

**A HISTORY OF THE SAINTS OF GILEAD:
AN HISTORICAL SKETCH of
GILEAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)**

In the Beginning

In 1742, before there was a Carmel or a Putnam County, indeed before there was even a United States of America, a small group of settlers met for the purpose of worshipping God and formed the nucleus of what is now the Gilead Presbyterian Church of Carmel, New York.

The small congregation met for many months at the home of the Rev. Elisha Kent, who had been commissioned to serve this body as pastor, until in 1745 a small log cabin was erected to serve as a meeting house for the "Western Society of Philipse Precinct." This log cabin was built on a rocky knoll overlooking Croton Valley very near the line between the towns of Southeast and Carmel, now known as Tilly Foster. It was a small building with backless benches for seats and a plain box for the pulpit. One can just imagine that with the length of services considerably more than an hour, the participants must have been very uncomfortable, not to mention, either very warm or extremely cold.

Upon Rev. Kent's departure, the Rev. James Davenport came to the church about 1750. He remained until 1754, at which time the pastorate was vacant for two years, until Rev. Knibloe was installed in 1756.

The Early Years

At some time during this period, the congregation decided to leave the log cabin, and a new church was built on what is now Seminary Hill, at the site of the Old Gilead Burying Ground. It was completed about 1755, and the foundation can still be seen, albeit faintly, at the site. It was an imposing building for its time: about 50 feet square and facing south. It had galleries around three sides of the ground floor with square pews for families, and straight pews through the central portion of the ground floor on either side of a center aisle. The pulpit was goblet-shaped and was reached by a winding stair. The church was white, with a red wooden roof.

Rev. Knibloe lived with Deacon Crosby and was paid the magnificent sum of £10 per year, of which he paid 6 shillings, sixpence to Deacon Crosby for rent. However, he himself only paid board of 15 shillings, the rest being paid by the parishioners to Mr. Crosby in the form of cash, goods, or personal services. Rev. Knibloe served until 1759, when he was succeeded by Rev. Elnathan Gregory. It was a well remembered sermon the Rev. Gregory preached from the text "Is there no balm in Gilead?" that would later inspire the renaming of the church. Rev. Gregory also leased a farm south of the church and worked it as well as attending to his pastoral duties. He retired in 1773 and was succeeded by Rev. David Close, who served Gilead during the American Revolution and left during 1782.

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During this period, the congregations of the Philipse (Southeast) and West Philipse (Carmel) were part of the Fairfield East Association. However, in 1763, the Association ruled out the two congregations in New York after the Connecticut-New York boundary was set, and the pastors of Southeast, Salem, Patterson, and Carmel formed themselves into the Presbytery of Dutchess. The Carmel church had had strong Congregational ties until Rev. Close became pastor, and it was his strong Presbyterian heritage that brought Gilead into the Presbytery. Between 1782 and 1793 there was a series of interim pastors, and because of declining membership and lack of interest the church was in danger of failing. On August 9, 1792 a meeting was convened for the purpose of reorganization, at which time nine articles of faith and a covenant were adopted which formed the basis of the church today.

Rev. James Hickox became pastor in 1793 and was followed by Rev. Stephen Dodd, who served until 1810. After Rev. Dodd left, Brother Herman Daggett served from 1810-1812 when an ordained pastor, Rev. Allen Blair, became minister. He left after a little more than a year, at which time Rev. James Austin assumed the pastorate for two years. Another series of short pastorates followed.

Since the Presbytery of Dutchess, of which Gilead was a member church, had been dissolved in 1795, and the church members were desirous of disassociating themselves from the Congregational church, the members met and declared themselves to be an independent body. One month later, they appeared before the Presbytery of Bedford and requested admission.

The Formative Years

On July 1, 1834, the present site of the church was purchased and a new church building was erected in 1835. It was colonial in style, with a deep piazza across the front supported by 4 pillars. A bell tower was later erected. In 1844 James Raymond presented a bell to the church.

In 1892 the necessity for extensive repairs became apparent, and it was decided to build a new church instead. The old church was sold for \$200, and a new edifice was erected and occupied by January, 1894. It was built on the foundations of the old church, but the entrance was turned around to face west. Again a bell tower was erected, and a bell installed. The complete expense amounted to \$11,726. The sanctuary could be combined with the Sunday School room (now the Lounge) when it was necessary to increase the seating capacity.

There was a succession of pastors, many of whom were interim and supply preachers who served for only a few months to a couple of years. Among the more notable were the Rev. Walker Todd, who established the first Sunday School, and the Rev. Henry W. Smuller, who was pastor during the Civil War and served as chaplain to Company G of the 135th Regiment recruited from this area.

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The Twentieth Century

In 1922 the church burned down, and a new building was erected on the foundations of the old one. With the exception of modern improvements, the new building was built exactly to the specifications of the previous edifice.

Gilead was blessed by the long pastorates of the Rev. Harley S. Fletcher from 1929 to 1945, and the Rev. James E. Walker from 1943 to 1948. During the 1950's there was a series of short term supply, until the arrival of the Rev. Donald A. Hostetter in 1956. During his tenure the Christian Education Wing was added, along with the parking area. This greatly enabled the expansion of the Carmel Nursery School that had begun in 1949.

