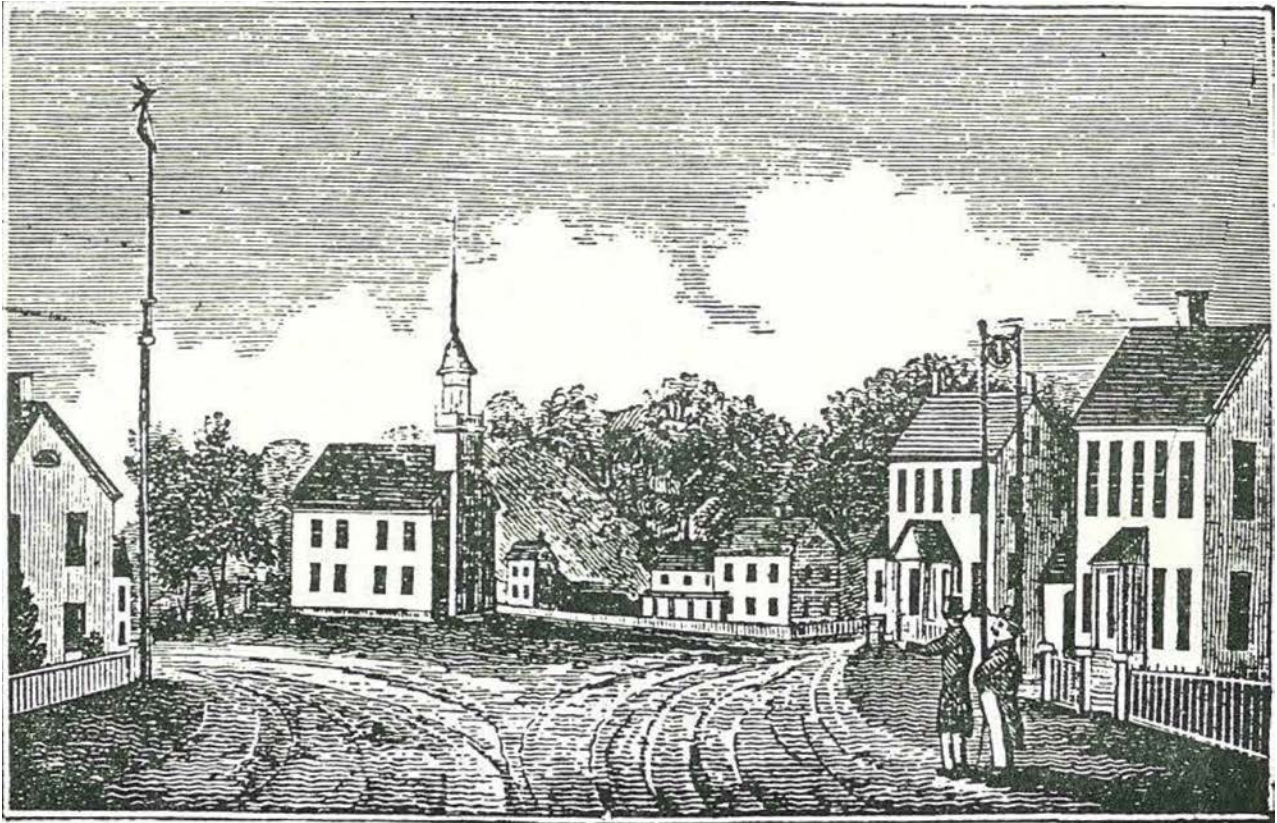




HISTORY
of a
YANKEE CHURCH

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TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BETHEL, CONNECTICUT

Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr.

First Printing - 1960

Revised Edition - 1978



Present First Congregational Church with new Parish House addition.

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FOREWORD

History Of A Yankee Church

Simplicity is the keynote of the Yankee Church. The simple New England meeting house is a far cry from the great Cathedrals of the old country, but they have much in common with the small old country churches of the sort in which you will find simple country folk on any Sunday morning. Our puritan ancestors developed a stern countenance and were harsh with the "sinner" or the slothful, for then they were engaged in the serious business of wresting a new country out of a wilderness, a land inhabited by wild beasts and Indians.

The early settlers of Connecticut were deeply religious and set out to establish a religious commonwealth. They admitted to citizenship only those who were members of the Christian Church. Later they found they were excluding their own baptized children from citizenship, those who were not ready to make a full profession of religion. They then accepted those who would acknowledge their own baptismal dedication and agree to educate their children religiously and present them for baptism. This was a sort of partway connection with the Church, commonly known as the halfway covenant. It was found to be a poor way to promote a Godly commonwealth and was finally abandoned after many years of controversy.

The fact remains that most of the early communities in Connecticut were first set up as parishes which needed the consent of the Colonial Assembly and, obtaining that consent, later became towns. Boundaries were set up by the Assembly through a committee, and the people within those boundaries were then free to set up a church of their own and call a pastor to work among them. So was the parish of Bethel established.

The First Congregational Church of Bethel was the only church in this community for seventy-five years. It was in existence for ninety-five years before the community became a town. Its existence covers the most important period of human history in many respects. It has been the period of most valuable inventions and discoveries and of the greatest progress in scientific knowledge, the practical arts, and popular government. It is the period of more complex social life and its accompanying problems. During this period, too, more wealth has been created than in all other Christian centuries combined.

However, a church is not worthy of commendation merely because it has existed for an important stretch of years. It takes more than years to create veneration. It does not claim authority because the church history reaches back into the ages. The influence of the church is in the moral effect it has upon the community. We are going to try and set forth here, not only a word picture of the history of the church but of the community and its people also, and the effect of the church upon them, as we see it.

CHAPTER 1

A New Community Is Born

In April, 1759, five men living in the southeast part of the town of Danbury signed a petition requesting the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut to divide the Danbury Congregational parish and authorize the establishment of a new church, or "ecclesiastical society" in the area now known as Bethel. The five petitioners, Ebenezer Hickok, Lemuel Beebe, Isaac Hoyt, Thomas Starr and Phineas Judd stated that their homes were at such a distance from the Danbury Church as to make attendance difficult, especially for those with large families. Often, after making the four-mile journey from outlying farms they found the Danbury church so crowded that they had to stand with their children in the rear during the long service. So they prayed the Assembly for a church of their own.

The petition still survives in the Connecticut State Library. It is a quaint and curiously fragmentary document, more a collection of notes and phrases than a formal memorial. It seems likely that the petitioners intended the paper as a reminder or memorandum, a brief summary of the case as they had discussed it among themselves and as they intended to present it orally before the proper authorities at Hartford.

In New England two hundred years ago the Colonial legislatures and courts were much concerned with religious affairs. The established ecclesiastical system was, of course, Congregational. A code adopted in 1650 taxed all persons for the support of the Church, provided for the collection of church taxes by civil distraint if necessary, and forbade the formation of new churches without the consent of the general court.

The historian Richard Hildreth writes:

"The provisions of these early constitutions on the subject of religion betrayed a curious struggle between ancient bigotry and growing liberality. On the eve of the Revolution, Congregationalism still continued the established religion in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut. The Church of England enjoyed a similar civil support in all the southern colonies, and particularly so in New York and New Jersey. It was only in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Delaware that the equality of all Protestant sects had been acknowledged . . .

"The Constitution of Massachusetts seemed to guarantee en-

tire freedom of religious opinions and the equality of all sects; yet the Legislature was expressly authorized and impliedly required to provide for the support of ministers and to compel attendance on their services--a clause against which the people of Boston protested and struggled in vain. The Legislature also took upon itself to subject to heavy penalties any who might question notions as to the nature, attributes and functions of the Deity, or the divine inspiration of any book of the Old or New Testament--reviving in fact the old colonial laws against blasphemy. Similar laws remained in force in Connecticut and were re-enacted in New Hampshire. Favored by the Legislature and still more so by the courts, Congregationalism continued to enjoy in these three states the prerogatives of an established church and to be supported by taxes from which it was not easy for dissenters to escape. The ministers, once chosen, held their places for life, and had a legal claim for their stipulated salaries, unless dismissed for causes deemed sufficient by a council mutually chosen from among the ministers and members of the neighboring churches."

No challenge to those existing laws and customs was involved the Danbury petition. Ebenezer Hickok and his neighbors were quite willing to recognize government authority in ecclesiastical affairs, and they had no quarrel with the system which made the church and the local town government almost synonymous. It is doubtful that all five signers made the journey to Hartford. More likely only Hickok and Lemuel Beebe took the road from Danbury that April morning, leaving early in the dawn and following the old wagon road that later became known as the Grand Army Highway, more recently, the Yankee Thruway.

No portraits survive of those hardy petitioners, nor do we know much about them as individuals. However, we do know something about the time in which they lived, the general conditions of life in the American colonies and the ideas which may have engaged the minds of our Connecticut forebears in the period in which our church was born.

Connecticut, like other New England colonies, had established friendly relations with the Indian tribes remaining after the arrival of the white settlers. In Massachusetts a Congregational clergyman, John Eliot, had learned the Indian tongue, translated much of the Bible into Indian, and preached to the natives in their own language. Many had been converted by his sermons. Only a few years before, the colonies had renewed their treaty of friendship with the Six Nations.

On the western border, however, in the Allegheny region and the Ohio Valley the French had enlisted hostile tribes to attack English forts, drive out the settlers and ravage the countryside. For two years, the French and Indian war made it necessary for the colonies to raise troops and contribute supplies to the border defense. Connecticut had an important stake in the outcome, for the state, acting under the provisions of its crown charter, had laid claim to the Wyoming Valley in what is now central Pennsylvania and had formed the Susquehanna Company to settle and develop that rich, promising region.

On the long, horseback journey to Hartford, some talk of the French and Indian War, and the fortunes of the Susquehanna Company must have occupied the petitioners from Danbury, and they would have found the General Assembly likewise engaged in the consideration of those problems in the West. The petition for a new church having been presented to the proper authority, a committee of three was appointed to visit Danbury and report on the desirability of dividing the parish.

So the matter rested from April through the summer months. It is interesting to note that while the Danbury petition was pending before the legislative authorities, two events of historic importance occurred. The first of these was on August 1, 1759. On that date in Newport, Rhode Island, the cornerstone was laid for the Touro Synagogue, the first Jewish house of worship to be established on the American continent. Thus the date of the beginning of our own Bethel church and the first Jewish synagogue in America are only a few months apart.

