

Baptist Church Steeple Restoration
Transcribed by Douglas H. Shepard, 2003

On Sunday, 12 October 2003, the church and community celebrated the newly renovated steeple of the Fredonia Baptist Church building at 19 Church Street. The building, which helps define the Village's Historic District, stands on the site of the original 1823 structure. Built in 1853, a new steeple, designed by local architect E. A. **Curtis**, was erected in 1885, housing the Village Clock from 1886.

The dedication ceremony, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Ray **Prince**, began with the ringing of the church bell by Mr. and Mrs. Jack **Woodbury**, words of welcome and purpose by Genevieve **Ludemann**, and a reading by Moderator Grace **Grimes** from Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." The Rev. Dr. Ronald E. **Vallet**, Pastor and co-chair with Mrs. **Ludemann** of the restoration committee, led the singing of "All Creatures of Our Lord and King," followed by a prayer led by June **Walldorff**. The co-chairs then introduced and recognized the restoration's Architect, Richard **Peebles**, the Contractor, Jack **Fiske**, and restoration committee members, Village officials and church members, all of whom had worked on the project. After a reading from Philippians 2:5-11 by Bruce **Wisensburn** the ceremony was completed with Reflections by Pastor **Vallet** and a recitation of the Litany.

The steeple had been twice struck by lightning and was badly weathered, which led then Pastor Robert **Wendel** in 1999 to put a renovation plan in place. Sanctioned by the Diaconate Board, he assembled a community group to provide guidance and seek funding including a three-year church pledge campaign. With the advent of Pastor **Vallet**, a second three-year campaign was initiated while Jim **Boltz** spearheaded the effort for additional funding from the Northern Chautauqua County Foundation, the Fredonia Preservation Society, and some generous individuals. The Village Clock was originally hand wound. The new **Varden & Co.** replacement, installed under the guidance of Richard **Lascola**, Village Superintendent of Public Works, is electronically controlled. As it has since 1886, the Fredonia Baptist Church building supports the community's clock, hopefully for another 117 years.