

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2/5/2012

First Presbyterian Church, Ilion, New York was organized on May 28, 1871. This was the same year as the Chicago fire, the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, the unveiling of Whistler's Mother and the end of Boss Tweed's reign in Tammany Hall. Ulysses S. Grant was in the third year of his first term as President of the United States, and Ilion was a booming, prosperous little town with E. Remington & Sons Company employing from 1300 to 1400 people.

The eighteen charter members of the new Presbyterian group held their congregational worship in Mechanics Hall on the south side of First Street (the approximate location of today's police department). It was in 1874 that the current location at the corner of Second and Morgan Streets was purchased for \$4500 and a church building erected at a cost of \$35,000. The new church was dedicated on April 6, 1875.

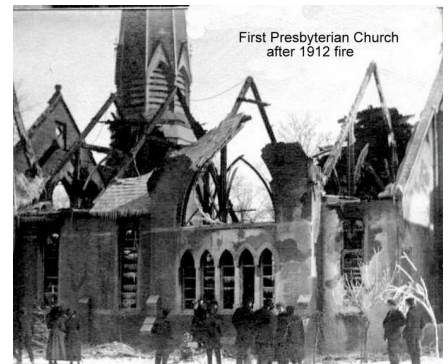
On November 20, 1871 the church welcomed the first pastor, the Rev. D.M. Rankin. The Rev. Albert F. Lyle became the second pastor on October 29, 1878. The third pastor Rev. Moses E. Dunham began his duties on April 2, 1882. On October 7, 1888 the Rev. William C. Taylor was our Fourth pastor. On October 24, 1905 the Rev. Calvin H. French was installed as our fifth pastor. We were debt free 1909-1911 and the membership was at an all time high.

2/12/2012

One hundred years ago, tragedy struck our beautiful church. Shortly before two o'clock on Sunday, February 11, 1912 and less than one hour after Sunday School

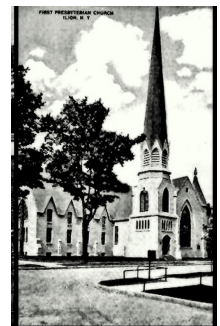


had been dismissed, the church had become a blazing inferno. Patrolman Henry Folts noticed smoke coming from the church on the Second Street side and called in the alarm to the fire department. Great clouds of billowing black smoke completely hid the structure from view. The flames broke loose and the Presbyterian Church was in ruins. The firemen fought the blaze until 5 PM in below zero weather. All that remained was the charred walls and the mammoth spire.



The trustees called a meeting that day at the home of Dr. R.B. Redway, DDS and they were already making arrangements for the future. A new building committee had been named and substitute meeting places for the services were made. The property was valued at \$50,000 but was covered by only \$15,000 of insurance.

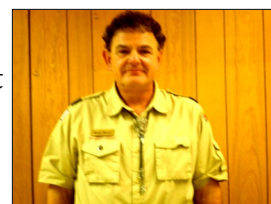
A campaign for the rebuilding of the church was begun. The slogan "Thirty thousand in ten days" must have been effective for in exactly ten days this amount was raised. Mr. Michael Hartford of the church of the Annunciation donated the first dollar. On September 17, 1912 the cornerstone, given by Mr. Alexander Jarvis, was laid for the new building. The new church was dedicated the following year from November 30<sup>th</sup> to December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1913 at a total cost of \$60,000.



The Reverend Calvin French originated our first Boy Scout Troop during his pastorate and became the first Presbyterian "Scoutmaster". At this time the original group was designated as Troop 1 in the year 1912.

Two young scouts who started their careers under Rev. French were Lewis Jones and Richard Dimock. Lewis Jones, in later years, became Dr. Jones and Richard Dimock continued on with scouting to become Scoutmaster in 1916---eventually attaining the rank of County Commissioner and executive board member in 1941. In 1934 Mr. Dimock was awarded the "Silver Beaver Award" – the highest honor to be given any official in the U.S.A.

Following Mr. Dimock as Scoutmaster were: Harry Wilkins, Bob Cosman, Carroll ("Cud") Hannas and Robert Fager. Donald R. Thomas took over the troop in 1967 as Scoutmaster. Dick Long was Don's assistant scoutmaster. Chuck Squire followed Don Thomas, then Cal Southwick Jr., Bill Laymon and finally, our current Scoutmaster Richard Rotondi, who is continuing the great tradition that makes the Presbyterian Scout Troop 9 one of the finest in the country.



