

# WHBC Roll Call Presentation

By Dan Scurlock

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Before we get into the actual WHBC Annual Roll Call Meeting, I would like to take a few moments to set the stage by utilizing a little bit of historical information about the creation of the West Henrietta Baptist Church and the Town of West Henrietta. In fact, there are so many historical facts affecting the creation of our church over the past 200+ years, it would take a large book significantly larger than this little half-inch thick blue book. The “little blue book” would more likely be twelve (12) inches thick or more.

We can trace a major fact about our church creation back to 1788, when Mr. Oliver Phelps and Mr. Nathaniel Gorham made an agreement with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to purchase a segment of land, approximately 6,000,000 acres, 300,000 English pounds, roughly \$1,000,000. If you think about it, back in 1788 \$1,000,000.00 was an enormous amount of money. Even in today’s world a million dollars is still a tidy amount of money. This portion of land spans the area from the southern shores of Lake Ontario south to the Pennsylvania state line, from the western shores of Seneca Lake westward to the eastern shores of Lake Erie. This purchase also included an agreement from the Iroquois Confederacy. A major investor in the land purchase was Sir William Johnstone Pulteney. Sir Pulteney’s daughter was the Countess of Bath, and that does not mean the location of Bath, New York; but more about her a little later.

Starting in the 1806, settlers from the Town of Pittsford, Township of Northfield, “Ontario County”, wanted to move west, closer the eastern banks of the Genesee River. As had been the history of this country, some of these settlers were unhappy with the politics of Pittsford. Westward, these settlers found rolling hills, heavily forested areas, and very rich fertile soil. Usually the father of the family, sometimes with the oldest son, would move first, establish the new homestead, and later bring the rest of the family. The family was usually just as fertile as the new homestead land resulting in rather large family units.

The new hamlet area was known as the “Woods of West Town”, “West Woods of Pittsford” or “West Town” for short. Very quickly, the population, which seemed to settle close to the two “plank” roads leading south out of Rochester to the remote areas of Avon and Rush. These “plank” roads later were named West Henrietta and East Henrietta Roads.

Once homesteads were settled, it was obvious this new hamlet needed schooling for their youngsters, already numbering over 300 by the end of the first decade of the 1800s, with the first school built in 1810. The first library in the area, spearheaded by Mr. James Sperry, appeared in 1816. Mr. Sperry was also very instrumental in the establishment of the first accredited school in 1826, “Monroe Academy”. More about the “Monroe” connection later. Other influential people of the time were George Beckwith, Arlow Beebee, Josiah Nichols, Michael Brininstool, just to name a few. At the same time, multiple “social” organizations started sprouting up, meeting in the homes of the influential people at the time. These “social” organizations not only dealt with the issues of clearing land, planting and harvesting crops, solving the large wolf and bear population threats, educating the children, but also to deal with political and spiritual needs of these settlers.

Businesses also began to spring up: lumber mills, tanneries, stables with blacksmithing services and carriage repair, churches, inns, taverns, stores, and other such businesses. There was also a need for spiritual fulfillment. The first churches met in the homes of area influentials. The first social/religious group to form into a church was the Baptists on the east side of the hamlet. The formation was on June 12, 1812. Other Christian fellowships included the Congregationalists, now known as the "United Church of Christ", Methodist/Episcopalians and Quakers. Four (4) religious groups in all, at that time.

The group of Baptists, forming on the west side of the hamlet, meeting in members' homes, such as Josiah Nichols, was formed on February 25, 1815. The newly formed church, accepting their own covenant on March 4, 1815, was named the "West Baptist Church of Pittsford". Michael Brininstool was elected as "Deacon". On April 12, 1815, six (6) other local churches were invited to recognize this newly formed place of faith. The Baptist church continued meeting in homes or schools until 1818 when they built their own "block" church structure along the eastern banks of the Genesee River.

In 1817 the settlers, being denied the right to vote in Pittsford town meetings because they could not produce clear land titles, became disgruntled and decided to form their own town. This new town was established on April 20, 1818, named after the Countess of Bath: "Henrietta" Laura Pulteney.

In 1821, portions of Ontario and Genesee counties were organized into the County of Monroe, New York. The "Monroe" name was derived from the name of the current President of the United States: James Monroe. Interesting is the fact that the area known as Henrietta is the exact geographical center of the newly formed Monroe County.

In 1825, the most famous personage of Henrietta history was born to Squire and Mrs. Joseph Brown: Antoinette Brown. Later, this young lady married Mr. Blackwell, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, and went on to become the first female ordained woman in the United States. She also was a renowned orator, feminist, and a temperance and abolition leader.

1827 saw the Baptists of West Henrietta join with the Baptists of East Henrietta into a United Baptists Church. However, just a few years later, 1830, a few of the West Henrietta Baptists resumed their worship in the original block church on East River Road.

The areas of West Henrietta and East Henrietta continued to grow and develop. 1831 saw the building of the second hotel, known as Cartwright Inn, and a corner store.

