

Fenner Community Church celebrates 200th anniversary with the help of some new friends

By ALEX BONAFICE

Dispatch Features Editor

FENNER — For the first time in about a decade the bells of the Fenner Church rang out over the Madison County community.

"My eyes have seen the glory," said the Rev. Richard Fenner during a church service Sunday celebrating the renovations of the church and its 200th Anniversary.

Fenner, along with about 30 members of his Kalamazoo, Mich. church helped members of the Madison County community church replace the siding on the west side of the building and repair the bell and bell tower that has been out of commission for eight to ten years, said Bill June, a member of the church board of trustees.

Fenner, a direct descendant of the town's namesake, former Rhode Island governor and senator James Fenner, was inspired to visit the community last year after a family genealogy search revealed that the Central New York community was named after one of his ancestors.

When he came to the town he said he felt an "instant, spiritual connection to the community."

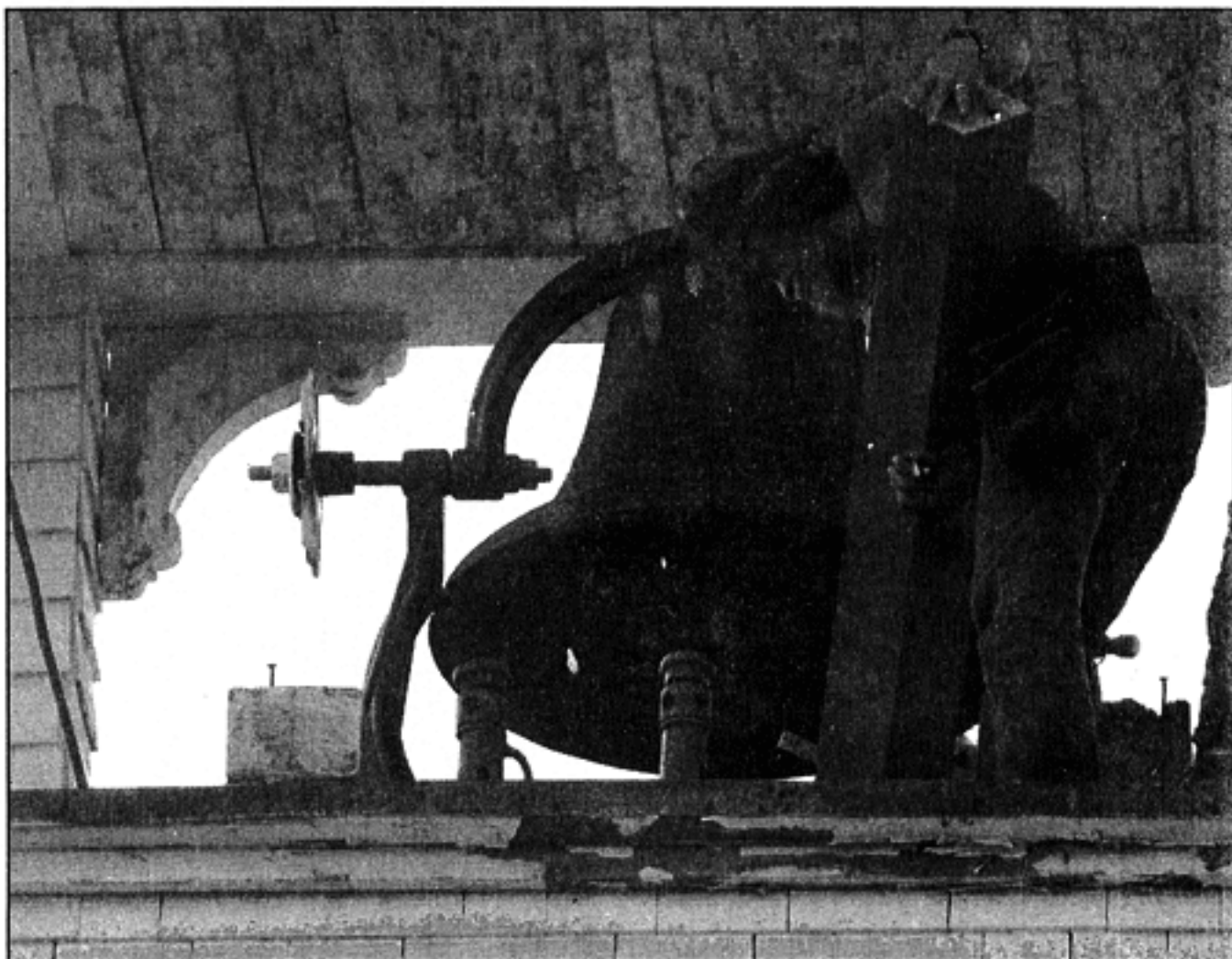
This connection brought Fenner, along with members of his Glendale Baptist Church, back to the community to help undertake the repair of the bell tower and other renovations.

As an added bonus, Fenner's visit coincides with the 200th anniversary of the start of the community church.

"I truly feel proud about being part of (the restoration of this church,)" said Fenner. "To me the celebration is an extra benefit. We would have been happy to come if it wasn't going on."

Jeanne Jones, another member of the Fenner Community Church board of trustees, said that the recent renovations were part of a continuing effort to improve the church. In the past the building's roof were repaired, beams in the floor were replaced, a new entrance to the church was installed and other repairs or improvements were made.

In the future, she said the church members, hopefully with the help of Fenner and members of his church and other volunteers, will undertake more improvements to the church.



Dispatch Staff Photo By JOHN HAEGER

The Rev. Richard Fenner of Kalamazoo, Mich. places a beam under the bell in the bell tower of the Fenner Community Church Friday. Fenner and members of his Michigan congregation restored the bell and bell tower and worked on other repairs of the more than 150 year old building. They also participated in the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Madison County church.

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The Fenner Church was founded on Aug. 23, 1802, by seven area residents. The first meetings of the

church were held in homes of various congregation members, Jones said.

The church was built at the center of Fenner in 1842, she said, and for decades was the focus of many community activities. The renovations are part of a movement to not only restore the appearance of the church, but also its part in community life.

The community church has non-denominational services 7 p.m. every Sunday with pastors from throughout the area presiding over the meeting, said Jones.

A typical service has about 40 people attending, but attendance is constantly growing and the past weekend celebrations had about 200 people attending, said board of trustee member Rose June.

"It was beautiful, a better event than we had ever hoped for," she said.

During the weekend long celebration, Fenner and his congregation held a revival, five pastors from throughout the community spoke, and the newly resorted bell rang out for the entire community to hear.

The success of the restoration, and the anniversary celebration, Jones said is a hopeful sign of the church's growing importance in the community.

"What we are striving for in having more people realize it's a community church," she explained.

Now all of the church's Sunday services will start with the ringing of the bell restored by Fenner and members of his congregation, June said.