The second event was of world-wide significance. In the spring, just about the time the Danbury petitioners were making their pilgrimage to Hartford, young General James Wolfe sailed from England with a force of several thousand soldiers. He arrived off Quebec late in June after several months of reconnoitering and maneuver, on the early morning of September 13 he led his troops up the steep river bank to the Plains of Abraham, just west of Quebec, and there a few hours later defeated the French under Montcalm. The British victory led to the capture of Quebec, the end of French hopes for empire in the new world, and the political destiny of Canada as we know it today.

So it was a historic time, and the news of the English victory at Quebec was just beginning to filter through the colonies when on the second Thursday of October, 1759 the General Assembly (meeting at New Haven) formally granted the petition to divide the Danbury parish in the following terms:

"Upon report of Mfrs. Samuel Olmsted, John Hitchok and William Lee a committee appoynted by this Assembly in May to view the circumstances of the first society in the town of Danbury and the situation and circumstances of the inhabitants living in the south part of the township who pray to be a distinct Ecclesiastical Society according to certain limits and bounds set forth in the Memorial of Ebenezer Hickok and Lemuel Beebe and others, inhabitants of said south part reporting their opinion that the south part and the inhabitants thereon living aught to be made a distinct society.

"It is therefore resolved by this Assembly that the Memorialists and all others living in the south part and southward of the following bounds viz.;

"Beginning at a beach tree marked by the grate brook from thence running southward a straight line on the east side of Spruce mountain until it comes to Fairfield North Line and then eastward from the beach tree as the Great Brook runeth to Muddy Brook and then by Muddy Brook to where the same emptyeth into Seempouge Brook and from thence a straight line to the Highway on the east of Swampe and by the Highway called Woodbury old road crossing the road running the same corse of the Highway on the East side of the Swampe to Newbury Line and in that line to Newtown line. Bounded east on Newtown Line and south on Fairfield Line, shall be and they are hereby made into a Distinct Ecclesiastical Society which shall be called and known by the name of Bethel with the same powers and privileges as other Ecclesiastical Societies in this Colony.

"A true copy of record examined by George Wyls, Secretary."

The first meeting of the new society was held on November 12th, 1759 at the residence of Isaac Hoyt, which is the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert S. Kirk, and is commonly known as the Treat Solley homestead.

According to the records Captain John Benedict acted as moderator, and Lemuel Beebe was clerk. A copy of the minutes follows:

"At a society meeting held in the parish of Bethel in Danbury November 12th, 1759, A.D. by the inhabitants legally warned and qualified for said purpos. Then by vote made choyce of Capt. John Benedict moderator, and Lemuel Beebe clerk for the . . . At the same meeting voted that the bill in form by which said society was set off by the General Assembly be subjected to the society record . . . At the same meeting by vote made choyce of Capt. John Benedict, Capt. Ebenezer Hickok, Lieut. John Dibble, Ensign

Benjamin Benedict, Ensign Thomas Starr a committee for society for year ensuing . . . At the same meeting agreed by vote to call some meet candidate to preach with said Society at present according to the discesion of the Soxiety Committee and for any other purpos advizable by the neighboring ministers and by direction of said Society . . . At the same meeting voted that the Societies Committee some suitable House to attend publick worship. At present till a House may be erected for said purpos . . . At the same meeting agreed by vote consisting of two thirds of the voters present to build a meeting house for said Society of the dimentions of forty-eight feet in length and thirty-six feet in width and twenty-one feet in heighth betwixt joynts . . . At the same meeting agreed by vote to send a memorial to the Hon. County Cort to be held at Fairfield on 20 instant for a committee to pitch a stake for meeting house and that Mr. Samuel Olmsted of Regfield, Captain John Hitchcock of New Milford and Mr. William Lee of Fairfield be appoynted for said purpos if said Cort will appoynt them ... At the same meeting voted to adjurn till Friday next at two of clock afternoon to the house of Mr. Phinneus Judd in said Society."

At the adjourned meeting the question of building a meeting house was settled.

"Bethel in Danbury November 16 A.D. 1759 . . . At an adjurned meeting at Phinneus Judd's house it was voted for Benjamin Taylor clerk for this meeting . . . Voted at the adjurned meeting to meet at Joseph Ferey house for the winter season . . . Granted at the same meeting a tax of a penny on the pound by way of vote . . . Voted at the same meeting that Ebenezer Hickok and Joseph Starr should be Collectors of said tax . . . Voted at said meeting that said rate should be payd at the first day of March next with the interest from that time . . . Voted at said meeting that John Whitlock should be masterworkman for getting out the timber and framing the meeting house . . . Voted at the same meeting that Phinneus Judd, Lieut. John Benedict and Isaac Hoyt be a committee to oversee the work and business of the meeting house."

Now it sounds very simple; a meeting was held and they voted to build a meeting house and call a pastor, but it was not as simple as that. Today we hold a church meeting in the vestry of our church and think nothing of it. We have a short distance to travel to the church; those that have to travel a little further have their automobiles to carry them to the meeting. Consider this meeting held two hundred years ago. There were no autos

nor even wagons or carriages in those days; only a few wagons were seen in Bethel some fifty years later. Grist of grain was taken to the mill in bags on horseback, and the women rode to church on Sundays and around the country on weekdays on horseback, usually on a cushion called a pillion, fastened behind the saddle, the man of the house riding in front on the saddle.

So, when a meeting was held, it meant that these settlers, who were scattered pretty well around the parish, would have come on horseback. There wasn't any village center. They journeyed to neighbors' houses to hold their meetings, the residences of Isaac Hoyt and the residence of Phinneus Judd. What is now the center of the town, where the houses are but a few feet apart, was then all farm land. Probably cow paths and Indian trails marked the way from one farm to another.

Among the first residents was a Doctor Noah Rockwell, and later we find mention of a Doctor Peter Hayes. We are told that the country doctor in those days visited his patients on horseback, carrying his saddlebag containing calomel, jalap, epsom salts, lancet and turnkey, those being the principal aids in relieving the sick. Nearly every person, sick or well, was bled every spring. Teeth were pulled with a turnkey; a dreadful instrument it was in looks and terrible in execution.

It was no easy matter to call meetings together, nor was it an easy matter to do many things. There were no stores to go except in Danbury, and there was very little money to purchase things if one did travel that far. Most everything was made at home. While the men toiled in the fields, you would find the women hatching their flax, carding their tow and wool, spinning, reeling and weaving into fabrics for bedding and clothing for all the family. These same women did the knitting, darning, mending, washing, ironing, cooking, soap and candle making, picked the geese, milked the cows, made butter and cheese, and did many other tasks for the comfort and support of their families.

Rainwater was caught and used for washing, while that for drinking and cooking was either taken from springs or drawn from wells, with their old oaken buckets, long poles and well sweeps. Fire was kept overnight by banking up brands in the fireplace, and if it went out, one neighbor would visit another about daybreak next morning with a pair of tongs to borrow a coal of fire to kindle with. In summer nearly all retired to rest early dark without lighting a candle except on extraordinary occasions. Tallow candles with tow wicks were also homemade. Homemade soft soap was used for washing hands and faces as

well. The children ate their meals on trenchers or wooden plates.

Life was not the easy matter it is today, with our autos, movies, radios, televisions, electric lights, washing machines, running water and our stores where one may purchase most any necessity or convenience at moderate prices. These early settlers had to work hard for what they got out of life and, one of the things necessary to their existence was a place of worship. It was too far to travel to Danbury, and the Danbury House of Worship was overcrowded; so they decided to have one of their own.

It is understood that Captain Ebenezer Hickok gave the society sufficient land for the meeting house site and for a burial ground. The meeting house was completed so far as to be occupied the following summer and was located upon the same site of our present Congregational Church. The house remained unfinished in its interior until the year 1796, when pews, a pulpit and the gallery were added. A steeple was added in 1818, and a bell procured ten years later.

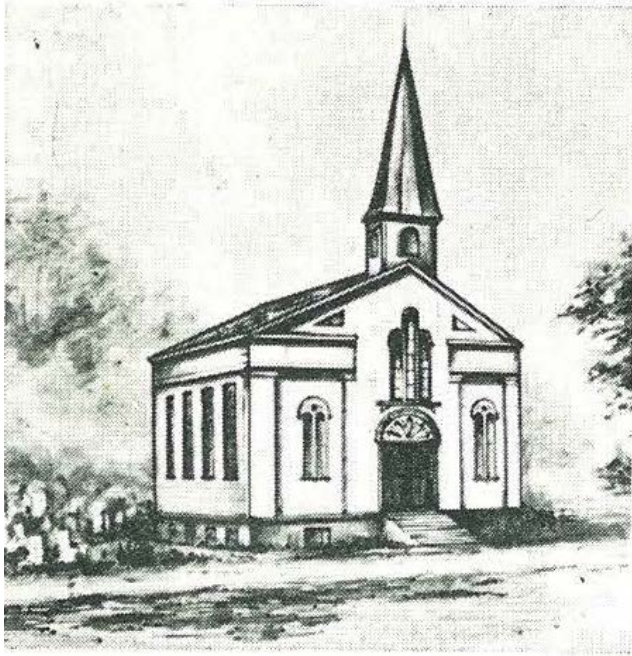
On November 25th, 1760 the new church was recognized by a council of the Eastern Consociation of Fairfield County, of which Rev. David Judson of Newtown was moderator. This council also ordained as pastor of this church Mr. Noah Wetmore, a licentiate, with the Rev. Ebenezer White of Danbury preaching the sermon.