Richard Rotondi

2/19/2012

During the summer of 1918 the church purchased a residence on Prospect Avenue as a manse. Between the time of the purchase and the Rev. Barnes' occupancy, the house was turned over to the Red Cross for use as a hospital during the terrible "flu epidemic".

In March of 1919 the Session revised the list of members of our church, striking off 144 names who had been absent for at least two years and had contributed nothing for church support; a practice which continues today.

Our next and 6<sup>th</sup> pastor, the Rev. E. D. Barnes, arrived in Ilion with his family and was installed in May of 1919. He was a former World War I Army Chaplain and preached his first sermon wearing the uniform of his country. Our church celebrated its fiftieth birthday (semi-centennial) in the year of 1921. On the evening of June 10, 1926 the church celebrated the second "burning of the mortgage". Board of Trustees chairman, George Getman, reported that all money is on hand with a surplus of \$30.00. The church purchased a manse on Armory Hill. The trustees found out that the Sanford Getman home south of the church was for sale and then purchased it for the manse.

The Reverend Paul Wagner, D.D., our 7<sup>th</sup> pastor gave his first sermon on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1934. Dr. Wagner was installed as our permanent pastor on April 11, 1935. A 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary service was held on December 11, 1938 celebrating the dedication of our new church after the fire of 1912. On December 7, 1941 the United States was again at war. There were seventy-three men, women, boys and girls from our church who joined up to fight for their country. September of 1953 Dr. Wagner submitted his resignation after a tenure of twenty years as pastor of our church.

The Reverend Charles H. Bartlett was installed as our eighth pastor on February 21, 1954. Rev. and Mrs. Bartlett (Doris) had five daughters and were welcomed at a reception. In the summer of 1954 several repairs were made to the church property; a new roof for the manse, a new floor in the basement of the church, and repairs for the heating system. On March 23, 1955 the Women of the church formed a new organization called "The Women's Association" having four circles called: Sarah, Ruth, Dorcas and Naomi. In May of 1956 the Rev. Bartlett discovered some of the bricks in the steeple tower were loose. All the wooden timbers

were badly rotted and the steeple began to lean. Our church was closed and services were held in the Masonic Temple, Municipal Building and other protestant churches. In August of 1955 a new steeple had been erected at a cost of \$24,000. Rev. Bartlett submitted his resignation at the annual meeting January 7, 1959.

2/26/2012

On March 8, 1959, the Rev. Maurice C. Mitchell conducted the morning service in our church and, at a congregational meeting held immediately after the service, it was voted unanimously to extend him a "call" to the church. Rev. Mitchell accepted and along with his wife, the former Alice Jane Shimp and his four sons, arrived in Ilion on April 28<sup>th</sup> and moved into the manse.

The Rev. Mitchell preached his first sermon as our pastor on May 3, 1959 and was formally installed on May 17<sup>th</sup>, by the Rev. John W. Tomlinson, Moderator of the Utica Presbytery and pastor of Olivet Presbyterian Church of Utica. The Rev. Tomlinson was L. Jean Smith, Martha Reals, Don and Sue Thomas's pastor at Olivet. He also married Don and Sue at Olivet in April, 1955. A unique feature of this installation was the fact that the sermon was delivered by the Reverent Harry S. D. Shimp, Rev. Mitchell's father-in-law.

In November of 1959, a major catastrophe occurred. An explosion in our boiler resulted in a gigantic hole in the boiler which could not be repaired. A new steam gas boiler was purchased and installed at a cost of \$3,120.

Our church celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on May 28, 1961. Rev. Mitchell's sermon was entitled "Past, Present and Future". Our fifty year and above members were honored.

On February 11, 1962, Mrs. Adelbert (Emma) Hemstreet was ordained an elder and elected clerk of the Session. As a result of this she became the first woman in the history of our church to become clerk of Session.

A new organ console was placed in the sanctuary on April 7, 1963 through the kindness of several members.

