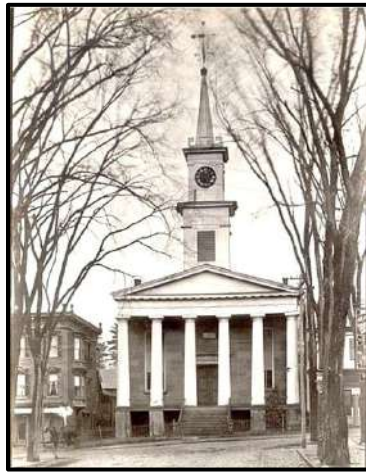


## **This Week in Saratoga County History**

### **First Baptist Church of Ballston Spa – 235 Years Young**

**Submitted by Eve Kenyon March 25, 2026**

*Eve Kenyon is the Historian of the First Baptist Church. She is a retired vocal music teacher from Shenendehowa Middle Schools. Eve was born in Long Beach, MS but has lived most of her life in Ballston Spa with her husband Jack, whom she met while she was in college and he in the USAF. She is pleased to serve on the Ballston Spa Trees and Parks Board and has a great love of Ballston Spa.*



*Ballston Spa First Baptist Church 1837-1896*

In the heart of Ballston Spa, on the main thoroughfare of Milton Avenue, sits a stone structure called the First Baptist Church of Ballston Spa. This edifice, made of gray Vermont marble, was completed in 1896, but the church family goes back to 1791 even before the Village of Ballston Spa was formed.

The 24 founding members separated from “The Mother Church” in Stillwater sometime in 1791 to form The Baptist Church and Society at Ballston Springs. In its early years, the church met in a schoolhouse very near Route 67 and Ballston Ave, and on occasion, in houses of members. There was no permanent pastor, but pastoral services were supplied by ministers from neighboring churches. The first supply ministers were Mr. Mudge and Elder Langworthy who came from Saratoga Springs. By 1800 the membership had grown to 92, and Elder Elias Lee was called as the first official Pastor and served until 1828.

At the church’s centennial celebration in 1891 Mrs. A. L. Crosby, Elder Langworthy’s daughter, memorialized Elder Elias Lee:

*When he began to speak every ear was open to the pleasant tones of his musical voice; a voice of great strength and compass, which he modulated to suit the occasion so that in the pulpit, courthouse, schoolhouse, barn or in the open air, its tones were rich, clear and silvery."*

Elder Lee was generous in caring for the poor and for many years gave his services to the church free of charge. It was not until 1821 that he was paid a mere sum of \$100 for the year.

From information found in early church documents, we have learned that the first meeting house was built in 1802 or 1803. Elder Lee mortgaged his farm to support the building which was located in what is now the southeastern (oldest portion) of the Ballston Cemetery on Ballston Avenue in the Village. Its location reputedly can be fixed by the location of Elder Lee's grave which is on the spot under the place where the pulpit stood. The meeting place was subsequently moved in 1816 to a lot on the east side of Science Street presented by Ballston's founding father Nicholas Low. The church resided there until about 1833.

The following years produced several revivals in the Village, and many persons were converted. So much that the church had outgrown their home, and a committee was formed to solicit funds to build a new one. The new meeting house was located at the head of Front Street on Milton Ave. where Pizza Works stands today. Construction took place during the years of 1834-1836 with Elder Parr preaching the sermon at the first worship services in that new building on February 2, 1837.

The gray stone church had a high flight of stairs and a wide portico with six huge pillars and could accommodate nearly 1000 people. It was very impressive facing west overlooking Front Street.

The church had 212 members at this time. Under the leadership of Pastor Norman Fox, who served for eleven years, by 1843 it grew to 417 members propelled by the revival known as the Second Great Awakening.

While train traffic increased through the village and with the proximity of the church to the railroad, rumbling trains often interrupted the peace and quiet of the services. Unfortunately, those rumbling trains and vibrations weakened the structure to a point where a decision was made to build a grand new edifice which is the building the congregation now occupies.

Records indicate that the church property at the head of Front St. was sold for \$3000. These funds were applied to the total cost of building and furnishing the new edifice. The new building and furnishings cost \$29,778, while the cost of the present church lot added \$5500. Some members who lived South of the Village complained that it would be too far to walk to church meetings, but the cornerstone was laid in early 1896 with completion in December 1896.

The last worship service in the old meeting house was held on December 4, 1896 with the last prayer meeting following on December 16<sup>th</sup>. A farewell and reminiscence service was held in the old church on December 18, conducted by Pastor Johnson. He was a young man just out of Colgate Seminary and who had been called and ordained in the church in 1894. On December 20, 1896 the people gathered for the dedication service in the new sanctuary. There were many thankful hearts that the full cost had been raised by cash or pledges. While it took a number of years to clear the last pledge, the time did not seem that long. It was 24 degrees below zero that dedication morning and the Baptists had the only warm church in the Village due to the new heating plant! The first baptism in the church was held only seven days later with records showing that Chauncy Slade was the first to enter the baptismal waters.

In the 1950's a major renovation to add Sunday School rooms and church offices were finished. Later, in 1996 an addition in the rear was completed providing a formal entrance to the church from the parking lot. Also, this addition included a new kitchen as well as much needed male and female bathrooms and handicap accessibility.

Thirty-seven men called by God have served as Pastor over the years since 1791. Our current Pastor, Dave Waldo welcomes all to worship each Sunday at 10:30 AM.

Sources:

First Baptist Church Records

Sesqui-Centennial Anniversary Booklet of 1941

200<sup>th</sup> Celebration Booklet with history provided by Eleanor Grose

Centennial History of the Village of Ballston Spa by Edward Fabrique Grose

