

# Records of United Baptist long gone

*This article is one in a bicentennial year Link series by WHBC Historian Bonnie Healy.*

Sometimes the extraordinary stories uncovered in genealogical or historical research collide eventually with something even more unexpected: Ordinarity. An ancestor's daring move across an ocean becomes a drop in a sea of human migration. A young woman's tragic death in childbirth normalizes in a society of stepparents and blended families.

So it is with the history of WHBC. Our history so parallels the history of East Henrietta Baptist, the church with which we were once united, that a common pattern emerges. If Elder E. Weaver ministered in cabins and barns in our riverside wilderness, Elder Daniel Brown did so on the east side of town. If Michael Brininstool, an 1811 pioneer on the river road, was our one stalwart deacon before the 1827 merger, his counterparts were Sam Wise, an 1812 settler near what is now Pinnacle and Calkins, and Moses Clark of Mendon. If our church organized in the home of Josiah Nichols, the eastside church formed in the home of Sam Wise.

So similar were these churches, that their union must have seemed a perfect match. But exactly why they united in 1827 and why they separated in 1838 will never be quite known. The records are lost. East Baptist records begin in 1855. Their two earliest record books, now in the care of the Henrietta Historian's Office, are brief in comparison with our own. It is only *The History of Monroe County, New York 1788-1877* that reveals a heyday during their union: In 1832, the combined congregation numbered 132.

If genealogy can show us the commonality of our roots, it can also teach us that beginnings do not determine subsequent paths or ultimate outcomes. At present, both congregations are small and struggling, but in the years following the separation, it seems that the church in the east village suffered more. While West Henriettans built a new church and thrived, East Henriettans remained two years in their brick church. In 1840, they sold that building — which soon needed to be torn down — to the Methodist Episcopalians. Then, for two years, the congregation that had stipulated that West Henriettans could leave if they built a church, met in the school house on the Pinnacle Road farm of Alfred Lincoln. Not until 1842 did they build a new church on Reeves Road at Pinnacle. As late as 1855, the church was still calling itself United Baptist.

Following the separation, the history and practice of the churches continued to mirror each other. If we had a long-time 19th century Clerk in C.J. Smith, a prosperous farmer and community leader, they had James Stevenson. If later we



**East Baptist Church on Reeves Road at Pinnacle**

had Emma Sherman as clerk for decades, they had Alma Stone. As we struggled for years with parking even for horses and buggies, they wrestled with the care of their cemetery. If we have a school named for Emma Sherman, they have one named for Floyd Winslow. Both churches used divinity students as part-time pastors for years. Both held monthly covenant meetings. Both disciplined members for failing to attend or give, for dancing and cursing, for drinking, and other misdeeds. Both sang the old hymns we still sing. Representatives attended the same Monroe Baptist Association meetings and attended significant services at each other's churches.

However, the fire that rocked West Henrietta with the 1905 destruction of the Jones and Buckley General Store pales compared with the fire that had destroyed East Baptist at midnight Sept. 18, 1871. Undaunted, they floored their horsesheds and held Sunday School. The existing church — built on the walls of the ruined original — was dedicated July 4, 1877.

Communion between the two churches was fractured again when the church that had been left in turn left. East Baptist left the American Baptist Convention, as American Baptist Churches USA was called in the 1970s, when a majority in the congregation found the convention and its divinity school at Colgate Rochester too theologically liberal. The oldest church in town, it now participates in few, if any, interfaith activities.