



Sangjin Kim / Contributing photographer

THE FENNER Community Church has been undergoing renovations this week as part of its 200th anniversary

celebration today and Sunday. A revival meeting and a special morning service are among the weekend's planned activities.

Restoration and Revival

Descendant of Fenner's namesake to preach at church

By Debra J. Groom
Staff writer

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

Richard Fenner — pastor, evangelist and contractor — has brought his flock from Glendale Baptist Church in Paw Paw, Mich., to help put the physical and spiritual light back into the church in his namesake town.

In Thursday's sweltering heat, men from Michigan and the rural Madison County town of Fenner climbed on scaffolding, removing the outside walls on the south side of the Fenner Community Church. Children helped put posts into the ground for tents. Women pulled siding off the rotting wood.

"Something made a connection for me with this place," said Fenner, as he sat with a lemonade under the huge revival tent he will use for his meetings and sermons this weekend. "I feel connected here, ancestrally and spiritually."

The Fenner Community Church is celebrating its 200th anniversary today and Sunday with special events at the Fenner Corners church site. Along with food, entertainment, games and music, Fenner will conduct a revival meeting Saturday night and a special service at 11 a.m. Sunday.

Fenner said divine intervention may have led him — a man who is a direct de-

scendant of the town of Fenner's namesake — to spend time here this weekend.

"Of course, I didn't know any of the people who founded this church, but the faith they had in the community was tremendous," said Fenner, 47. "I'm very excited about their faith, and that we are a kindred spirit to what they had in establishing the church 200 years ago."

Fenner, a primarily rural town of 1,680 people, was named for a former Rhode Island governor and senator. A Fenner did eventually come to Madison County, but didn't stay long.

"They must have spent a winter here and decided this was not for them," said Gerald Davies, Fenner town historian. "You have to be a little hearty to live in Fenner."

Richard Fenner learned of the town of Fenner a few years ago. While at an evangelism meeting in Massachusetts last year, he decided to seek it out while on his way back to Michigan.

"We were told it was in Herkimer County," he said. "We talked to some people in a couple of county seats and a made a couple of contacts. And then I talked to Gerry Davies."

Fenner fell in love with the tiny but ma-

jestic Fenner church and vowed to help all he could. During the winter, he made new parts for the bell tower.

But with all the hustle and bustle around him, and his nearly 30 church members working and sticking their heads in water to keep cool, Fenner said he hopes to do more than just renovate the church this weekend.

"I hope to restore the church, but also restore the people," he said. "That is my vision. There is going to be a revitalization here."

He also promised excitement.

"I'm what you call a 4-S pastor. There will be lots of shoutin', stompin', spittin' and sweatin'," he said.

Karen Beach, a meter reader in Kalamazoo, said she jumped at the chance to come to New York to help in Fenner.

"This church is full of the Holy Spirit, and it has so much history," she said. "And Rev. Fenner cares about it, so we also care about it."

Tammy Sanders of Paw Paw was leery about making the trip because of all the bad things she had heard about New York.

"It's from too many TV shows," she said of her New York phobia. "But the Lord told me I had to go. And it's beautiful here. The view over there at those hills — I was in awe when I got here."