

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## ANNIVERSARY OF NOTE



*"Acknowledge that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we belong to Him, we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."*

*Psalm 100:3*

On Sunday, May 20, 1990 the First Free Methodist Church of Albion, New York celebrated its 130th anniversary of dedication. A brief history of the church is as follows:

"The Albion Free Methodist Church was first organized during the fall of 1859. Rev. Loren Stiles, for some years a member of the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal church, and at that time pastor of the Methodist Church in Albion, was unjustly expelled from the conference and Church in October, 1859, during what is known as the "Genesee Conference Troubles." He returned to Albion and at the request of many of the members of the church, who sincerely sympathized with him, he formed a new church called the "Congregational Free Methodist Church." One hundred and eighty-five of his former charge joined the new church.

Services were held in the "Old Academy" until the basement of the church was finished in the Spring of 1860. The church property valued at \$11,000 was dedicated on May 18, 1860. The church was packed to its utmost (1300) and the religious interests ran high. It is also related that at a quarterly meeting held during the summer of 1860 there were 340 communicants present.

At the first annual convention of the Free Methodist Church held in Rushford, New York, November 8, 1860, Rev. Loren Stiles and his church joined the new organization, and he was appointed pastor at Albion. He continued as pastor until November, 1861, when he was elected Evangelist Missionary Secretary and Chairman, which office he filled until his death from typhoid fever May 7, 1863."

The reason Rev. Stiles was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal church was because he and all their ministers were forbade by their Bishop to speak from their pulpits about anti-slavery. The Rev. Stiles was an ardent abolitionist and pursued vocally with great zeal his feelings about the slave issue. Consequently, he was removed with many sympathizers following him. They purchased a lot across the street from the Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of East State and Flatt Streets in Albion and erected the first Free Methodist Church in the world. The word free, for Free Methodists, has a great significance historically — free from pew rent — free from the Methodist Episcopal Church and free from organizations with oaths. They are not and never were pretentious people in their dress, demeanor or style of religious worship. In the beginning, they purposely used no organ or piano. Music came from the heart in the form of a cappella singing.

They did however, build for themselves a church building of extra-ordinary exterior character. It is most unusual and a very rare form of architecture known as Norman Revival. The characteristics of this style include round headed windows and doors, high pitched roofs and short towers.

As we look at the scope of history from the local level we begin now in the last decade of this century to see things in greater perspective. We have a better sense of what is truly important in our heritage than we did fifty years ago. And surely one of the most significant happenings in local history during the last century was the establishment of the Free Methodist Church in Albion. In part, out of this occurrence, a world-wide denomination was founded. Rev. Stiles had personal integrity, he lived up to his scruples in spite of the consequences. When we consider the people he influenced and the church he established and the generations which in turn that church has influenced, truly that is important history, not just on the local level, but in a national and international framework.

Believing this, I felt an historic marker was most appropriate and long overdue for the Albion Free Methodist Church. Therefore, the Orleans County Department of History procured such a marker which was dedicated for the church's 130th anniversary. Now as tourists visit the Historic Court House District in Albion, they will see another spot which is indeed very significant in the heritage of our community, something we should all take pride in.