

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #38 Part I

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the newsletter, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

THE MADISON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The early settlers to the Town of Madison were very religious and immediately began to organize churches. In this series of "Turnpike Tales" we will look at the six original churches in the township. Each has a unique story. Although only two of the original six are still active, all of the churches served or are still serving the spiritual needs of their followers.

The First Congregational Church of Madison was organized on September 6, 1796 by the Rev. Eliphalet Steele of Paris, New York. It was known in the beginning as the Hamilton Congregational Church, as the Township of Madison was not incorporated until 1807.

The church was what has been called the Puritan type, as its early members were from New England or of New England descent. It appears from records that the barn of John Berry was used for the first meeting of the small congregation. The original eleven members are listed as: John and Lucy Berry, Abraham Hemingway, Samuel Curtis, Jesse and Sally Maynard, Rebecca Cleaveland, Benjamin Simmons, Samuel and Ruth Brownell, and Gideon Simmons.

The church depended on itinerant ministers to preach to the group before Rev. Ezra Woodworth became the first pastor in 1799.

During the first six years of its existence, John Berry's barn was a meeting place for the congregation, but in 1802 a house of worship was erected at Madison Center by Paul Hazzard. The area for the new church seems to have been to the southwest of the present cemetery and across the road.

By 1807, membership in the church had grown to 55. In 1815, the number had increased to 160. Puritan principles were strictly followed. At times, members were punished quite harshly. Sins such as drunkenness, profanity, breaking Sabbath rules, and absence from church were dealt with by the minister and the congregation. On one occasion, a young man was fined \$2.00 for saying that the minister's coat was too long!!

Some twenty years later the church was deemed to be too small. It was taken down and a larger church built across the highway and nearly opposite to where it formerly stood. By the 1850 time period, there was a growing movement among the church members to move the church to Madison Village. Beginning on June 23, 1856 it was again taken down, the boards numbered, and rebuilt at its present location in Madison Village. The last service to take place at the Madison Center site was the funeral of Mrs. Harvey Blair. This occurred on June 22, 1856, the day before the dismantling of the church began.

The carpenter in charge of taking the church down and rebuilding it in Madison was James E. Coolidge. He had finished the Cobblestone Store building in Bouckville, which we now know as the Landmark Tavern, in 1851.

The cemetery for the original Congregational Church was on the hillside overlooking Madison Center and north of the present cemetery. Many of the graves in that cemetery were reinterred in the new cemetery in Madison Village after the church was relocated there. The relocated site has been the home of Taylor's Auction Service for many years.

The church, however, suffered from being moved to Madison. The Congregational Church in Hamilton was much nearer for many families; hence 20 families withdrew to that church. Death also removed many of the strongest members. The church never fully recovered from the loss of members and the ill-feelings caused by the move from Madison Center. By 1880 membership had shrunk to 109.

In 1892, through the efforts of Rev. Peck, the church interior was modernized. New hanging lamps were installed, and memorial windows were given by private individuals. The expense was \$1,500, largely paid for by the untiring efforts of the ladies of the church.

The church, however, was dissolved in 1906 as a result of a bitter dispute over the retaining of a pastor. Plans were made for the disposition of the church property. At the time of the church closing, membership had dwindled to fewer than a dozen.

The property was sold to the Knights of Pythias organization on February 12, 1909. The pulpit chairs from the church were donated to the Pine Woods Union Church and the beautiful stained-glass windows were donated, removed, and installed in the Bouckville Church.

As Knights of Pythias Hall or K.P. Hall, as it was affectionately called for years, the building was used for Pythian ceremonies, plays and musicals, the voting area for District #2, a movie house, a venue for milk meetings and telephone meetings, and also for graduation ceremonies of the Madison Union School, which was located just to the south of the hall on Hamilton Street, known today as South Street.

When the Knights of Pythias group dissolved, the building was used for Hill's Bus and Truck Repair, then became the location for DePuy's Auction Service and finally is the home of Taylor's Auction Service today. The Congregational Church of Madison has certainly had a storied past.