The following persons were upon recommendation of the Danbury pastor embodied into a distinct church, viz:

John Benedict	and his wife	Rachel Benedict
Ebenezer Hickok	" " "	Ester Hickok
Philip Judd	" " "	Lydia Judd
Nathan Taylor		
Solomon Ferry	" " "	Mrs. Ferry
Theophilus Taylo	" " "	Sarah Taylor
Benjamin Judd	" " "	Sarah Judd
Nathaniel Benedict	" " "	Hannah Benedict
Abraham Benedict	" " "	Anah Benedict
James Crofut	" " "	Lydia Crofut
Ephraim Barnum	" " "	Ruth Barnum
Lemuel Beebe		
John Dibble	" " "	Sarah Dibble
Ebenezer Platt	" " "	Marah Platt
Benjamin Benedict	" " "	Abigail Benedict
Benjamin Judd, Jr.		
Simeon Rockwell	" " "	Mrs. Rockwell
Nathan Taylor	" " "	Mary Taylor
Jabez Taylor	" " "	Hannah Taylor
Samuel Judd	" " "	Hannah Judd
Samuel Hoyt	" " "	Jerusha Hoyt
Mathew Taylor		
Ebenezer Munson	" " "	Mrs. Munson

John Benedict	"	"	"	Lydia Benedict
Noah Rockwell	"	"	"	Mary Rockwell
Stephen Trowbridge	"	"	"	Lydia Trowbridge
Isaac Hoyt	"	"	"	Sarah Hoyt
Benjamin Taylor				
Phineas Judd	"	"	"	Deborah Judd
Joseph Ferry	"	"	"	Rachel Ferry
Nathaniel Hoyt	"	"	"	Ruth Hoyt
Jonothan Beebe				
Samuel Benedict	"	"	"	Mrs. Benedict
Eliphalet Peck	"	"	"	Rebecca Peck
Jesse Peck				
Joseph Beebe	"	"	"	Mrs. Beebe
Hezekiah Benedict				
Widow Sarah Benedict				
Sarah Judd				
Mrs. Hannah Seeley				
Sarah Bush				
Mrs. Lydia Bailey				

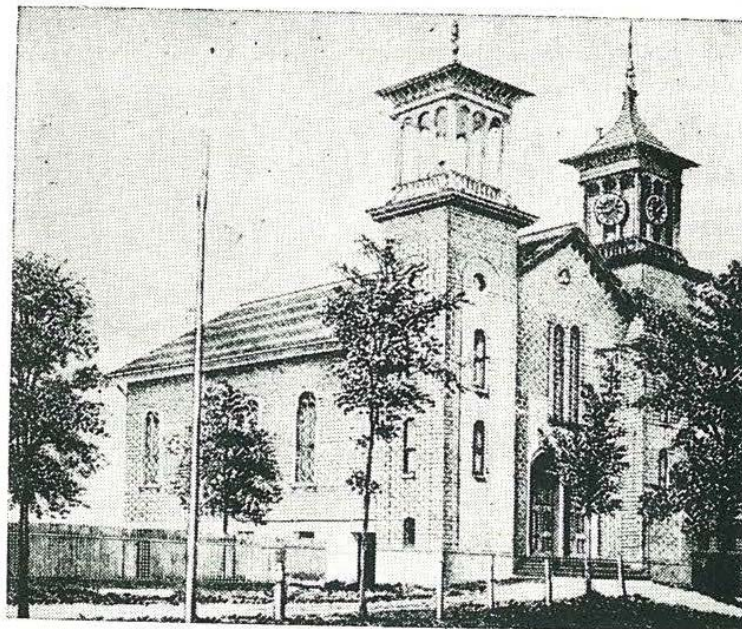
in all 71 members.



An artist's conception of the second meeting house-built in 1842-damaged by winds in 1865.



Dr. Laurens Persius Hickok, who preached the Centennial sermon.



The New Church Building built in 1865.

CHAPTER 2

Years Leading Up To The Revolutionary War

Captain John Benedict and Captain Ebenezer Hickok were appointed the first Deacons in this church February 11, 1761.

In these early years, the views and preachings of the Danbury pastor, Ebenezer White, were tinged with what was afterwards called Sandemanianism, so called after Robert Sandeman, who came from Scotland to Boston and afterwards visited and died in Danbury.

"In 1764 Mr. Robert Sandeman, a native of Perth in Scotland, man of learning and superior abilities, who had some correspondence with Mr. White (Ebenezer White, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Danbury, 1736-1764) and some other ministers in this country, came from his native land, landed in Boston and came to Danbury near the close of the year. After tarrying several weeks he returned to Boston, where he soon organized a church. He returned to Danbury and gathered a church July, 1765. The principal doctrines which he taught were similar to those of the Christian Church. His distinguishing tenet was 'that faith is a more intellectual belief'; his favorite expression was, 'A bare belief of bare truth.' He maintained that his church was the only true church, then arisen from the ruins of Antichrist, his reign being near a close. The use of means for mankind in a natural state he pretty much exploded."

--from Barber's "Connecticut Historical Collections"
published in 1836.

It was estimated that there were only four hundred converts to the Sandemanian doctrine in all the world, forty of whom were in the United States and most of those in the vicinity of Danbury.

Mr. Sandeman is buried in Danbury. The headstone reads:

"Here lies, until the resurrection, the body of Robert Sandeman, a native of Perth, North Britain, who, in the face of continued opposition from all sorts of men, long boldly contended for the ancient Faith, that the bare work of Jesus Christ, without a deed or thought on the part of man, is sufficient to present the chief of sinners spotless before God. To declare this blessed truth, as testified in the Holy Scriptures, he left his country, he left his friends, and after much patient suffering finished his labors at Danbury April 2, 1771, AB 53 years."

Our first pastor, Mr. Wetmore, was charged with tendencies

in this direction and Mr. Taylor of New Fairfield was fully committed to Mr. White's sentiments. In May 1763 the Association convened in Bethel and heard charges against these three ministers. Mr. Wetmore was cleared from suspicion, but Mr. White and Mr. Taylor were presented to the Consociation for trial. Both of them were subsequently dismissed with censure. Mr. Wetmore then became more pointed in his preachings against the Sandemanian doctrines continued for several years until in 1770 some people memorialized the General Assembly to be set off from this society. Nothing seems to have come of it although several families in the parish became Sandemanians.

These are the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. In 1775, a form of dysentary broke out in the parish, known as camp distemper. Malignant in form, it spread throughout the district and caused fifty deaths. Many children were afflicted by it, and Dr. Hickok in his Hundred Year Anniversary address to the parish spoke of wandering among the many small graves in the southwest corner of the cemetery adjoining the church.

What must have been a very exciting period in the lives of these early church founders was the march of Tryon's detachment of two thousand British through Bethel on their way to burn the Revolutionary Army Stores at Danbury. It is said that a lone rider sighted the British approaching from the top of Hoyt's Hill and rode at top speed to warn the rebels. The British, thinking they were being met by a considerable army, halted their forces and sent skirmishers ahead. A lineal descendant of Thomas Taylor told a story that her grandmother was riding home from a neighbor's over Hoyt's Hill when she sighted the British and dashed into Bethel shouting, "The British are coming! The British are coming!" Another and different account is that a young man named Lambert Lockwood was sent out to scout the enemy's advance and was wounded and captured. Some Tories lived here during the Revolution, and a deserter from the American Army was found secreted by one of them in a barn. He was afterwards hanged at Newtown. The larger portion of the inhabitants were with Mr. Wetmore firm friends of the Revolution.

In those early years our Church was often involved in strife and controversy. Although Mr. Wetmore had been absolved of the charge of embracing the Sandeman doctrines, and his sermons conformed to accepted religious principles, he was unable to maintain a harmonious spirit in the congregation. His long pastorate was marred in later years by minor dissensions among the members which he ignored or was unable to resolve. In 1784, after

nearly a quarter of a century of service, Mr. Wetmore's pastoral relations with the church were formally severed by the Consociation. It was said that while his ministry had been earnest and faithful, the church had declined. Membership had dwindled from seventy-one to thirty-six, and not more than six of the original members remained.

At this same meeting which ended Mr. Wetmore's pastorate, was suggested that the Bethel society be dissolved and the congregation reunite with the Danbury parish. At first it seemed that the two societies might again become one, but as the matter was postponed opposition grew, and it was finally decided to continue as a separate parish.

Following the termination of Mr. Wetmore's ministry, temporary pastors filled the pulpit for a period of seven years. The first of these was the Rev. Joseph Peck, whose services gave satisfaction and who might have continued but for his untimely death in 1791. During Mr. Peck's illness, in 1790, Samuel Sturgis, young man from Fairfield, received a probationary appointment and he brought about a revival of interest in church affairs during the few short months of his pastorate. He declined a call for permanent pastorate, and in 1791 a young minister, John Ely of Lyme, was called and installed by the Consociation.

With the beginning of Mr. Ely's ministry the church was required to set its house in order and examine some of the conflicts within the congregation. Mr. Ely gave his immediate attention to a number of these small problems of discipline and controversy. In several cases, committees were appointed to adjust differences among the members; a few individuals were taken to task for neglect or violation of the covenant. A long standing disagreement, probably more personal than doctrinal, between Ensign Nathaniel Hoyt and Samuel Crofut had disturbed the tranquility of the church. Considerable effort was made, by Mr. Ely and influential members of the congregation to reconcile the conflict. The case came before a church meeting in August, 1784; and subsequent meetings considered the case without finding a solution. Eventually the two men got together and adjusted their differences, and the congregation breathed a collective sigh of relief on learning of their reconciliation.

Another problem which confronted the young minister was the completion and furnishing of the church interior. For more than thirty years it had remained unfinished, a bare, barnlike structure without pulpit or pews, accommodating the congregation on rude wooden benches. However, supplementing the primitive

structure, some members of the community built small plain neighborhood structures called Sabbath Houses which could be used by those families which came some distance to worship in Bethel.

In 1797, the sixth year of Mr. Ely's pastorate, the society voted to finish the lower floor of the church with permanent pews, build a pulpit, lay the upper floor, install two stairways and a single row of seats around the gallery.

About the same time the question of church music seems to have occupied the congregation. The first church choir had been organized under the leadership of one Daniel Taylor and the old records disclosed that they "chanted to the sound of the viol" as played by Appolos Benedict. In 1798, with the newly finished interior providing more comfort to the worshippers, it was voted to admit musical instruments, specifically the bassoon, clarinet and flute into the choir. There was considerable opposition to the use of those worldly music devices, however, and it was necessary to vote again upon the question in 1801. Again the use of the musical instruments was approved, after spirited discussion. The records tell us that under the leadership of Ransome Seeley "the singers invested to themselves instruments like David's" ; Hiram Benjamin played upon the bass viol, Deacon Matthew Starr upon the flute, and Edward Stapleton upon the clarinet, and they "did make a joyful noise to the God of Jacob."

