



# The Renovation News

The First Presbyterian Church  
Bergen, New York

Special Issue  
December, 1996

WELCOME to this "Special Issue" of The Renovation News! Those of you to whom this special issue is directed are our newest friends who may have been attending Sunday morning services or other fellowship and teaching activities with us for only a short time, and who have not been on our mailing lists. This newsletter, The Renovation News, has been published monthly since June of 1996 to keep our church members and friends up-to-date on the progress of our exciting - and challenging - renovation program. It has contained a little bit of the history of our beautiful old church buildings, progress reports on how the renovation is going, and some photos of the activities and people involved in the project. In the hope that we can excite you about the project, and, perhaps, elicit your help and support, this Special Issue has been put together to give you a thumbnail sketch of what it is all about.

## WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

Some History - The focus of the renovation is the Fellowship Hall and the office and room areas that connect the Hall to the sanctuary. Fellowship Hall is a very old building, dating from the 1840's, when it was built at a site about one-quarter mile south on what is now Lake Avenue. In the 1860's the building was moved down the road and placed next to the sanctuary building, which itself had been moved from Cemetery Hill in the 1850's. A century later in the mid 1950's the two buildings were connected to give some new first floor and basement space.

The Problems - About three or four years ago it had become clear that



*Sanctuary & Session House (Fellowship Hall) - 1910*

our church programs were running out of space, particularly Sunday School and other children's and youth programs. When we began looking into how more good space might be achieved, some engineering work was commissioned to study how the existing Fellowship Hall wing might be expanded, or even demolished and replaced with a new building. It quickly became clear that the cost of a new facility would be excessive, over \$1,000,000, and, in addition, in demolishing the current building we would have to pull any new building away from the lot lines and lose significant space.

The choice to save the current wing and significantly renovate it was complicated when the engineering studies revealed several significant and serious structural problems with the old building. Parts of the old foundation were giving way, the floor in the Hall was sagging in several areas, and, of greatest concern, the roof structures over the Hall were flawed and deemed susceptible to imminent collapse under the wrong wind and snow-load conditions. In fact, one of the engineering firms felt the whole wing should be immediately condemned and put off limits to any use! (To temporarily resolve this problem, some wooden posts were put into the Hall to add support to the roof - those posts are still in place awaiting the roof work in the Hall.) It was also determined that our facility failed to meet several fire, health, and safety codes, especially if we were to establish more children and day-care programs.

The Decision - In January of 1994 the congregation agreed to undertake a renovation of the Fellowship Hall and, in January of 1996 with floor plans in hand,



*Fellowship Hall - Before*

reaffirmed this decision. The scope of the project was agreed to be:

- \* excavate under the Hall to rebuild the foundation and to raise the floor to meet the floor level of the sanctuary, and build a full basement with classrooms and other useful space
- \* rebuild the roof structures in the Hall and put in a cathedral ceiling
- \* enlarge the rear and front entryways to the wing connecting the sanctuary and the Hall
- \* provide handicap accessibility to the basement and first floors with a lift at the rear entrance
- \* rebuild and enlarge the basement and first floor restrooms, and rebuild the kitchen

Several other important areas are also being addressed as part of the project (a whole new heating plant for the entire facility, for example), but these are the main elements.

**The Plan** - The architects on the project had estimated that if all of the work of the renovation were to be contracted, the cost could be over \$500,000. Even though Bergen First is indeed blessed with a large endowment, it is not large enough to cover such a financial commitment, and we clearly needed to plan for significant volunteer help. This church has a long history of successful volunteer support of building projects - indeed, the project in the 1950's to build the connector between the Fellowship Hall and the sanctuary, and the 1982/83 project to excavate under the sanctuary to put in our existing infant, toddler, and children's rooms were basically driven by church member volunteerism. Therefore, the project was planned to use as much volunteer help as possible, and based upon our experience to date, we expect that total cost of the renovation may be held to \$250,000-300,000, or a saving of 30-50%. We have been particularly blessed in that several in our congregation are skilled and active in the building trades, and their participation has kept the quality of the volunteer work at a level we can all be proud of. We must specifically recognize the singular contribution that our church Building Supervisor, Dan Sheldon, is making to the project. He is Project Manager of the renovation, and is coordinating all of the volunteers as well. His skills and experience in nearly all the elements involved in the work is a real blessing, particularly to those of us who can barely distinguish a hammer from a screwdriver.



**Accomplishments** - The project started in May of this year with the cleaning out of all of the rooms in the Fellowship Hall wing. Since then the work and progress has been steady - a full basement with usable rooms now exists under the Hall, and the basement area under the center wing is nearly at that stage. The new heating plant is in, and the new restrooms will be outfitted and functional within a few weeks. Work is now starting to finish the new rooms with ceilings, paint, and fixtures. The handicap lift should also

### ***Fellowship Hall - During***

be installed soon. Soon after the holidays, work on the Hall roof structures can begin, the expanded entryway and rear hallway should take shape, and the outfitting of the kitchen begin. We hope that all will be done sometime in the spring of 1997. Thus far (November, 1996) the costs of the project have totaled about \$175,000, and we expect the total cost to not exceed \$300,000.

**Financing** - As mentioned above, our church has a good endowment, about \$250,000 of which is earmarked for support of our facilities. These funds have resulted from the generous gifts of past brothers and sisters, and have continued to be available for several decades because of continuing good stewardship. Whenever there has been a need to use these funds, money has been withdrawn as loans from the principle, and, in every case, these loans have been repaid by the congregation through capital fund drives. This renovation also is using this endowment in a similar way. The endowment is providing the collateral needed to secure a line of credit at a good interest rate with a local bank. To date the loan balance is about \$175,000.

**How You Can Help** - We invite you to wander around the church to see what is going on. There may not be work underway on Sundays, but at almost any other time you will find workmen and/or volunteers doing something. Encouragement and admiration of the work are always welcomed. If you have an interest, and can invest some time, we certainly need as much volunteer help as possible. There are times when organized work parties are underway, usually Thursday evenings and Saturday



*Some of our Volunteers*

mornings, but many work individually for a few or a couple of hours at a time throughout the week. Contact the church office (494-1251) or Dan Sheldon (494-2442).

If you feel led to do so, a pledge and contribution to our Renovation Fund Drive would be most appreciated also. The goal of the Drive is to raise \$300,000 over a five-year pledge period so that we do not have to permanently invade the principle of our endowments, and to ensure that future generations will have the use of these funds as we have. Contact the church office for a pledge card. And, Thank You!

If you have any questions, or would like more information and some more of the details of the project, contact the church office. The past issues of The Renovation News with the monthly progress reports and more of the history and background are available as well.

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