The strong work ethic and Christian morals allowed the dedicated settlers to overcome the harsh winters, wild animals and the recurring episodes of Genesee flu. Fortunately, the local population of Native Americans, located on reservations, were friendly, not presenting any problems for the growing area population.

In 1838 the West Henrietta Baptists were seeking dismissal from the United Baptists and started meeting in the home of Elijah Nichols. However, due to very strict rules governing families regarding their Baptist membership, any infraction reflecting a lack of faith resulted in very harsh disciplinary action by the church elders. The United Baptists would allow the dismissing of the West Henrietta Baptists only if they could build their own "House of Worship" structure. Hence, the church building located on the northeast corner of the West Henrietta village was erected and was known as the "Baptists of West Henrietta". The church was recognized at council meeting on September 27, 1838. The next month, the new church joined the Monroe County Association of Baptist Churches.

By the beginning of the 1900s, the “West Henrietta Baptist Church” was, as it was then called, matured as a local church. People came and left and families then called the WHBC location as their “home” church. It was also recognized far and wide as a place of worship.

1910 saw the addition of the “Fellowship Hall” to the church.

In 1915 a beautiful pipe organ was installed. Unfortunately by the close of the 1900s, parishioners saw the removal of the pipe organ due to inability to obtain parts to maintain the piping.

The 1920s saw the beautiful enhancement of the sanctuary by the addition of the stained glass windows. On Sunday mornings when the sun shines in those windows, the glory of the Lord is so evident. And for evening services, the internal lights coming from those windows broadcasts to the whole community the worship of faithful believers present.

The comfort of indoor bathrooms downstairs became a welcome addition, especially during harsh winter days, in 1931. That same year, additional comfort for parishioners was found with the replacement of the pews.

Our beautiful Memorial Cabinet became a sanctuary fixture in 1935.

Also started during the middle decades of the 1900s, a growing number of women’s groups, “guilds” added to the faithful message of the white church standing on the Henrietta corners. An example of the strength of those women’s groups were the war years, starting in 1942, when Red Cross bandages were produced in the Fellowship Hall and supplied to our armed forces.

In 1954, after many years of church elder debate, the old horse sheds, which were being maintained over behind the hotel and corner store across the street, were sold. Maintenance had become such a burden for the church faithful. It was also believed the “automobile” vehicle was here to stay.

1956 saw the selling of the old parsonage located up the street on West Henrietta Road, a duplex, and the erection of the new parsonage located just up the hill on Erie Station Road. Rev. Fred Dean and his family became the first occupants.

1963 saw the addition of the individual classrooms to the fellowship hall basement area. This same year the church building was connected to the local water and sewer lines. A cistern located under the northeast corner of the sanctuary was utilized for potable water.

The tradition of the weekly book of “Joys and Concerns” was added in 1975. That same year, the church sponsored its first family of immigrants, a Laotian family. Other families followed.

In 1980, our West Henrietta Baptist Church building was recognized as a local historical landmark.

In 1981, the balcony was added to the sanctuary to accommodate the growing church family.

1985 saw another “outreach” program take hold at WHBC: several individuals, spearheaded by Roger Cross, started the local affiliation of “Habitat for Humanity Organization”.

Many local prominent family names are reflected in the history of our WHBC. Names such as Brininstool, Bullard, Carpenter, Caswell, Crittenden, Dunn, Fenner, Gay, Howlett, Keyes, Martin, McFarlane, McNall, Nichols, Remington, Search, Sperry, just to name a few. Descendants of the families are still members of our church family today. There are also local streets, roads, buildings, schools, and

other landmarks. Even the names of the stained glass windows of our sanctuary reflect some of these names.

As stated at the beginning of this presentation, these historical facts as presented and many which were not, tell only one side of the story of the West Henrietta Baptist Church's 200 hundred years. The other story is much more powerful, I believe. That story is one of legacy. Those early settlers, their descendants, some of which are still part of this congregation, along with a lot of others who have come and gone over the two (2) centuries, formed the fabric of our church.

Those hard working, Christian, dedicated faithful people established a corner of worship for all of the world to see and feel. Each generation, since 1815, had church members who served in our nation's military armed forces, both during war and peace times. They helped spread their faith to all they came in contact with around the world. Missions and missionaries have experienced the strength of God's love as provided by this congregation. Two (2) centuries of families have been born, raised, and even passed on to His mansion from this house of worship.

A structure of God's faithful worship stands on this crossroads corner, by God's grace has weathered many personal, financial, spiritual storms and still stands. This beautiful House of God's love, by His mercy, will continue to shine with His glory for many decades, maybe centuries, to come.

Now as would probably would have heard back in 1815: "Hear ye!" "This assembly of the congregation of the West Henrietta Baptist Church Annual Roll Call is hereby called to order. As the clerk reads your family name, please affirm your presence and announcing your faith with either helping us sing a favorite hymn, reciting a favorite scripture, offering a word of prayer, reading an appropriate poem, or some other inspirational thought. I now ask our church clerk to step forth.

Thank you Sharon for leading us in our "Roll Call.

I now would like to lead us in reading and reaffirming our Church Covenant.