During Mr. Ely's ministry the church began to show an interest in missionary labors among the Indians. With the congregation's approval, Mr. Ely left his pulpit for a time to go to Whitestone, near Utica, New York. At that time the village was on our western frontier, and the friendly Indians there were subjected to a brief campaign of evangelistic sermons, Bible studies and stories. The records do not say how successful Mr. Ely was in winning converts to Congregationalism.

Up to this time the principal occupation of these early settlers was farming, but we find that as early as 1793 there were four small hat shops in Bethel. These were owned by Zar Dibble, Eli Taylor, Thomas Taylor and Eli Hickok. Apprentices did most of the work. At one time there were as many as twenty hat factories in Bethel, and also quite a number of concerns which made combs. We have not been able to establish the exact date when the comb making started, but in the middle eighteen hundreds, comb making was as prominent as hatting in Bethel.

CHAPTER 3

The Early 19th Century

In 1802 much excitement was aroused through the finding of an anonymous letter which discredited several persons in the church. Mr. Ely, the pastor, was supposed to have had some connection with the matter. At a specially called meeting on October 18th of that year, Captain Eliakim Benedict, Seth Benedict and Samuel Starr were appointed a committee, to wait upon the pastor and arrange for a meeting with certain persons to consult about this writing an anonymous letter to their alleged injury. The feeling was such that in November it was voted "That the Society does not wish to continue Rev. John Ely as their minister any longer." However, the excitement cooled, and at a later meeting a committee was appointed to ask Mr. Ely to call a meeting of the Association to advise with them. It was not necessary because Mr. Ely in a letter to the church admitted certain imprudence on his part and as willing to overlook the same from some others, so a reconciliation was affected. The matter left its scar, however, and on January 26th, 1804 it was voted to call a meeting of the Consociation for the purpose of dismissing Mr. Ely. He had served as pastor for a little over twelve years. It was said that during his ministry there had been no special revival in religion, and only a few admissions had been made to the church in any one year.

In December 1805 the Rev. Samuel Sturges was called. Mr. Sturges had earlier served as a supply and was well thought of by the people. One question of some importance was raised during Mr. Sturges' ministry, otherwise his six years ministry was marked with nothing of distinction or importance. The question in brief was this: May a baptized child on coming to his majority become a member of the church on profession of his belief in Christianity, or must he give evidence of personal experimental piety? This was the end of the half-way covenant. Earlier it had been voted to allow baptized children who had not professed their faith upon reaching majority the protection of the church. In 1791 this half-way covenant had been abolished but had left the door open to a few who still had some doubts until they should receive further light. At this time it became fully decided that the church would withdraw its watch and care from those who did not come to the Lord's Supper. As a result some ten or twelve cases came to full communion. At a later meeting the confession of faith

and covenant received several modifications and some additions. After the termination of Mr. Sturges' ministry in 1811, the church had no settled pastor for ten years. During this period a number of temporary ministers occupied the pulpit; often the congregation worshipped without a pastor, the services being conducted by the senior deacon.

After the period in which the half-way covenant occupied the congregation's interest, the church became concerned for the religious training of its youth which resulted in the establishment of the first Sabbath school. This was in, 1818, during the temporary pastorate of the Rev. Burr Baldwin, who organized the school and taught its first classes. The following summer, in 1819, Deacon Seth Seely enrolled about fifty children for religious instruction and provided a small library of good books.

In November, 1821 the church called to its pulpit the Rev. John G. Lowe, who was installed January 1, 1822. Mr. Lowe was an English minister who had immigrated to this country only a few years before. It was said that his preaching was original in thought and illustration and quite edifying and instructive to the people. The congregation grew in numbers and strength. In 1824 additional seats were installed in the gallery, and in 1821 a church bell was procured.

Previously mention was made of Bethel's first two medical practitioners, Dr. Noah Rockwell and Dr. Peter Hayes. They were followed by three others: Dr. Ansel Hoyt, Dr. "Tyle" Taylor and Dr. Samuel Banks, who moved to Bethel from Wilton, Connecticut, about 1812. In September, 1828, a disagreement arose between Dr. Banks and the Rev. Lowe which "became extensively disturbing and annoying." Dr. Banks was excommunicated November 18, 1828. He appealed to the Consociation September 22; 1829, but when that body convened on October 7th and heard the evidence, it confirmed the church's action. Later Dr. Banks made a confession which was accepted by the church, and he was restored to membership. During this controversy, Rev. Mr. Lowe made a formal request for his dismissal, which was granted January 20, 1829, after a ministry of seven years.

The period of Rev. Mr. Lowe's service witnessed an important change in the church's financial affairs. During the pre-Revolutionary period and through the first two decades of the Nineteenth Century, church expenses were met by taxation. The salary of Rev. Mr. Wetmore, the first pastor, was one hundred ten pounds, or about \$550 a year. A tax of five pence on the pound was levied on the congregation, each member being assessed according to

his financial worth.

During Rev. Mr. Lowe's pastorate the tax method of financing was discontinued. Necessary revenues to operate the church were obtained by auctioning the pews. The more desirable places, of course, brought a higher rental. Records of the first pew auctions are missing, but we learn that in May, 1859, when the church was about to observe its centennial anniversary, a meeting was called to sell pews for the ensuing six months. The highest bid was made by Ransome Seeley for seat No. 49--fifteen dollars. Presumably this was one of the most prominent pews and accommodated the entire Seeley family. The lowest bid was for seat No. 74, which was allotted to B. M. Benedict. The entire amount raised for the six months period was \$455.75, which would indicate that the church expenses at that time were less than \$1,000 a year.

The history of the church, as it is handed down to us in the anniversary sermon and the old records, falls naturally into those periods during which the most prominent ministers served and deals largely with their problems and personalities. No doubt this is so because the records set forth only what happened during those flourishing periods, leaving little trace of the lesser figures and more tranquil times. However, additional information has been gathered which will give a better idea of how the church influence extended out into the community, indeed out over the entire country.

During this period we have been writing about, several men were born, whose influence was felt a long way from Bethel. These men were sons of the Bethel Church. Julius Hawley Seeley, born September 24, 1824, became President of Amherst College after a distinguished career as a preacher and teacher; this position he held for thirteen years. Rev. Laurens Clark Seeley, his brother, born September 20, 1837, became President of Smith College in 1875. Another brother, Samuel T. Seeley, born October 24, 1822, entered the ministry. Laurens Perseus Hickok, son of Ebenezer Hickok and Polly (Benedict) Hickok, born December 29, 1798, became President of Union College in 1866. Dr. Hickok preached "Century Sermon" in this parish on November 30, 1860. Another son of the church, Orris S. Ferry, born in Bethel August 15, 1823, became a United States Senator after a distinguished career.

Phineas Taylor Barnum, who was born in Bethel July 5, 1810, became the world's greatest showman. He at one time edited a newspaper here, which he called the "Herald of Freedom." He was sent to jail in Danbury for sixty days for printing something libelous, and when released he staged a parade with a band which

played "Home Sweet Home" on his arrival in Bethel. In 1881, returning to his birthplace he presented the community with a bronze fountain eighteen feet high which stood in the center of the town where the "Doughboy" monument now stands. At the time of this presentation he made a speech in which he said, "I have invariably cherished with the most affectionate remembrance the place of my birth--the old village meeting house, without steeple or bell, where in the square family pew, I sweltered in summer and shivered through my Sunday School lessons in winter."

Mr. Barnum in his reminiscing mentioned many of the names we find in our church record and told where many of them lived. He said he was born in a house on Elm Street (now Greenwood Avenue). This is the house formerly owned by Deacon William H. Hickok. Further relating his boyhood remembrances, he said, "I remember seeing my father and our neighbors put through military drill every day by Captain Noah Ferry in 1814, for the war with Great Britain of 1812-1815." He also mentions a private school of Laurens P. Hickok.

Mr. Barnum died at his home in Bridgeport on April 7, 1891.

CHAPTER 4

Bethel Becomes A Town

Following Rev. Mr. Lowe's dismissal, a Rev. Isaac Beach and a Rev. Mr. McCloud filled the pulpit for a year and a half. Then the Rev. Rastus Cole from Worcester, New York, was called and was installed as pastor on September 29, 1830. Mr. Cole's ministry was a successful one. In 1832 the meeting house was extensively repaired and altered, and slips were substituted for pews. There were several cases of church discipline, and two persons were excommunicated. Mr. Cole asked for his dismissal, and his pastoral relations were dissolved September 26, 1837, after a pastorate of seven years.

Four months later the Rev. John Greenwood, who had recently arrived from England, was called to settle as pastor, and he was installed in 1838. Another case of church discipline is recorded during this pastorate; this time Dr. Samuel Banks and his wife were excommunicated. Then there seems to have been another division in the church, and Mr. Greenwood asked for his dismissal, which was granted in 1842. A Rev. Mr. Bacon from Woodbury was called to preach. Some wanted to keep him, and others desired the return of Mr. Greenwood. Finally, they were both dropped.

The meeting house burned down on July 21, 1842. It was voted by the society to build a new house of worship, fifty-two feet by thirty-eight, together with basement room and in the meantime to conduct services in Temperance Hall. A Rev. Mr. Burton, a pulpit supply, conducted the services of laying the cornerstone. The new building was dedicated June 1, 1843, with sermon by the Rev. James Knox, who was supplying at the time for several months and during which there was a revival of interest in the church, one hundred and thirty-five persons having joined the church in this period.

It wasn't until 1846 when the Rev. Sylvanus Haight was called that a regular pastor was installed. His ministry was short, as he only served a year and a half. The Rev. John S. Whittlesey became the pastor in 1849, and was dismissed in 1852. In 1853, the Rev. Wheelock Nye Harvey was called.

In 1855, the society of Bethel became a separate town by the same name, and the society by an alteration to its charter became the first ecclesiastical society of the town of Bethel. For almost a

whole century, the church was the center of activities in the community. For ninety-six years, although still a part of the township of Danbury, Bethel ran most of its affairs through the medium of the church. The religion of these people was not just a Sabbath Day observance, their everyday life was one of a sincere, even a stern sense of duty to the Almighty God. The covenant of Baptism and Holy Communion was to them just as necessary as their daily bread and butter. Those who shirked their duty to the church were quickly reprimanded and church discipline was something very serious to these, our forebears. To be excommunicated was a disgrace.

