed by his father on Brown Road, filled the pulpits of the local Free Methodist churches at Albion and Gaines when they were vacant.

According to area resident Helen Allen, the last service held in the building was probably July 6, 1917. Around 1921 one of the last surviving trustees of the church, Robert Woolston of Carlton, sold the building to John Bauer. The building was later converted for use as the Gaines town hall and highway department.