

# Albion Free Methodist Church celebrates

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Back in mid-September, the Albion Free Methodist Church celebrated its sesquicentennial with a worship service and reception.

The physical church building in Albion is the oldest Free Methodist Church in the world. It was built in the very unusual Norman Revival style using round leaded windows and door. This was done in opposition to the more typical Gothic Revival style, used by Roman Catholics and Episcopalians.

At any rate, here is the fascinating story about the local congregation:

The Albion Free Methodist Church was first organized during the fall of 1859. The 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 1959, during what is known as the "Genesee Conference Troubles."

He returned to Albion 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 1960. The church property, valued at \$11,000, was dedicated May 18, 1860, by the Rev. E. Bowen, assisted by Revs. B.I. Ives, Asa Abel and the pastor. The church was packed to its utmost capacity 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 Dutchford on



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**FOUNDER:** The Rev. Loren Stiles from around 1860. He is buried in Mount Albion Cemetery under a very modest headstone is befitting early Free Methodist rejection of ostentatiousness.

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## Bethinking of Olde Orleans

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.

Free Methodists were organized under four principals: free pews, freedom from secret societies, free of the slaves and freedom of the spirit.

Likewise, the Albion congregation was free from the Methodist Episcopal Church from which they withdrew. Therefore, the word "free" meant a lot to Free Methodists.

It seems Stiles was an abolitionist and was expelled from his former church by the conference for preaching about the subject. He also felt parishioners should tithe their income, rather than pay pew rent. Today there are more than