Four years later the church reached the century mark. The Rev. Mr. Harvey left in 1859. The Rev. Elijah C. Baldwin was installed September 5, 1860. On December 29, 1859 it was voted by the church "That there be a committee of six to consider the propriety of a centennial celebration of the organization of this church, and report at a future meeting." This committee consisted of the following members: Deacon Seth Seeley, Andrew C. Hickok, William A. Judd, Izaac H. Seeley, Ethel T. Farnham, and Deacon Andrew L. Benedict. This committee requested Dr. L. P. Hickok of Union College to prepare and deliver a historical discourse, and the day of the celebration appointed was November 30, 1860.

CHAPTER 5

Centennial

The society was particularly fortunate in the type of men who have kept the church records. From these records, Dr. Hickok gleaned the facts for his memorable "Century Sermon." A clerk of the church realizing the time that Dr. Hickok must have put in, gathering the data for this historical address, incorporated a complete copy of the sermon in the records. A summing up of one hundred years work!

Concluding his "Century Sermon," we give you in part his inclusions: "Your strength is in union and harmony. The experience of a century shows that in proposition as the members of the church and society have thought and felt, and acted together, they have prospered ... Losses and disasters are soon made up by prompt concerted action, but the greatest gains and richest prosperity may at once be thrown away by discord and contention . . . A more permanent pastoral relation is desirable. Of the ten pastors this people, none have as yet laid their bones to rest with yours. Finally, this centennial retrospect should loosen our attachment to this world, and hasten our preparation for heaven. The warm life, the ardent hopes, and the strong attachments of antipathies of the past generations are now all quenched in their graves. The earthly schemes which once so interested them have passed away, and only the influences which bore their account with eternity, have any interest for them. Our own hearts may be throbbing with just such anxieties as they here experienced, but as all temporal interests have ceased to have power over them, we shall soon be as they are, and have dealings only with the spirit world. What may buy enjoyment here, may have no influence to give blessedness there; and what may be called honor here, may bring us only shame there, and our vain mirth in this life may turn to weeping in the world to come."

The following men served as Deacons of the church during, its first century:

	Elected
Captain Ebenezer Hickok	February 11, 1761
Captain John Benedict	February 11, 1761
Phinneus Judd, brought his office from Danbury Church	
Lieut. John Dibble	October 17, 1771
Benjamin Benedict	September 29, 1774

Stephen Trowbridge	October 2, 1776
Lieut. James Seeley	October 2, 1776
Ebenezer Silliman	February 8, 1797
Oliver Benedict	December, 1803
Captain Eliakim Benedict	June 4, 1806
Ira Benedict	July, 1813
Ephraim Barnum	July, 1813
Ebenezer Hickok	1818
Eliud Taylor	1818
Najah Benedict	September 28, 1832
Seth Seeley	September 28, 1832
Elizur Benedict	September 10, 1840
Asahel Dunning	September 10, 1840
Munson Lockwood	October 29, 1844
Mathew W. Starr	October 29, 1844
Henry O. Judd	December 15, 1848
Charles Smith	December 15, 1848
George A. Hickok	November 10, 1853
Andrew L. Benedict	November 10, 1853
Deacon Seth Seeley resumed his office	October 30,
	1857 from which he had withdrawn in 1841.

The Rev. Mr. Slack in his *Reminiscences of a Quarter Century* says, about two of these deacons, "In March, 1867 the church buried one of its deacons who had been a pillar of spiritual strength in the church for nearly fifty years, Deacon Asahel Dunning. Deacon Dunning was a man of quiet and reserved manner; his words were few, but they left their impression; he was eminently a man of peace and sought for the unity of the household of faith. He died in the seventieth year of his age."

"In February of 1869, another deacon passed to his heavenly rest, Deacon Seth Seeley. Deacon Seeley for quite a half century had been identified with the church. He served the church with his earthly means, he contended for its purity in doctrine, he had remembered her at the altar of prayer. He was a man of positive character, outspoken and fearless in maintaining what he believed was right but he was conscientious and truth-loving. He was one of the earliest workers in the Sabbath School, having established our present Sunday School as early as 1819. Deacon Seeley was 78 years of age at his death."

In closing the history of the church for the first century word should be included about two sister churches which had sprung up in our community. St. Thomas Church, which had been a chapel of St. James Church of Danbury for eleven years previous, was organized as a separate parish on April 13, 1846. The first rectors were David H. Short, Thomas G. Guion, John Purves, Henry Olmstead and William Everett.

A small group of Methodists who were unable to attend services in Danbury, held their own services in homes in the winter of 1837, and in 1848 the first Methodist Episcopal Church was built on Center Street. Its first pastors were Levi Perry, Morris Hill, Horace Bartlett, G. S. Stillman, S. H. Smith and John Crawford.

CHAPTER 6

The Civil War Period

The second century of the church's history begins at a crucial period in the nation's history. Just as the beginning of the church in 1759-60 was amidst the ripening causes of the Revolutionary War, so the commencement of the second century in 1860 was at the eve of the great Civil War. South Carolina seceded at the close of this year, and within a few weeks several of the southern states had withdrawn from the Union. The nation saw a new Confederacy inaugurated with a President of its own, the basis of which was the right to own slaves. The issue being a moral one which stirred the country, religion and patriotism in the North became controvertible terms.

Our church, which had its inception during the trying times of the Revolutionary period and which had contributed substantially to the principal of self-government, again made its contribution to the freedom of the slaves and the preservation of the Union. For the first five years of the new century the Civil War left its mark on this period of the church history. Over fifty men from Bethel, two-thirds of them from this church, served their country during this period. Two promising young men of the church gave their lives for their country. Leonard I. Smith, uncle of the late Leonard and Anna Laura Smith, of our church, was killed at Cedar Mountain, in the second year of the war. Irenaeus P. Woodman was mortally wounded in the battle of Chancellorsville in the third year. Several spent time in rebel prisons, captured during the war. Deacon Charles Bailey, Alfred L. Benedict and James Reid survived to tell about it. William Holly died in Salisbury prison. Many who went from our church families returned home to live long and useful lives. We understand one of the Benedicts helped to hunt down John Wilkes Booth.

The Rev. Elijah C. Baldwin commenced his ministry in May 1860 and continued until May 1865. According to Rev. Mr. Slack's sermon of a century and a quarter, Mr. Baldwin related that one morning after the departure of a regiment for the war, there were no male voices left in the choir and almost all of the male teachers in the Sunday School had departed. In spite of the handicap laid upon the church during this period, its members reduced the church debt of twenty-three hundred dollars to nine hundred. The charities of the church amounted to three hundred and twenty-five

dollars yearly.

In May 1865, during a gale of wind, the church building was badly damaged by the falling of the church spire. The building was never used again, but was sold to the town for a town hall, and it still stands on Main Street west of the present church, where it was moved in 1865. Increased congregations caused the building of a new and larger church. Although not entirely out of debt and with the war years just preceding, its members entered on this large undertaking to build a new edifice seventy-two feet length and forty-four feet in width, of pressed brick and at a cost of twelve thousand dollars.

The building committee consisted of I. H. Wilson, Walker Ferry, Charles Hawley and D. T. Hubbell, with Mr. Hubbell and Mr. Wilson to act as superintendents of the construction. A further committee was named to raise the necessary funds; these were J. G. Hawley, T. Hubbell and A. L. Benedict. This was the second building to be erected in the short space of a quarter of a century, the first having been destroyed by fire in 1842. The people of this generation were called upon to make a double sacrifice; and with the effects the war, it was a tremendous undertaking to build this brick structure which we still use for our house of worship.

It is said that Mr. Hubbell, who was superintendent of the church school, was largely responsible for the raising of the first six thousand dollars, and a record has been preserved which shows how much the children of the church gave to the enterprise. The sums at the close of the year ranged from one cent to that of the largest giver, who was Georgie Starr and who gave eleven dollars and eighty-six cents. The next largest giver in the church school was Aggie Ferry, who gave ten dollars and eighty-three cents. The total amount of the school's donations was six hundred and fifty-two dollars.

The new church cost something over fourteen thousand dollars. About half of this became a debt on the society under which the church struggled several years. It is interesting to note that for my years the church carried fire insurance only to the amount fourteen thousand dollars and that in 1925 it was raised to thirty-two thousand dollars, which was the value set upon it at that time by appraisers for the church. The present insurable value said to be ninety-six thousand dollars.

The year of 1867 was a hard one for the church. Struggling under the debt of seventy-seven hundred dollars, it was necessary sell the parsonage in order to diminish the debt. In 1871 the church received from the Shepaug Railroad, whose tracks passed

immediately in front of the building, sufficient land damage to pay off a large portion of the indebtedness, and in 1876 the total indebtedness was liquidated. According to the records, Bro. H. H. Baird, S. S. Ambler, G. G. Durant, Dr. A. E. Barber, and Fred E. Benedict were the committee which raised the funds.

In 1869 the Rev. Robert C. Bell was called, being ordained to the pastorate of the church on November 3rd. He served the church for two years and five months. In 1871 a catalog of the church membership since its foundation was issued, giving a total membership of one hundred. In the spring of 1873 the Rev. George F. Walters was called and installed as pastor in July.

The church grew and kept pace with the growth of the town, which was considerable, from 1870 to 1880. A parsonage was built in 1873 and enlarged in 1883 at a cost of forty-five hundred dollars. The lecture room was fitted up in 1884. An organ had been installed in the summer of 1881 at a cost of about eighteen hundred dollars.

The Rev. Henry L. Slack in his Reminiscences of a Quarter Century, mentioned the names of many persons who had passed away in this period of the church's history, and many of these names are still familiar to some living in the community. Some of these were: Charles Smith and his wife, Ann; Charles Dart, Harry Seeley, Hiram Benjamin, Joseph Kyle, George B. Benedict, Asahel B. Taylor, Mrs. Angeline (Cyril) Benedict, Cynthia Whitlock, Esther Hickok, Rachel Dunning, Rachel Morgan, Lucia Beebe, Abigail T. Seeley, Betsy Benedict and Cornelia Coley. Others were John Greenwood, Jr., Timothy Hickok, Isaac Seeley, Thomas Andrews, Silliman Judd, Miss Elizabeth Seeley, E. Merwin Benedict, Ransome Seeley, Henry B. Squires and Mary T. Holly.