Two new ventures in our Worship Services were incorporated in the year 1966 – the Junior Services (which was always enjoyed by everybody) and the method of welcoming visitors to our church, giving them a ribbon, by which they could be recognized, and an information card. Both were very successful.

In 1968 the Rev. Mitchell gave the sermon at a Baccalaureate Service held in the Annunciation Church and this was a "first" for our community. This was an overdue reunion of Christian people. This experience was repeated when the Rev. Patrick Mangan of the Annunciation Church, preached a sermon in our Church at the annual Union Thanksgiving Service – "families sat together in worship who had never done so before".

George Rolling III was accepted in 1969 at The Princeton Theological Seminary, the Rev. Mitchell's alma mater, to prepare for the ministry. Also in 1969 the Mitchell family moved into the new manse at 216 South Fourth Ave., which was purchased at a cost of \$23,500.

In the year of 1971 we began to plan for our one-hundredth anniversary. The centennial committee was named and the work began. During the winter months the interior of our church was cleaned, polished and painted. In 1973 new carpeting and drapes were installed and the sanctuary was remodeled with new pews and a center aisle. The Rev. Mitchell, it seems, is as efficient in overalls as he is in his vestment robes.

The Mitchell family had two foreign exchange students. Eduardo Racha from Brazil was the first; and in 1973 Brigitte Obrecht from Switzerland came to live with them.

For several years Rev. Mitchell was the fire chaplain for the Ilion Fire Department. He began the Council of Churches "Prayer Telephone" and sponsored a twice a week AA meeting. AA holds one meeting a week in our church to this day.

Our church had a very active Youth Group. They sold pizzas all during the winter months for their annual after Easter vacation trips, which began in 1964. We also had a very active Couples Club gathering on Sunday evenings.

Maurice was the Presbytery's Stated Clerk for 7 years with Chet Lippy as his assistant. He served on the board of VanderKamp when it was purchased, camp counselor at Glengarra as well as VanderKamp, involved with the groundbreaking for the Presbyterian Home and served many Presbytery committees.

After 18 wonderful years in Ilion the Mitchell family left for their new home in Santa Barbara, California.

In 2007, the Rev. Mitchell published a book entitled "Towns and Pulpits"; a recollection of his life, family and career from one town and one pulpit to another.

When Ann Cross talked to him about his upcoming 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination, she asked him if he had ever thought of being something other than a minister; knowing that in the past he had been a church sexton and a coal miner. He told her that when he felt God calling him to be a Minister of the Word and Sacrament it would be for the rest of his life and he would minister as long as he could mentally/physically do so. The one constant throughout his career has been the expression of love through his faith to the people he served. He simply demonstrated his love for Christ in his day-to-day, hands-on ministry.

On January 19, 2009, the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Ilion, NY voted to bestow upon the Rev. Maurice C. Mitchell the title of Pastor Emeritus without honorarium. Following the approval of the Committee on Ministry and the Presbytery of Utica, the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Ilion voted on March 29, 2009, at a special Congregational Meeting, to concur with the Session.

Our tenth minister, the Reverend David Jones, came to the First Presbyterian Church in March of 1978, on Easter Sunday; coming to us from a pastorate in Kentucky.

David was born November 14, 1946 in St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica, New York; the son of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Jones. The family moved to New Hartford, New York before he started school. He attended schools in New Hartford and graduated from New Hartford High School in 1964. He furthered his education at the University of Rochester and graduated in 1968 with a BA in Music. Some of you might remember that his major instrument was the trombone, although he played piano, organ and guitar also.

After University of Rochester, David went to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School (also in Rochester, NY) and graduated from there in 1972. David and Susan Rasmus were married on September 8, 1970, at the end of a year of internship in New York City through New York Theological Seminary.

The Reverend Jones was quite involved in Youth Ministry both in our Ilion church and the Presbytery, where he served one term as Moderator. He continued the annual after Easter "Youth Group" trips that Rev. Maurice Mitchell started. He also organized and held an annual cross-country ski weekend and retreat at VanderKamp for our youth. Rev. Jones was also the Cubmaster for our church's Cub Pack 9 for six years. During the early nineties, David started

taking some of our youth to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware to work with the Presbytery's summer "Delaware Work Camp", where they learned to rehab houses for Habitat for Humanity there.

