

Public Square Landmark Church Celebrating Its 175th Anniversary

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The First Baptist Church is celebrating "175 Years of Sharing." A special service of worship is planned for 10:30 a.m. Saturday at the church at 207 State St., followed by a luncheon. The program will include a presentation on the church's 175-year history.

"Public Square has had its ups and downs through the years, but there has been an anchor of stability on the State Street side at First Baptist," said the Rev. William K. Waterston, the church's pastor. "The present mission of the church is to serve the neighborhood. Its clock tower is more than a landmark. It is a reminder that God is at work in Watertown."

Among the early settlers in Northern New York were a number of Baptist families from Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. In 1823, at the village of Watertown, Baptist services were being held in the old stone court house and prayer meetings were held in private houses. Later services were held in an old log school house on the north side of Factory Street.



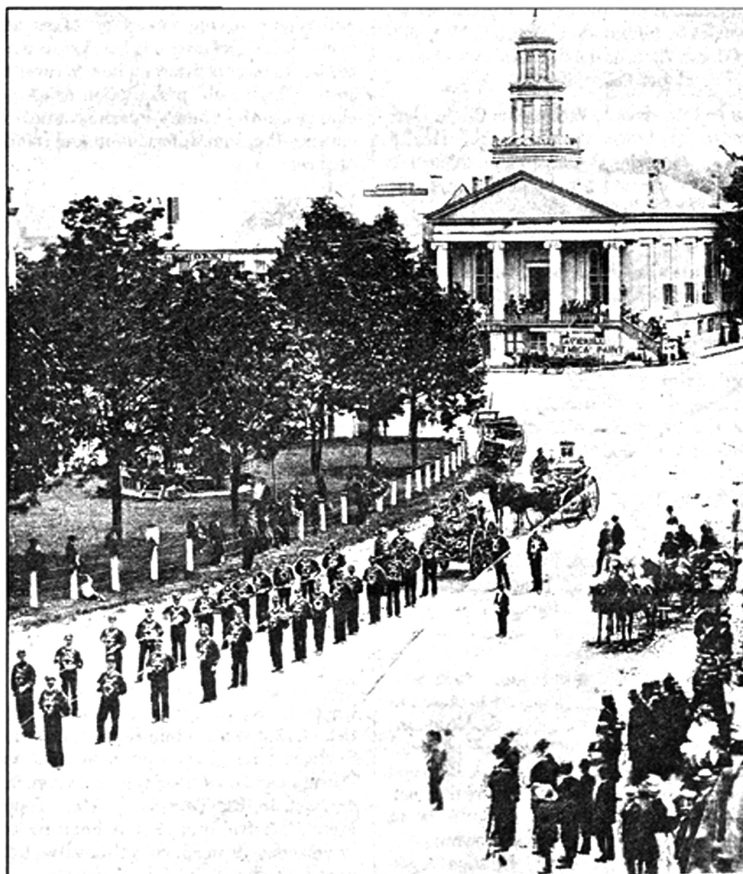
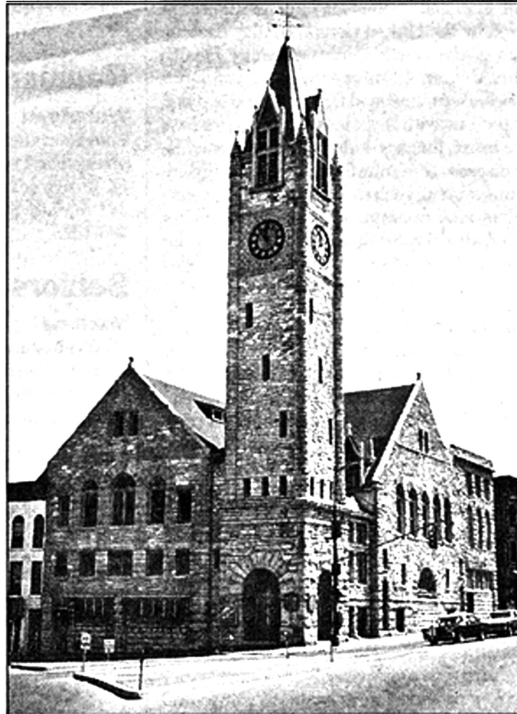
Rev. Waterston

In 1828, a meeting house was built on Factory Street. The building was sold a few years later as the ever-increasing congregation found it to be too small. A new church was built in 1837 on the corner of State and Mill streets, fronting public square. It was a white wooden structure of about 40 feet by 60 feet with one story, a steeple but no bell. It had a seating capacity of about 300. The building was dedicated on Jan. 10, 1838. However, the congregation was only able to enjoy its new church for a short period, as a fire destroyed it on March 8, 1846.

The church was rebuilt and dedicated on Jan. 7, 1847. This building was two stories and built of brick with a stone basement. It remained in use until it was torn down to build the existing building.

On June 6, 1891, the cornerstone of the present First Baptist Church of Watertown was laid. The limestone used in the building was quarried near the city of Watertown and the marble came from Gouverneur.

While businesses have come and gone on Watertown's Public Square in the last century, the First Baptist Church tower clock has remained a main fixture. Constructed when there were no paved roadways and horse-drawn buggies were the main transportation, the town clock has maintained accurate time, with a few lapses, since 1901. The clock underwent major repairs in 1993 after a main drive gear started to fail.



The First Baptist Church in Watertown is celebrating 175 years as a congregation. Construction for the present First Baptist church (top photo) began in 1891. In the bottom photo, a fire department parade goes through Public Square in the mid-1800s with the First Baptist Church in the background.

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