Deacons William A. Judd and George A. Hickok also died during this period. Of Deacon Judd, Rev. Mr. Slack said in part: "He was a man of deep spiritual character, an earnest worker in the vineyard, especially among young men, whose testimony I have repeatedly heard in thanksgiving for the tender words and gentle influence of Deacon Judd as shaping their spiritual experience."

And of Deacon Hickok: "Deacon Hickok was a man who loved the 'Word of God' and forgot not to honor the Christ of the Word nor His Holy Spirit; his prayer and exhortation in the social service of the church were from an overflow of his heart of Faith and Prayer."



One of the early hat shops run by Edwin Short when the derby was the headgear of the day.



Shepaug Railroad on Main Street in front of the church and the Town Hall.
(Now. the -V.F.W. building.)

CHAPTER 7

Main Street In The 80's

The first transportation facility between Danbury and Bethel was provided by a member of this church. Eli Goodsell, born in Redding, became a member in 1876. He drove 'a stage coach between the two towns, and for a number of years this was the only public conveyance. The horse drawn trolley cars came into service in 1887, and the first electric car on January 1, 1895. Automobile buses came into use about thirty years later.

Up until about 1887 the center of the village was in close proximity to the church, but with the advent of the trolley car and the moving of the post office from the old town hall down into the English Block on Center Street, the center of the village gradually moved away from the church, so that today there is not a store where there used to be several. Across from the church was Myer's department store, Ben Sport's store, a meat market and Len Seeley's store, Henwood's Stationery Store. Around the corner was Goodsell & Andrew's General Store, and across on Chestnut Street, what is now the Mead homestead, was Wilson's Hotel.

A poem has been found which was supposed to have been composed on the veranda of the Wilson Hotel. Looking out across the way, someone observed the church and made up this verse:

Old Bethel,	Without a Preacher,
New People,	Without a Bell,
Old Church,	All the People,
New Steeple,	Go to H----.

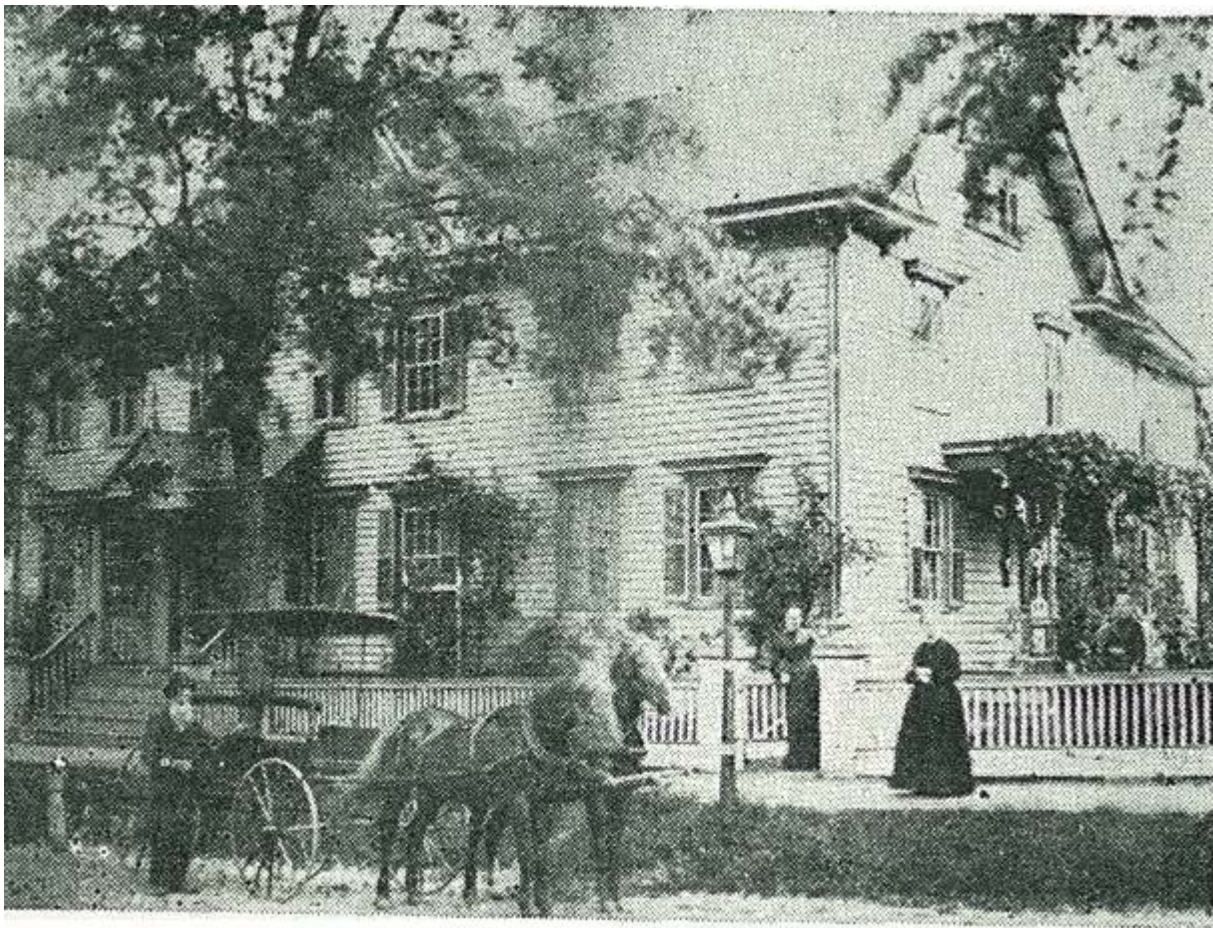
Presumably this poem was written during that period of the Church's history when the new steeple had been built on the original building but contained no bell and was without a pastor.

In the latter part of the eighteen hundreds there were twelve hat shops in Bethel. These were of some size, with the following proprietors: Edward Short, Richmond Bros., Andrews, McKenzie & Durant, Gorman, Wixted & Crow, Cole & Ambler, Judd & Co., The Judd &- Dunning Hat Co., George A. Hickok & Son, H. E. Hickok & Son, F. W. Smith & Son, Foster & Ridge, Farnum & Fairchild. There were also three paper box factories, three hat-case factories, one hat-forming mill, and one leather tannery. Many of the proprietors of these factories were prominent members of this church and gave liberally to its support.

Now in the day when most of the hats are being made by

machinery, it should be recalled that in those days hatting was a trade worth learning. A young man had to apprentice himself for several years before he became a journeyman workman and could draw the wages of such. That the men working in these shops were of high caliber and character is shown in that they made good money and invested in homes of their own. One of the notable things about our community for many years was the fact that the workmen owned their own homes and did not have to live in tenements as has been the case in other communities where a single industry thrived. Mention should be made of the famous hatters' lockout, too, when employee and employer waged a vigorous legal battle over the right to strike. The matter attracted nationwide attention.

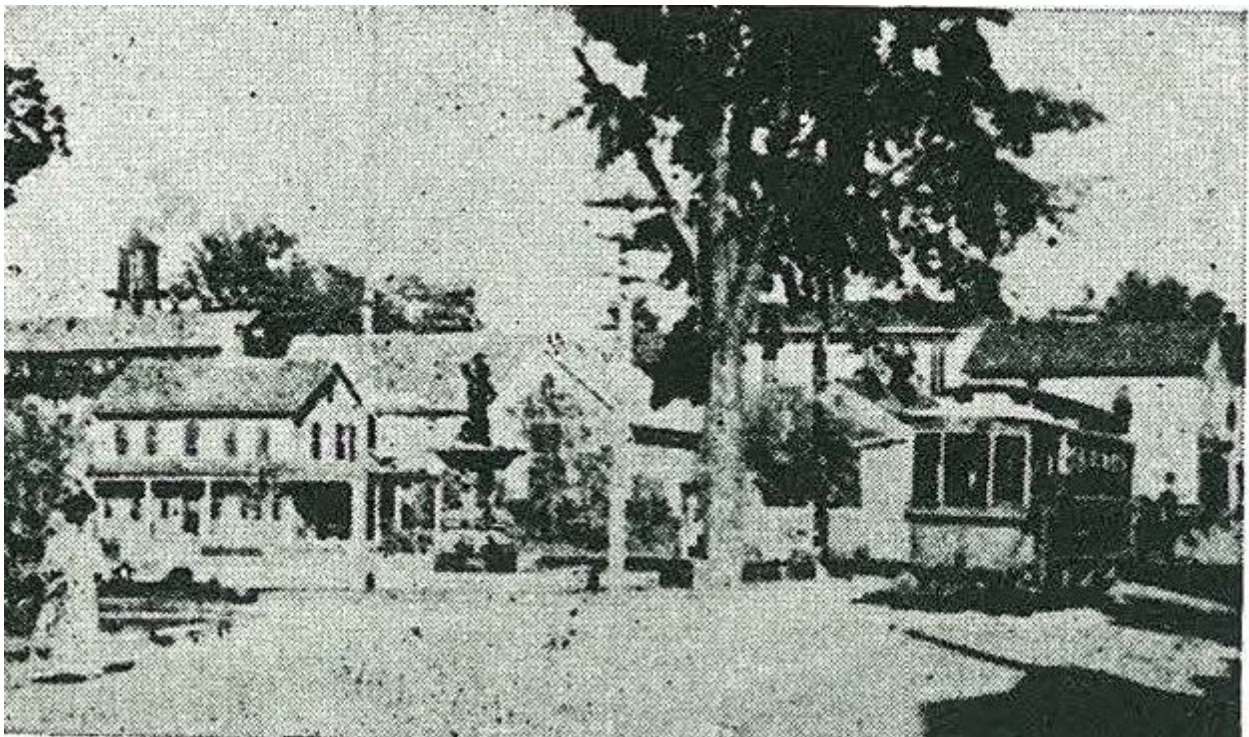
As this is just previous to the advent of the automobile, mention should be made of the town's famous livery stable, which William J. Nichols operated from the barn in back of George Beard's and later built in back of the residence on Fountain Place now occupied by a gift shop.



The Wilson Hotel on Chestnut Street.
(Now the Mead home.)



Some of the men of the church at Poker Rock at the turn of the century.