David had a Bible Study group that met weekly for several years meeting at the church for awhile, but then went and met at peoples' homes, including Evelyn Stitt's & Barb & George Maley's. David was very active in the choir and said recently "It was a very good one, and we had lots of quality music and lots of fun."

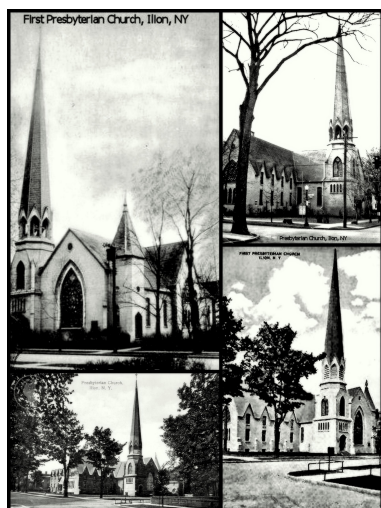
He also had "Round the Table Carol Services" in the Sunday School Hall, with a brass choir in the balcony. I remember particularly Chuck Paddock and his sons being part of the brass choir.

Rev. Jones also was active with Ilion Days, participating in the Doo Dah Parade's Lawn Mower Brigade - along with Don Lamphear, Lee Maley & Steven Maley. The clergy of the Council of Churches also held a Sunday morning worship service during Ilion Days at the band shell down by the bank, ostensibly to ward off that four letter word, R A I N. It worked pretty well most years.

The Rev. Jones was our minister for the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the First Presbyterian Church on the weekend of June 1 and 2, 1996. The Rev. Charles Bartlett & the Rev. Maurice Mitchell were able to attend along with two sons of the church who are now ministers as well: the Rev. George Rolling (son of Julia) and the Rev. Steve Mitchell, Maurice's youngest son.

The Ilion Council of Churches was very active while David was in Ilion. The churches did many things together, like Vacation Bible School, joint services during Lent and Holy Week, Thanksgiving, Christmas, High School Baccalaureate services, pulpit exchange and joint programs during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. David organized & conducted a Towne Choir which was comprised of anyone in the valley who wanted to sing. This was held every other year for Palm Sunday, with Fay Davis of the Mohawk Reformed Church taking the opposite years. Rev. Jones helped get the Ilion Food Pantry started. It first began here in the First Presbyterian Church and later it was moved to the Ilion Municipal Building. It now resides in the basement of the Annunciation Parish Hall.

While Rev. Jones was at our Ilion Church a handicapped accessible bathroom was installed and also the ceiling fans in the sanctuary. While at Ilion, the digital age, with word processors and computers arrived. Our thanks go to Ellis & Nancy Green for providing our first word processors.



In 1979 the gray paint was removed from the outside of the church building, returning the church to its original brick surface. A wooden handicap access ramp was installed in 1991 in the North-west corner of the sanctuary to allow better entry for those unable to climb steps. And in 1993 a fire alarm system was installed throughout the church, allowing the Fire Department to be notified of any fire.

David just remembers having a very good time in Ilion. "It was a great community to be a part of and for us it was especially nice because we could be so close to my parents in New Hartford, so Rob and Evan could have a close relationship with their grandpar-



ents.” He expects to be retiring at the end of this year from Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church in Stewartsville, NJ. He has been very fortunate and blessed to have been able to serve four wonderful churches – including a yoked-field in Kentucky. He gives his best to all the folks at our church.

Our present, and 11<sup>th</sup>, minister is the Reverend Victor McKusick. The Rev. McKusick was born on July 3, 1964 to Dr. Victor and Dr. Anne McKusick in Baltimore, at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He has a sister Carol, eleven years older and a brother Kenneth, thirteen months younger,.

He attended school K-12 at Friends School in Baltimore. This was a Quaker school. He earned a BA degree in American History from Bates College in 1987. In 1991 he received his Master of Divinity from Yale University.

The following year he was an Associate Pastor of The Congregational Church at South Glastonbury, Connecticut. He then spent 3¾ years at the Presbyterian Church in Shawnee, Pennsylvania.

The Rev. McKusick came to Ilion July 1, 1999 to the first Presbyterian Church. In September, 1999 he was installed at the First Presbyterian Church of Ilion.

