

**HISTORICAL RECORD
OF CHURCHES IN ORWELL**

1806 – 1996

Compiled by: David C. J. Potter II

**HISTORICAL RECORD
OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND CHURCHES
LOCATED IN THE ORWELL, NEW YORK AREA
1806 – 1996**

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FORWARD

As with most of the early settlers in the 18th and 19th centuries, those who came to settle in the area we now refer to as Orwell in the northern part of Oswego County had a strong religious foundation. Families shared the reading and listening of the scriptures on a daily basis. Those who could not read would seek those who could and small meetings and groups were common. Since most of the early settlements could not afford to support a pastor independently, many groups would share a Pastor with a neighboring town or as in the case with the Methodists, circuit preachers were prevalent. While individual ties to a specific denomination were often very strong, the need to share in worship and study was stronger and brought all together.

Probably the earliest permanent settler in Orwell was Frederick Eastman and family. They were Presbyterian. In 1807 Nathaniel Bennett and family arrived, and they were followers of Methodist movement. It was not long before the need to share in Christian fellowship and worship overshadowed the doctrinal differences they may have had. As you proceed through the following pages, the names of these families will play prominently in the spiritual growth of our town.

Much of the information you will find in these pages comes from minutes of church meetings. Therefore, the information is brief and not as detailed as I would like. However, some interesting conclusions have become apparent during this endeavor.

First, in the early days of our town's religious endeavors, local residents who were chosen to serve as Elders would conduct the weekly services or studies. On a fairly regular monthly basis, a Pastor would arrive on Saturday for a Church business meeting. On Sunday there was often a morning service followed by an afternoon service, which would include the Lords Supper. This seemed to be a time of great fellowship and social interaction. Compare this with today where we try to fit that all valuable one hour into our Sunday morning.

Second, The records show that the first true organized religious organization was of the Presbyterian faith, followed by the Congregational, and then the Methodist. You will see many of the same names mentioned in the records of all three of these groups, showing that as one group faded or dwindled in size, the members were readily accepted into the other. Also, the Orwell Union Church built in 1844 and was concurrently used by these groups. Again, this demonstrates how despite affiliation, the community worked together to worship God.

Lastly, while the organized denominational groups were an important part of the community, I have found a sense that the individual classes, societies, and groups have played a major role. You will find that during much of the record, only men held office in or spoke in the meetings. These individual groups were often comprised of women who physically, financially, and spiritually supported the church. Some of their activities may even have been a bit radical in their day, such as that associated with the Temperance movement.

Much of the information in this writing has been gleaned from Church records handed down and maintained in the Orwell Union Church. Original writings, baptismal, marriage, and membership records have been copied as accurately as possible. When a particular spelling or wording is in question the area will be marked with a "[*]". The purpose of this writing is the desire to preserve, in a manner whereby all can have access, these very important records. Also, the hope that by looking back at our history, we may reinforce the ideals that helped our ancestors survive the many hardships they encountered. The strongest of these ideals was their unending faith in God.