P. T. Barnum's Fountain and the trolley car on Center Street. (Now Greenwood Ave. and Barnum Square.)

CHAPTER 8

Ministry Of The Reverend Henry L. Slack

The history of the first century and a quarter of the church leaves us little doubt that this church made itself felt in the community. During the next quarter century it continued to make its influence felt; was largely due to the untiring efforts of its pastor, the Rev. Henry L. Slack. On the occasion of the celebration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the church, the Rev. Albert T. Steele, in his anniversary sermon, summed up the ministry of the Rev. Slack in these words:

"In the records of the church there comes a change of handwriting on February 16, 1905. The pen falls from the hand of a faithful pastor-clerk, Rev. Henry L. Slack. The preceding twenty-two years showed a steady increase in membership and influence and efficiency in church work. All these years, his life had been growing into your lives and the life of the community. He passed through your times of financial crisis and business and depression when they who needed him most knew him best. A pastorate of such length gave him opportunity to receive into church fellowship the children whom he had baptized and whose parents he had married. This was a prosperous period of our church life, which was due to his constructive genius.

"His public spirit and large capacity for community affairs brought him prominently into the counsels of the community. To his creative touch and executive mind, Bethel owes much of her public school system. As a religious teacher and leader he possessed those strong masculine qualities and virtues that so effectively appeal to men, whose unbounded confidence and respect he successfully maintained at all times. He despised sham and ostentation, yet was patient with the slow. I tried to characterize him as a man among men when you unveiled the tablet at my right to the Glory of God in the memory of the beloved pastor of this church for twenty-two years and until his death. Taken in all, he was a splendid embodiment of the best in Congregational tradition and in him the Congregational was made beautiful.

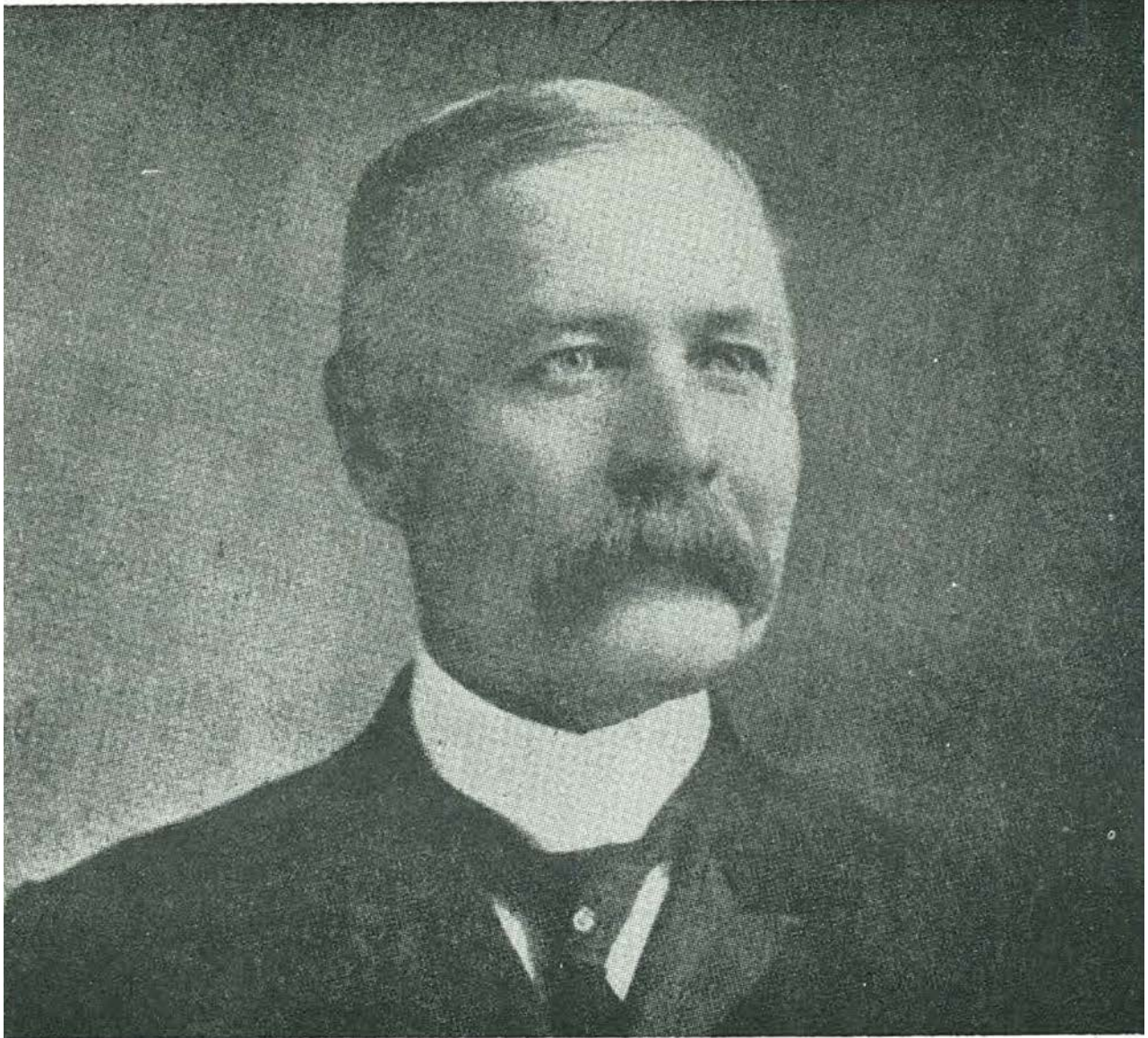
"When attractive offers came from other fields of service, he found that the tissues of his life were knit up with those of yours; so busy had he been with your affairs, that he could not sever them. A friendship had grown up between you like that of Jonathan and David, who were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in death

were not divided. And when he chose to sleep among those with whom he had worked, you gathered unto yourselves a benediction under whose hallowed blessing may you ever dwell."

Under the guidance of this beloved pastor, the Bethel Church enjoyed a spiritual prosperity which has not been equalled in its entire history. The pastor was the shepherd of_ the flock, and his keen eye was ever on the watch for the weak and heavy laden; there he would be to give them strength or to lighten their load. Many people today could testify that only his kindly helpfulness had pulled their family through a crisis of one sort or another. In addition to his duties of pastor, he served for many years as chairman of the Bethel School Board, with credit to himself and the community. During his pastorate there was an evangelistic mission conducted in which many souls were brought into the fold and the church membership increased thereby. There are a number who came into the church as the result of these evangelistic services conducted by Miss May B. Lord.

In 1880 the National Council of Congregational Churches had recommended the modification of our statement of doctrine, and in 1887 a new church manual was published, setting forth a revision of the rules of the church. This revision separated the statement of doctrine from the confession of faith in form for the reception of members. This was in harmony with trends which laid less stress on theological doctrine as a test of fellowship and more on the right kind of living. There is a story to the effect that one member of the church at this period related to the pastor that her parents could not conscientiously accept the old doctrine of the perseverance of saints and therefore were not admitted to membership in the church. The deacons tried in vain but could not make them see the light, to wit: that the really elect could not permanently fall from grace but would be ultimately saved according to the councils of God. In discarding this doctrine the church had to recognize that the true essence of religion is the will to do right and not in the acceptance of some man-made dogmas.

In 1885 the church increased the number of deacons from four to six, and at the annual meeting, William Beard and Frederick E. Benedict were elected deacons. Alonzo Knox was elected to this office in 1890, and Stuart Kyle in 1907. During this era, four deacons passed on: Deacon Charles H. Hawley, Deacon Oliver Stone, Deacon Andrew L. Benedict and Deacon W. W. Sherman. Also during this period the church lost such men as Andrew C. Hickok, who was known as a father to the pastors of this church; Amos Woodman, who gave years to the running of the Plum trees Sunday School;



Rev. Henry L. Slack, beloved pastor of this church for twenty-two years and until his death, 1883-1905.

Henry H. Baird, known as a friend to the poor; and public spirited men and women such as Arthur Andrew Hickok, Martha Evans, Annie May Kyle, and Mary A. Woodman.

In September 1890 it was voted to incorporate the church under the provisions of chapter 53, section 1 of the Public Acts of 1889, of the state of Connecticut. The corporate name of "The First Congregational Church of Bethel" was adopted and a committee consisting of William Beard; Henry H. Baird, and George G. Durant was appointed to act for the "First Ecclesiastical Society of Bethel," and the society conveyed to the church all its property interest. This ended the double form of church government which sometimes had caused dissension.

During 1902 the church was redecorated and a heating plant installed. In 1908 the church was left its first bequest under the will of Alzar A. Judd, of five hundred dollars. Soon after, the much larger sum of ten thousand dollars was left by Smith S. Dunning, the interest of which still goes toward the support of the church.

In 1910, it was planned to raise funds for a parish building, and in April of that year, Mrs. Henry H. Baird presented the church with the ground for the building. The cornerstone was laid in July, 1912 and in 1919 it was sold to I. F. Terry for a Community House. Later it was sold to the Masonic Fraternity and is now being used by them as their home. It proved to be too expensive for the church to operate, and later the community found also that it could not operate the building successfully. So, a project which was started on its way with much enthusiasm and was supported by such men as Deacon Samuel Kyle, Church School Supt. Joel R. Taylor and First Trustee John H. Cords, was abandoned after several years trial under the supervision and guidance of the Rev. Mr. Steele, Mrs. James Kyle and Mr. William P. Bailey.

Installation of electric lights and repairs to the church were inaugurated in 1914 under the supervision of a committee headed by Howard H. Woodman and assisted by John H. Baird, Frederick E. Benedict, Theodore H. Smith and J. D. VanOlinda. Also in 1914 one of the church's most able and active pastors submitted his resignation, which was accepted with regret. The Ecclesiastical Council in dissolving the relationship said of Rev. Mr. Steele: "We regard Mr. Steele as a scholar who has maintained the best traditions of community life and active in every good work; as a preacher of the Word who has wisely administered unto his people and strongly led them in larger service, especially inspiring them to build a new and well equipped church house, which ministers effectively to the boys and young men of the parish." On November

1, 1914 the church extended a call to the Rev. William F. Tyler, of Morrisville, New York, who accepted.

CHAPTER 9

World War I And The Early 20's

Our church was founded during the stormy years of the Revolutionary War. We had trying times during the years of the Civil War. During the period of World War I it almost passed out of existence.

In December 1917 the Rev. William F. Tyler asked for, and received, a leave of absence to enter Y.M.C.A. work at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, which was the induction center for the young men going into the service from this area. The church was without a pastor until July 1918 when Mr. Tyler submitted his resignation, which was accepted.