The Rev. McKusick has participated in the following events which have been important in the history of our church: a bequest from Carleta Mixer Cox, a School Mission Initiative which includes book bags with school supplies that touch the lives of 25% of the student body at Remington and Barringer Road Elementary schools, library books and reading tests with book plates given to the youth of Ilion from our church, and the support of numerous programs such as TIPS, a trout project, school Nurses’ Fund and After-School Enrichment Program.

Our Tuesday and Thursday lunch program, started by George Gullis, has been very successful. Victor was chairman of the Ilion Days’ Doo Dah Parade from 2001-2003. He has been active with the American Legion Baseball Teams and their trips. You would see him at several sports activities of the High School level in football, soccer, basketball and baseball. Victor is the Chaplain of the Yale Hockey Team.

Another feature of our Church’s outreach ministry is the Annual “Blessing of the Bikes”, held at the Ilion Marina. Motorcyclists in the Mohawk Valley join us for a “blessing”, asking God to keep them safe on the roads each year. This program has, since its beginning in 2008, increased in numbers, reaching 71 bikes and over 90 people in 2012.

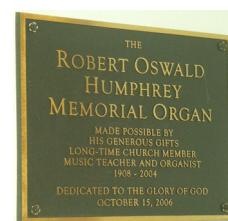
The greatest happening in Victor’s life, he says, was when he met the “love of his life”, Lori Decker. They were married July 22, 2006. Lori is a music teacher at Dolgeville Central School and they live in Herkimer, NY.



An outdoor heated handicap ramp was built in 2002 at the Morgan St. entrance.



Following a sizeable donation from church member, Robert O. Humphrey designated for the purchase of a new church organ, it took almost seven years of suppers, programs and special events to raise matching funds to purchase this new organ.



In 2006 a new Casavant Organ was installed and dedicated. The following Internationally renowned organists have played our organ: David Higgs, Joan Lippincott, Gerry Hancock, Peter Sykes, Todd Wilson and Janette Wilson.

Let us give thanks for the gift of music which inspires and remember those who have made it possible.



For the four Sundays of February 2012, we heard about the history of First Presbyterian Church of Ilion. 100 years ago where we sit today was rubble, a charred skeleton. Since that fire in 1912, our church has been blessed with incredible gifts. The most important of these gifts has been and always will be the people. It is the people, past and present, who make us a church. Let us first remember and give thanks for the people of this congregation – more than 140 years of people, pastors, elders, deacons, members and friends: people who ministered and people who came to be ministered to. Remember those past and present who make this a church.

Let us give thanks and remember those who have given so generously financial gifts that now let us maintain this place of worship and provide us a chance to look beyond ourselves.

In 2002, Neva Getman donated a beautiful new set of collection plates in honor of her husband, George H. Getman's, 80th birthday.



Also, in 2006, we received a very generous bequest from the estate of former member Carleta Sterling Mixer Cox. The interest from this bequest has allowed us to make some much needed repairs to our beautiful church building.

As we remember the devastating fire of 100 years ago, let us be thankful for the gifts First Presbyterian Church of Ilion has received since its founding in 1871 and rededicate ourselves and these gifts to the service of God.

Let us give thanks for this beautiful place to worship. One hundred years ago the members of this congregation banded together to rebuild the sanctuary in which we worship. Generations of this congregation have lovingly maintained this sanctuary. Look around and give thanks for this beautiful refuge where we can gather as a community and worship.

**Presented as a Minute for Mission  
on each Sunday of February 2012**

**with acknowledgment to  
George Gullis  
Ann Karabelas Cross  
Lesa Siver Decker  
M. Susan Thomas  
G. Stephen Getman**



