A Short History of Coke's Chapel – Nott Road, Canandaigua, NY

Coke's Chapel, established around 1817, was one of the earliest Methodist churches in the Town of Canandaigua. Its roots began in 1796 when Rev. Hamilton Jefferson preached to early settlers, including Roswell Root, who led a small Methodist class from his home. As the congregation grew, a log meeting house was built in 1801. In 1807, Bishop Francis Asbury preached to 400 people from Root's barn, helping to spark further interest.

By 1817, the group formally organized as "The Trustees of Coke's Church," naming their chapel after Bishop Thomas Coke, a major figure in early Methodism. Built on Nott Road, the church was completed around 1818 and became a center for worship and revival, including a major one in 1832 where over 100 people professed salvation.

Over time, some members formed new congregations nearby, and Coke's Chapel became part of a larger circuit known as "Cokesbury." Despite steady growth in the early years, the Civil War led to a decline in attendance and leadership. With no assigned preachers and reduced support, the chapel was sold in 1870. The structure itself was moved into the Village of Canandaigua, and the church community disbanded.

Though the building is gone, the chapel lived on in the memory of John M. Baker, who had grown up in the congregation. In 1919, he penned a touching poem titled **"Back to My Youth and Old Coke's Chapel,"** published in the *Ontario County Journal*. The poem is significant as it captures the emotional, spiritual, and communal legacy of the chapel, offering a deeply personal look into a bygone era of worship and fellowship.

Back to My Youth and Old Coke's Chapel
By John M. Baker (1849–1922)

Back to my youth I went today:
And to old Coke's Chapel upon the hill.
Fond memory cleared my vision so.
I saw old faces long since still:
Yes, and heard old songs of long ago.

No choir was there, the audience sang:
Some voices cracked, few touched a note.
But the love of God was there, and faith and hope.

There everlasting Spring abides;
It touched some chord to memory dear,
The pearly gates seemed open wide,
And the crystal screen bore not a tear.

But I alone sat in that church;
No old time friends with mystic powers
Heard what I heard of loving praise
And never withering flowers.

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood:
I heard again as once of yore.
As in my old place near the door,
I watched the cracks peep through the floor.

But no thought of them I gave today, I mean;
As boy I heard, as man I dream.
I heard those dear old voices sing.
Stand dressed in living green.

I left the church for the old homestead,
I found the buildings razed and gone.
I builded those old rooms anew,
I placed the old chairs that I knew,
And filled them with those dear loved forms.

A Bible lay upon the stand,
My father took with reverent hand,
And clearly read a chapter through.
Then mother's voice to me so sweet, so true:
Sang softly these words, "I give to you."

Thus far the Lord hath led me on,
Thus far His power prolongs my days:
And every evening shall make known
Some fresh memorial of His grace.

Much of my time has been to waste.
And I, perhaps am near my home.
But He forgives my follies past,
And gives me strength for days to come.

John M. Baker's poem *"Back to My Youth and Old Coke's Chapel"* is a heartfelt tribute to the church where he grew up—a place that shaped his faith, community, and early memories. Written decades after the chapel was gone, the poem captures the powerful emotions tied to worship, family, and the passage of time. Through vivid imagery and sincere reflection, Baker honors not just a building, but the spiritual life it fostered. His words remind us that even when physical places fade, the impact they leave on our hearts and souls can last a lifetime.