

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
OF VERMONTVILLE

140 YEARS OF HERITAGE

This material has been compiled in conjunction with the 140th anniversary of the First Congregational Church of Vermontville. It is my goal to enlighten the readers of this material as to the history and heritage of the First Congregational Church and the Village of Vermontville.

In the year 1835 in East Poultney, Vermont, a man by the name of Reverend Sylvester Cochran prepared for a trip west to the area of the Mississippi River Valley, which is what the Vermontville area was known as at that time. He made his journey in the autumn of 1835; and upon arriving, he found exactly what he had been hoping for. The region had good fertile lands, trees for lumbering, sources of fresh water, and many other natural resources. One thing did distress Reverend Cochran though; he found the people so scattered that it would be almost impossible to have a church or a school, both of which he felt were essential to the growth of a better community. After a great deal of thought and pondering, he came to the realization that perhaps a union colony was the answer. With this hope in mind, he went back to Vermont to sell the idea of a union colony to others.

On returning to Vermont, he found that many were interested in this new land. So he gathered a group of people together and organized them. Together they drafted a code of rules and regulations; and on March 27th, 1836, the constitution of the "Union Colony" was formally adopted. While 42 people originally signed the document, only 22 actually became residents of Vermontville. Those people came from 12 different towns in Vermont, and they represented 11 different trades. Those trades included a minister, physician, machinist, cabinet maker, wheelright, merchant, blacksmith, surveyor, cooper, printer, and several farmers. This group of people purchased approximately 5000 acres of land in this area and then began their trek west. They came not only to settle the new land, but to bring education and religion to the area also. The people of the Union Colony were religiously and educationally oriented, so these two areas were of utmost importance to them.

Just west and a little north of the present church building is a monument dated 1837, marking the original site of the very first dwelling of Vermontville. Called - the "State House", it was a large log cabin and housed families until their own homes could be built. It also served as a public meeting house, a school, and a church until the chapel could be built in the early 1840's. The chapel, which is located directly north of the present church, then took over as the meeting house, school, and church. As the members of the Union Colony were determined that their children should have a good education, the Vermontville Academical Association was formed. Classes were held in the chapel or "Academy" as it came to be called; and as most of the colonists were also Congregationalists, the Congregational minister also served as the academy teacher.