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Chenung United Methodist Church

Chenung was newly settled when  
Methodism began to be recognized here.  
This was Indian Land until  
Sullivan's Expedition in 1779. At that  
time the Indians were driven out  
and the area became available  
for settlers. In 1786 a group of  
settlers, with land grants, came here  
to make their homes. Some of  
these settlers were from the New  
England States where the soil was  
rocky and hilly. They had been  
here as soldiers during Sullivan's  
Expedition, and having seen the  
rich land decided to settle here.

Apparently these early settlers had  
an inherent feeling for religion and  
a reverence for the Sabbath Day, as  
the following is an entry which  
was copied from a record of the  
Commissioners of Poor. "Dec the 28th,  
1798. Received of Elias Meadow, six Shillings  
for breach of the Sabbath, by the  
hand of Esqur Duck

Esqur

Thos Keeney, Overseer of the  
Poor"

Soon the circuit rider made his appearance and meetings were held. This was in disfavor by in some instances, due to the disturbances caused by shouting, hard clapping, and singing. In 1819 there was a Religious Revival and the Methodist Church had its origin in Chemung. About thirty members were enrolled in that first class. They had their first meeting in the old log school house near Stynkoop Creek with Rev. Sophronus Stocking, one of the circuit preachers, as their first leader. The first Resident Pastor was Rev. Wm. H. Pearne.

Until 1838 meetings were held in the log school house. In that year they built a small, modest church just east of Stynkoop Creek, where meetings were held for about ten years. At that time the Erie Railroad came thru and the property was purchased from the Church Society for the railroad's "Right of Way".

Immediately construction began at the site of the present church. This church was completed in 1850 at a cost of \$1500.

The Church Charge in 1850 consisted of Chemung Village, Oak Hill, "Williwanna" and Middle Chemung. In 1872 there were about one hundred members in the entire charge, with twenty of these in Chemung Village. The Sunday School had ~~an~~ fifty enrolled members.

At the present time the charge consists of two churches, Chemung and Willawana with 154 enrolled members at Chemung and 151 at Willawana.

The Sunday Schools are variable with about 130 enrolled members in the two churches.

There have been many changes in the church property since the early years; such as, remodeling, addition of Sunday School rooms, and the purchase of a parsonage, but basically it is the same, serving the community as a spiritual and community center.

Materials assembled by Elsie Thomas 1984

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HISTORY OF THE TOWN AND CHURCH

IN 1777 THE MEN OF GENERAL SULLIVAN'S ARMY CARRIED THE STORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL VALLEY OF THE CHEMUNG. AFTER THE WAR MANY MEN MADE THEIR HOMES AND FUTURE HERE. SOON AFTERWARD, PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER CAME TO SETTLE AND BUILD. CHEMUNG WAS SAID TO BE THE FIRST SPOT IN THE VALLEY TO BE SETTLED. CHEMUNG WAS AT THAT TIME CALLED BUCKVILLE, AFTER THE BUCK FAMILY WHO LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE VILLAGE. CHEMUNG IS AN INDIAN NAME MEANING "BIG HORN" AND THE NAME ORIGINATED IN THE DISCOVERY OF TWO BIG HORNS OR TUSKS DUG OUT OF THE BANKS OF THE CHEMUNG RIVER. THE TUSKS BELONGED TO THE MASTODONS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN IN THE AREA.

THE RUGGLES AND BUCK FAMILIES WERE AMONG THE EARLY FOUNDERS OF METHODISM IN CHEMUNG. METHODISM WAS LIVING IN CHEMUNG (BUCKVILLE) AS FAR AS BACK AS 1780, BUT IT WAS NOT AN ORGANIZED CLASS UNTIL 1819. THIS WAS HALF A CENTURY AFTER THE FIRST METHODIST SOCIETY WAS ORGANIZED IN AMERICA.

THE SETTING OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN 1819 WAS A LITTLE LOG MEETING HOUSE ON THE LOWER END OF THE VILLAGE NEAR WYNCOOP CREEK. THIS FIRST CLASS CONSISTED OF THIRTY CONVERTS.

IN 1838, A MODEST FRAME CHURCH WAS BUILT JUST A LITTLE EAST OF WYNCOOP CREEK. THEN IN 1849 THE ERIE RAILROAD WON RIGHT OF WAY THROUGH THE VILLAGE WITH THE ROAD BED PASSING DIRECTLY THROUGH THE CHURCH PROPERTY. THE CHURCH WAS THUS COMPELLED TO SELL THEIR PROPERTY.

1850 FOUND THE METHODIST SOCIETY AT THE CENTER OF THE VILLAGE WITH THE EXISTING CHURCH THAT WAS BUILT FOR A MERE \$1,500. MINOR CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE THROUGH THE YEARS AND A MAJOR BUILDING PLAN TOOK SHAPE IN 1968 WHEN A TWO STORY ADDITION WAS ADDED TO THE BACK OF THE CHURCH. THIS ADDITION WAS FINISHED AND DEDICATED IN 1973.

ONE OF THE FIRST PASTORS WAS A HORSEBACK CIRCUIT RIDER, THE REVEREND SOPHRONUS STOCKING. THE FIRST RESIDENT PASTOR (AROUND 1840) WAS REVEREND WILLIAM H. PEARNE. TODAY WE ARE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF REVEREND JAMES CARR AND HIS WIFE DAWN.