



New Era Photo by Keith Baum

This 1984 narthex and office addition forms the facade of First Presbyterian Church of Mount Joy.

Mt. Joy Presbyterians to celebrate 150th year

by Diane M. Bitting
New Era Staff Writer

Mount Joy's First Presbyterian Church is marking its 150th birthday on Dec. 1, and the congregation plans to celebrate with special events scheduled for every month except March.

The year's overall theme is "Memories of the Past, Visions of the Future." Sub-themes, selected in a contest, have been designated for each event.

This month's celebration takes place at 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 29, at the church, 7 Marietta Ave. Called "1839-1989: a Call to Celebrate," the event begins with a hymnsing.

Sally Roberts will speak on the topic "Learning Our History," which will include a discussion of the church's beginnings. Boxed lunches will be eaten at 5:15 p.m., and there will be a contest for decorated lunch boxes, with prizes given for the most elaborate, most original, prettiest, funniest and most authentic for the 1830s.

During the upcoming months, the church will participate in two parades, hold a picnic and stage

a square dance, among other events.

The church's charter was signed on Dec. 1, 1839, according to records, but Presbyterians had been worshipping in several locations in Mount Joy since 1746.

During the American Revolution, the Rev. John Witherspoon, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, paid the Mount Joy Presbyterians a visit to urge support of the patriots, according to the Rev. Robert S. Burns, pastor since 1987.

Some of the well-known Mount Joy families associated with the church in its early years included the Slaymakers, the Pinkertons, the Newcomers and the Reists.

The original brick building was constructed in 1840; the sanctuary remains in use and looks the way it did then, except for the addition of an organ and the relocation of a door. A Sunday school addition, built in 1904, is also still in use. In 1984, an addition with offices, narthex, a nursery and a library was built.

Plans then had called for constructing a new church school unit, but now the church may decide to renovate the existing one. Those options are still being studied, said Burns.

The manse was torn down in 1986. Original plans had called for parking space to be added there, but the land has instead been made into a lawn and flower garden.

Youth and women's groups have been in existence since the turn of the century. In 1905 a Young People's Society and Women's Foreign Missionary Society were created; they are now the youth group and Presbyterian Women.

The church has supported missions throughout the years, in the United States and abroad. Also, in 1960, a telephone service of recorded prayer messages was started. Today the service, called Strength for Today, is still operated by a member.

will be no event in March, as the congregation observes Easter and participates in a community service.

On Sunday, April 30, people who grew up in the church and have moved away will be invited to celebrate "Yesterday's Foundation for Tomorrow." After the service there will be a luncheon and a slide show of the church's history.

The church plans to have a float in Lancaster's Loyalty Day Parade on May 6 and in Mount Joy's Memorial Day Parade on May 27.

On Sunday, June 11, an old-fashioned picnic will be held at the Sico Park in Mount Joy. It will feature old-fashioned games, such as a taffy-pull, a cake walk and a three-legged race. That day's theme is "Looking to the Past, Living for the Future."

On Sunday, July 9, Burns will hold an "old-fashioned" church service, conducted the way the minister did in 1839. Members will be encouraged to dress in period garb. The theme will be "Forward to the Future, with Faith of Our Fathers."

On Sunday, Aug. 6, former ministers who served the church in the past 50 years will be present at a Communion service and dinner. The theme is "From Time to Time, One Must Not Only Think of the Future, but of the Past."

A square dance will be held Saturday, Sept. 9, so that members can "Experience the Joy: 150 Years." On Oct. 6, 7 and 8, young adults will hold a retreat at Camp Donegal in York County to study the theme "Growing on Faith."

On Sunday, Nov. 5, members will present the play "In Remembrance of Us," written by church member Norma Ahlborn. On Friday, Dec. 1, members will hang Christmas greens and celebrate using the theme "We're Still Nifty at 150" with a birthday party.