

The West Junius Methodist Church

At the corner of the Bostwick and Grange Hall Roads can be found a church building whose history gives us insight into the history of many of the small rural church congregations in Seneca County. In the horse and buggy era many small churches sprang up throughout the county. With the advent of the automobile, and perhaps a reduced interest in regular church attendance, many of these churches struggled to exist.



It was in 1848 that the West Junius Methodist Church congregation was organized. The original trustees were Abram S. Newton, David Newton, Stephen Collamer, Henry Terbush and Tern Odell. Abram Newton and Henry Terbush donated property along the boundary between their two farms for the site of this new church and its cemetery. The new church building was dedicated on January 25, 1849. In 1852, at a cost of \$200, horse sheds were built for the accommodation of those attending services.

Those sheds were torn down about 1925.

Affiliated with the Methodist Church conference, this church functioned for many years as a fine example of a circuit church. The Methodist Episcopal society had the right to use it every alternate Sunday, and also at any other time when it was not wanted by some other Christian denomination. The pastor was often a pastor at another nearby church. The 1896 book *Manual of Churches and Pastors of Seneca County, N.Y.*, stated that at that time the congregation had only eight members but that the congregations at public worship were “large and formed of attentive listeners.”

According to a 1950 article in the *Waterloo Observer*, about 1937 a couple of Bible students from Providence, Rhode Island tried to hold “full gospel” meetings in the old church. But the efforts died out.

In the deed to the church property was the provision that the church was to revert to the original owner of the land and building if it went over twenty years without church services. When this allotted time occurred about 1948, Paul D. Newton inherited it. Mr. Newton, a prominent Newark businessman, was determined to restore the church building and make it available to any denomination. Newton, who was born just west of the church and cemetery, gave the money for a new roof, new windows, wired the church building for electricity, and installed a new oil furnace. Mrs. Hazel Buisch reported that Paul Newton had told her, “I’m not a praying man but I want the church open. God has been very good to me.” Hazel Buisch had a great urge to preach and she organized a Sunday school class and occupied the pulpit, with the assistance of Miss Marion



Holland of Geneva. Prayer meetings and testimonial meetings were held on Tuesday nights, and church services every Sunday at 3 o'clock.

No church services, however, have been held in the church building since sometime in the early 1960s. Genesee Country Village tried to secure the church building. The disbanded Enterprise Circle gave its funds to the church for maintenance. When Paul Newton died in 1961, he left funds to start an endowment fund for the neighboring cemetery association. Several members of the Newton family are buried in the cemetery.



John Zornow of Newark got involved with maintaining the church in 1970. He and members of the cemetery board, mostly made up of Newton descendants, place a lighted Christmas tree each year inside the church. His efforts, along with those of Paul D. Newton's daughter Pearl N. Rook, continue the vision of Newton to make this church available to any denomination. As a tribute to Paul D. Newton, who was Chairman of the Board of Commercial Enterprises in Newark, the C.H. Stuart Foundation has supported the restoration and upkeep of the West Junius Methodist Church.

The interior of the church today looks fairly typical of any small rural church. It does contain, as well, a painting of the Last Supper which was given by Junius community residents as an expression of thanks to Paul Newton and his family for their efforts to preserve the church and the neighboring cemetery. Without the dedicated efforts of individuals like Paul Newton, his daughter Pearl Rook, and John Zornow, it is likely that the church building would no longer exist.