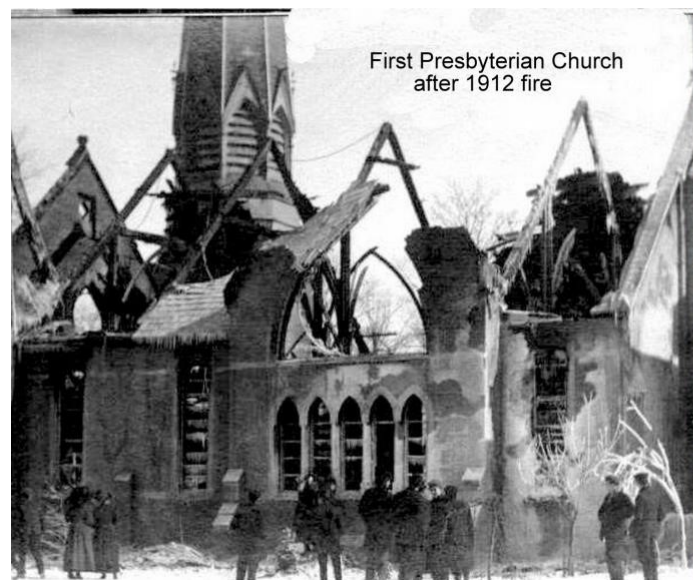
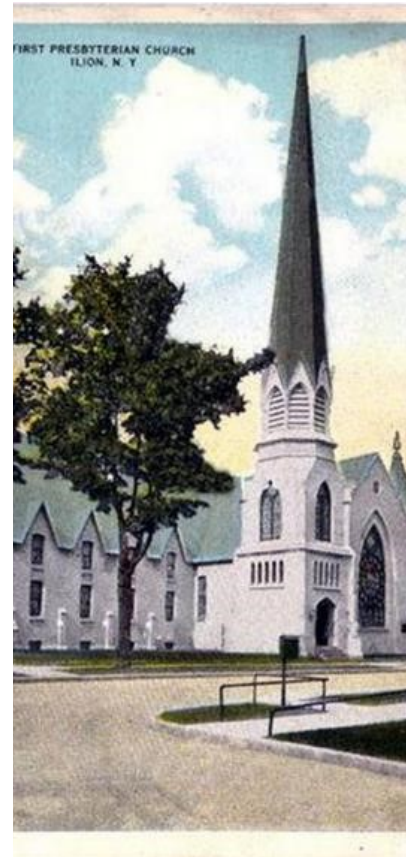
**First Presbyterian Church  
Ilion, New York**



**From Fire 'til Now  
February 11, 1912 - February 2012**

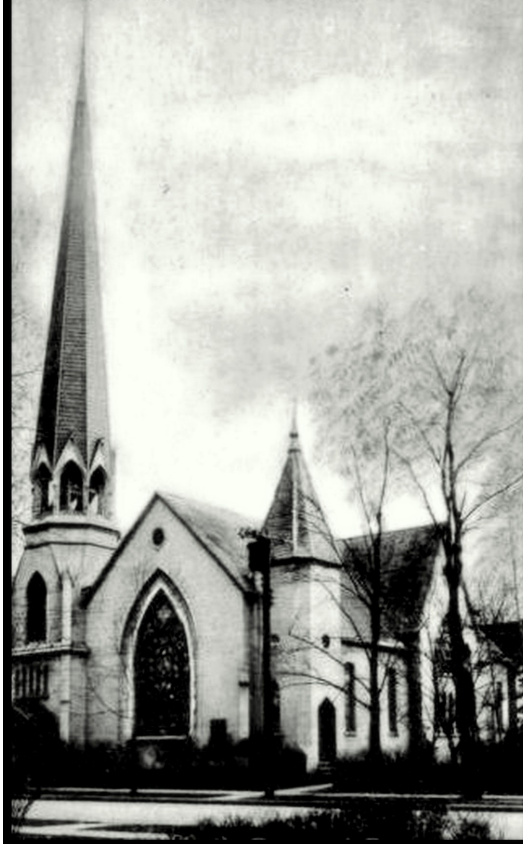
**A brief review of the  
Life of the church**

**The devastating Fire of 1912 through February 2012**



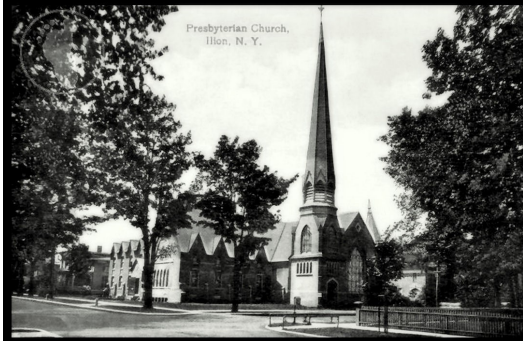


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