

History

The First Presbyterian Church was organized in 1837, the year Coldwater was incorporated as a village. The group did not have permanent facilities until the erection of its first church building in 1844. Construction of the current historic structure began in 1864 and finished in 1869. Civil War drafts brought operations to a halt and work was stopped until August, 1866. John C. Bennett served as contractor, and the building cost \$40,104. Around the time of its construction, the church had the largest seating capacity of any building in Coldwater, and so was often used as a public auditorium. Notable speakers included Sojourner Truth in 1877 and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

From 1958 through 1959, a two-story addition was built for an educational role. The building was designated a Michigan State Historic Site on June 15, 1979. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 31, 1986, and a MSHS informational marker was erected on April 27, 1987. The steeple was reconstructed in 2004, funded by community donations.

The church was designed in the Romanesque Revival style, and is the largest such church in Branch County. The red brick building is rectangular with a gable roof and a projecting, centrally aligned tower. A sandstone belt course divides the largely-above-ground basement from the sanctuary. The steeple, which stands 185 feet (56 m) tall, is a major landmark in Coldwater and is one of the tallest in southern Michigan. It is covered with white shingles and features two sets of narrow gabled dormers. The belfry houses a bell manufactured in 1853 by the Meneely Bell Foundry of West Troy, New York. The sanctuary's stained and painted glass windows were installed in 1868, created by George A. Misch and Brothers of Chicago.

Sojourner Truth born Isabella (“Bell”) Baumfree; c. 1797 – November 26, 1883) was an African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Truth was born into slavery in Swartekill, Ulster County, New York, but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. After going to court to recover her son, in 1828 she became the first black woman to win such a case against a white man.

She gave herself the name Sojourner Truth in 1843. Her best-known speech was delivered extemporaneously, in 1851, at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. The speech became widely known during the Civil War by the title “Ain’t I a Woman?,” a variation of the original speech re-written by someone else using a stereotypical Southern dialect; whereas Sojourner Truth was from New York and grew up speaking Dutch as her first language. During the Civil War, Truth helped recruit black troops for the Union Army; after the war, she tried unsuccessfully to secure land grants from the federal government for former slaves.

Sojourner Truth, , spoke at the First Presbyterian Church in 1877. The lectern from which she spoke can still be viewed at the church.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (November 12, 1815 – October 26, 1902) was an American suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, and leading figure of the early women’s rights movement. Her Declaration of Sentiments, presented at the Seneca Falls Convention held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, is often credited with initiating the first organized women’s rights and women’s suffrage movements in the United States. Stanton was president of the National Woman Suffrage Association from 1892 until 1900.

Before Stanton narrowed her political focus almost exclusively to women’s rights, she was an active abolitionist with her husband, Henry Brewster Stanton and cousin, Gerrit Smith. Unlike many of those involved in the women’s rights movement, Stanton addressed various issues pertaining to women beyond voting rights. Her concerns included women’s parental and custody rights, property rights, employment and income rights, divorce, the economic health of the family, and birth control. She was also an outspoken supporter of the 19th-century temperance movement.

After the American Civil War, Stanton's commitment to female suffrage caused a schism in the women's rights movement when she, together with Susan B. Anthony, declined to support passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. She opposed giving added legal protection and voting rights to African American men while women, black and white, were denied those same rights. Her position on this issue, together with her thoughts on organized Christianity and women's issues beyond voting rights, led to the formation of two separate women's rights organizations that were finally rejoined, with Stanton as president of the joint organization, approximately twenty years after her break from the original women's suffrage movement. Stanton died in 1902 having authored both *The Woman's Bible* and her autobiography *Eighty Years and More*, along with many articles and pamphlets concerning female suffrage and women's rights

1973 THE Wurlitzer organ was removed, a new Reuter organ installed and dedicated at the morning Worship Service September 30. Evening recital with guest organist, James Bisbing of Detroit. The organ was specially built to the needs and acoustics of our church by Reuter Company of Lawrence, Kansas, and installed by Mr. George Price of Tekonsha, Michigan. 1,137 pipes are included in the organ's 19 ranks. Total cost \$35,748.00