In 1963, Rev. Hostetter resigned as pastor to become Director of the Presbyterian Camp at Denton Lake. Rev. Fred Knieriem arrived as pastor, and with his wife, Dolores, contributed 28 years of service to the church. They also brought a new member into the church with the birth of their daughter, Martha. During his tenure, the manse was renovated, the garage added, and siding installed on the church. In 1991, Fred and Dolores indicated their desire to retire from active service as of August, but unfortunately, Dolores was called to the service of God on January 31, 1991. Rev. Knieriem continued his ministry until August.

In January, 1992, Rev. Audrey Evans Lee was installed as Interim Pastor. In that year, the church celebrated 250 years of service to the community. There were special services held and local proclamations were received from Robert Bondi, Putnam County Executive, as well as from the State through the offices of State Senator, Vincent Leibell.

In 1995, Rev. Paul D. Lent was ordained and installed as our pastor, and under his leadership there was a renaissance of activity and good feeling, which in turn led to an increase in membership and participation in church activities by the congregation. In 1996 Paul was married to Christine Wong and in 1999 the church was blessed with the arrival of their son, Daniel.

As the church grew in membership, Rev. Diane Jamison Fitch joined the church ministry as Associate Pastor in 1999 to 2003, ably assisting in the additional ministerial duties brought about by the increase in membership. In 1997, Rev. Fred Knieriem was installed as Pastor Emeritus, in recognition of his many years of service to Gilead.

In recent years, a new roof has been put on the church, and the bell tower has been restored to its original configuration. At the manse, a new roof and vinyl siding were installed and all windows replaced, giving the house a whole new look. In 2005 a major renovation of our Church School rooms brightened and broadened our Christian Education, and we became handicap-accessible in our ongoing journey to make our church welcoming to everyone.

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In 1996, the church lost their organist and choir director, Aileen Romberg, to cancer. Aileen had not only been a member for over thirty years, but had served on Session as Clerk and had been active in the Hudson River Presbytery. The church procured the services of another active member, Mary Temple, who brought new meaning to the words "the glorification of God through music". Under her direction, the senior choir membership has increased; new groups have been added, including both junior and adult hand chime choirs and three youth choirs, and various soloists have been brought in to delight the congregation.

In October, 2000 Rev. Lent left our church to join the pastorate of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, and later Freedom Plains Presbyterian in Lagrangeville NY. In January 2001, Rev, Pablo R. Diaz, his wife Elba, and their two children Paul and Christine, came all the way from California to become our new pastoral family. Pablo served as Interim Pastor until September 2002, when Rev. Martin McGeachy arrived from Arkansas bringing his daughters Rebekah and Rachel, making him the 48th pastor since 1743.

Gilead has never been a large church and there have been times when its future was in question, but it has always been faithful to its calling and has served the community well. Today it is a warm lively church with a vital church school, a talented music program, a food pantry that reaches out to those in need in the community, and a well-regarded nursery school. We maintain a varied program of social and fellowship activities for all ages. Programs housed in our facility include Alcoholics Anonymous, PRPH (programs for the handicapped), Girl Scouts, etc.

We are a church that looks forward to the next 260 years in confidence and in hope.

Continued Below

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THE MINISTERS OF GILEAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Elisha Kent	1743-50	Israel W. Cochrane	1868-69
James Davenport	1750-54	Daniel D. Sahler	1871-82
Ebenezer Knibloc	1756-59	Anthony W. Colver	1883-84
Elnathan Gregory	1760-73	Rollin A. Sawyer	1885-88
David Close	1774-82	Addison K. Strong	1888-90
Blackleach Burritt	1782-92	Henry R. White	1891-92
Ichabod Lewis	1772-93	Bruce W. Cronmuller	1892-94
Jonas Hickox	1793-1800	John B. Appel	1894-98
Silas Constant	1800-01	Nathan F. Van Horsen	1899-1903
Stephen Dodd	1803-10	George P. Noble	1903-16
Herman Daggett	1810-12	William Parker	1916-18
Allen Blair	1812-13	John J. McClelland	1920-23
James N. Austin	1815-17	Edward L. Junkin	1923-24
Abner Brundage	1818-21	Robert S. Chamberlain	1924-28
Isaac Allerton	1821-24	Harley S. Fletcher	1929-43
Ashael Bronson	1824-27	James E. Walker	1943-48
Benaiah Y. Morse	1829-35	Robert Sargent	1948-51
George Todd	1835-44	Edward W. Miller	1951-55
Henry G. Livingston	1844-49	Donald A. Hostetter	1956-63
Rutgers Van Brunt	1850-52	Fred P. Knieriem	1963-91
Joseph C. Foster	1852-54	Audrey Evans Lee	1992-95
Samuel W. Crittenden	1856-57	Paul D. Lent	1996-2000
Henry W. Smuller	1858-62	Pablo R. Diaz	2001-02
Saurin E. Lane	1863-68	Martin McGeachy	2002-