

Remembering the Sabbath

BY C.W. LATTIN

Our illustration is a print from the collection at the Cobblestone Society Museum in Childs. The print, created in 1901, is taken from a painting done in 1900 by W.L. Taylor, a late 19th century and early 20th century artist.

However, the setting for this illustration goes back to a much earlier period of time. It depicts the interior of a meeting house circa 1835 just prior to photography. Consequently, we rely upon the artist to show us the reality of the times.

Here we see a family enclosed in a box pew no doubt on a cold Sunday in February. Notice how the mother and daughter both have their feet planked on foot stoves or foot warmers. These devices were filled with embers or charcoal at home, placed in the sleigh for the ride to church and then brought inside for the duration. Box pews were outfitted with doors to cut down on drafts

when foot warmers were being used.

We also notice the family is warmly dressed with muffs and hats for the ladies while the man wears his gloves and high top boots.

The interior of the Protestant meeting house is unadorned with any religious accrements, thus reflecting the essence of the second commandment.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ..." The focal point for the worshippers is a high central pulpit where a preacher is seen delivering a sermon no doubt based on a text from the open Bible before him. Resting on the pulpit is an hourglass. A gallery along the side also is filled with people.

All meeting houses at the time had pew rent as a means of support. However, the galleries were open for those who could not afford the better pews up front on the main floor. Obviously the family illustrated here is well dressed and could

well pay for pew rent. Caleb Knapp in 1835 paid \$65 for a pew in the Cobblestone Church at Childs. He was issued an indenture, which stated this and that it was his pew then for life.

All the early houses of worship in Orleans County would have looked very much like this in the 1830s with clear glass windowpanes and stark white interiors. Baptist, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Universalists built in the manner giving an outward expression through architecture to the very thrust of the Protestant Reformation.

By the mid-19th century, the old stark mode of meeting house design began to give way to a more Victorian, romantic and church-like form of architecture. The clear glass panes were replaced with stained glass windows and the foot stoves became obsolete with better heating stoves and furnaces. Carpet covered the



plank floors while organs replaced the need for a capella singing.

As a foot note: This print in our illustration has been made into an all occasion greeting card in full color put up in packets of 10, which are available at the Swan Library in Albion.