At about this time we received an invitation to join with the St. Thomas Episcopal Church of Bethel. After some discussion it was decided that such a union was not feasible and the matter was dropped. This move might well have been the end of the First Church of Bethel. Ministers were hard to get, many of them having gone into the armed services as Chaplains, but the church was fortunate to secure the services of the Rev. Eric Allen for one year.

Among the young men who went into the military service from this church were the following: Samuel S. Ambler, James L. Britto, Marshall Huse, Victor Mackenzie, Garfield Morrison, Royal E. Tomlinson and Albert J. Magnus in the Army. Leonard L. Bailey, Robert P. Brodie, John P. Slack and Leland D. Wheeler served in the Navy. R. Scott Ohlweiler served in the United States Marines.

Fortunately, the war did not last long. In March, 1920, a call was extended to Warren Wheeler Pickett, a veteran of the war and a student of Yale Divinity School. He was ordained and installed in June of the same year. Under his young and vigorous leadership the church started to pick up both spiritually and financially. It was a blow to the people of the church when he found it necessary to resign to enter larger fields. Mr. Pickett resigned in late 1921, and in January, 1922, the Rev. Frederick W. Walsh of North Reading, Massachusetts, was called.

Mr. Walsh was installed as pastor on May 25, 1923. The financial affairs of the church were not in very good shape at this time, and the church property was sadly in need of repairs. The work of raising the necessary funds was started in May 1924, and the task of repairing and redecorating the church was completed under the supervision of the trustees, Messrs. Lewis E. Goodsell, Stuart H.

Kyle and Jerome L. Allen, at a cost of \$3,411.35.

Less than two years later on March 17, 1926 the interior of the church was destroyed by fire, water and smoke. The reason for the fire was never ascertained, but the local fire department was successful in saving the main portion of the building. The pulpit, the choir loft and the organ were entirely destroyed, but the Communion Table, which stood in the direct path of the flames, was left intact. This table is the same that we are using for Communion services today.

There was a move started at this time to secure a new site for the church, but at a meeting of the church held on April 9, 1926, it was voted to retain and repair the present building. A repair committee was named, consisting of Lewis E. Goodsell, Miss Anna L. Smith, Deacon William H. Hickok, Deacon Haro'd B. Senior, Deacon Stuart H. Kyle, Rev. F. W. Walsh, Mrs. D. Floyd Wood, Jacob Luthy and James Osborne. During the period of the church repairs services were held in the old town hall and St. Thomas' parish house. Services of rededication were held on January 2, 1927. A new organ had been installed, thanks to the gifts of M. J. McPherson, Miss Belle Foster, George H. Hickok and the bequests of Cornelia and Sidney Smith.

After eight years of faithful service, Rev. Mr. Walsh resigned in November 1930 to accept a church in Groton, Connecticut. During Mr. Walsh's pastorate, the church had twice undergone repairs, and many new members had been brought into the church.

CHAPTER 10

Ministry Of The Reverend Frank Tishkins

Something must have impressed itself very forcibly on the church people at this time; that was that this good old Yankee Church needed new blood. Again without a spiritual leader, they needed someone who would give new stimulus, new-enthusiasm, new courage to an institution which had guided its people so well and faithfully down through the years. They went out to seek that new blood, and found it. A pulpit supply committee, divided into groups, went out over the countryside, visiting other churches Sunday after Sunday, looking for a new pastor. The old way had been to have candidates come to the church as a supply. This time the committee went out and sought the man. They found him.

A young Lithuanian immigrant, veteran of World War I and a student of Yale Divinity School, was found preaching in a small church in this county. Frank Tishkins accepted the call and began his duties in February, 1931. He was ordained and installed in April of the same year. The "new blood" began to tell. More repairs to the church, the vestry renovated and painted, the parsonage repaired and painted, a memorial entrance to the vestry built, a chapel for small services built into the church, notes paid off, new members brought in, preaching missions inaugurated, cottage meetings held, and still the Rev. Tishkins had time to serve a term as Chaplain of the Connecticut House of Representatives, time in which to get married and time to take a trip to Europe to see his people. All during this period he had the continuous support of his trustees and the Board of Deacons.

The first official ushers chosen from the young men of the church were elected in 1933 by a church meeting. They were Richard Benson, Albert Kirk, Fred Kropp, Stanley Edmond, Willard Noxon, Harrison Hoyt, Theodore Mathews and Richard Staib.

In 1935, Pastor Tishkins reported that over two thousand persons attended various meetings during the 175th Anniversary celebration and that the celebration showed a net profit of \$256.53. When the Hattie M. Patchen Fund was launched in 1938, Mr. Tishkins said: "Its growth depends upon the faith, initiative and stewardship of its six trustees." The fund grew to over six thousand dollars by 1959 which was enough to pay the architect's fees on the new parish house.



Rev. Frank and Mrs. Tishkins. Mr. Tishkins served one of the longer pastorates. Mrs. Tishkins is now serving as a missionary in India.

It seems that this history is not complete without another world war having its effect upon the church. Our men were sent all over the world to fight the axis powers, nations led by men with the lust for power, bloodthirsty men who had no use for church or for religion. Seventy-six of our young men and women went from this church to serve in the armed forces of the more than six hundred who went from this community. As each one left to don the uniform of the Army, Navy or Marine Corps, our pastor was there to bid him goodbye, and into each one's hand he put a small Bible or prayer book. He asked God's blessing for each and every one of these young men and women who were indeed Christian soldiers going forth to battle for the four freedoms; the freedoms which we had enjoyed over all the period during which this church had been in existence and which our enemies would destroy, freedoms which we and our allies would preserve for our children and our children's children; the freedoms which were our heritage, handed down to us by the forefathers who built this church and others like it all over this country-freedom of speech, which found its birthplace in the old meeting house days; freedom of Religion, that men might worship as they desire, and freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These are the freedoms for which our young men fought.

With the return of our young men after their military' victory over the Axis powers, the church carried on. Two of our boys did not return; two Gold Stars on our service flag explain their absence. Others found their way to other communities, but many returned home. These men who only a short time before sat in our Church School, later, after experiencing the horrors of war, sat in the Church pews. They took their places in the community, life. They fought for peace and hoped to have it, but by the same token they would not be denied the rich heritage which has been handed down to them by their forefathers: The right to run their own lives; the right to worship God in their 'own manner. Willing to work and produce in a land which has been richly endowed by nature, they would not fear want; willing to divide their bounty, even with their recent enemies.

The names mentioned in this history are the names of people noted for seeking to serve God and their fellow men, not seeking power for themselves.

A list of the men and women who went out from this church to serve their country in World War II follows:

Robert Abbott

Aurel J. Haitsch, Jr.

Robert J. Schnabel

Jerome L. Allen, Jr.

*Raymond W. Hansen

William A. Schnabel

DeAlton S. Ambler
W. Valen Bard
Gilbert A. Benson
James Bourne
John H. Bourne
Edwin L. Brundage
Raymond A.
 Brundage
Earle F. Canfield
George Cher
Michael Cher
Stephen Cher
Allan R. Collier
William R. Collier
Grace Comstock
William L. Cornell
Stanley C. Edmond
Harold A. Elwood
Nathan A. Elwood
Kenneth H. Goodsell
Lewis E. Goodsell, Jr.
Nelson A. Goodsell
Allan A. Griswold
Walter D. Hager

Arthur Hall Harris
John B. Hawley
William Hawks
William Hodson
Edward J. Hoyt
John R. Hoyt
Donald H. Hurd
William R. Judd
Carl H. Kropp
Edward T. Kyle
Frank L. Larson
John R. Main
Joseph Mato
Theodore R. Mathews
Clinton B. Maynard
Harry Maynard
Ernest E. Miller
William Miller
Clarence Naramore
Horace J. Post
Donald B. Reed
David H. Robinson
Francis S. Schnabel
John P. Schnabel

Arlene Senior
George Shawah
John M. Shawah
Albert G. Staib
Clinton J. Staib
Daniel Staib
Edward Staib
Richard Staib
Ernest B. Talbert
Earl Taylor
John F. Taylor
Richard R. Taylor
Ronald A. Taylor, Jr.
Ronald A. Taylor, Sr.
Robert S. Tibbetts
William Toth
Evelyn A. Titus
Harold B. Titus
Robert A. Van Horne
Donald A. Weis
Harry R. White
Herbert D. Williams
John N. Williams

*Died in Military Service

CHAPTER 11

Contemporary Years

After one of the longer pastorates in the church's history, the Rev. Frank Tishkins resigned March 23, 1946, and a Council of Dismissal was convened April 12, 1946. Mr. Tishkins had enjoyed a long and successful pastorate. He was a man of strong character and worked hard to build up the Bethel Church. His many friends in Bethel were sorry to learn of his untimely death March 26, 1954. His widow, Eleanor Tishkins, is doing missionary work in India, and our church takes a personal interest in her work in the Near East.

The Rev. Robert P. Bell was called July 16, 1946 and began his duties September 8, 1946. After serving two years he resigned November 2, 1948. He was followed by the Rev. Clarence A. Wagner, who served even a shorter pastorate--from February, 1949 to July, 1950. During this period a new constitution and by-laws for the church were set up and adopted in February, 1949--it was amended in February, 1950 and again in January, 1955. Principally changes were made in definitions of duties and change in terms of offices--no basic changes were made which would cause any great upheaval.

There were some new offices created, the most important of which was the office of Deacon Emeritus in 1950 when Deacons William H. Hickok and George H. Hinman were elected to this office. Deacon John F. Hall was elected Deacon Emeritus in 1956 and Anna D. Kyle, Deaconess Emeritus the same year. The office of Church Historian was established February 16, 1949, and the writer of this history has filled the office since that date.

During the pastorate of Rev. Clarence Wagner there was an influx of new members probably larger than during any other period in recent years. However, Mr. Wagner wrote in his resignation that there was a "divisive influence for the past three years creating an undercurrent of disharmony." He noted that this had caused the resignation of three pastors in four years.

The Rev. Russell Milnes was called in October, 1950. He had been an Army Chaplain and active in the Masonic Grand Lodge of Connecticut. During his pastorate the "divisive influence" disappears almost entirely. It could not be otherwise, else we could not have undertaken and carried through the building of a new parish house to a successful conclusion. His quiet faith and gentle

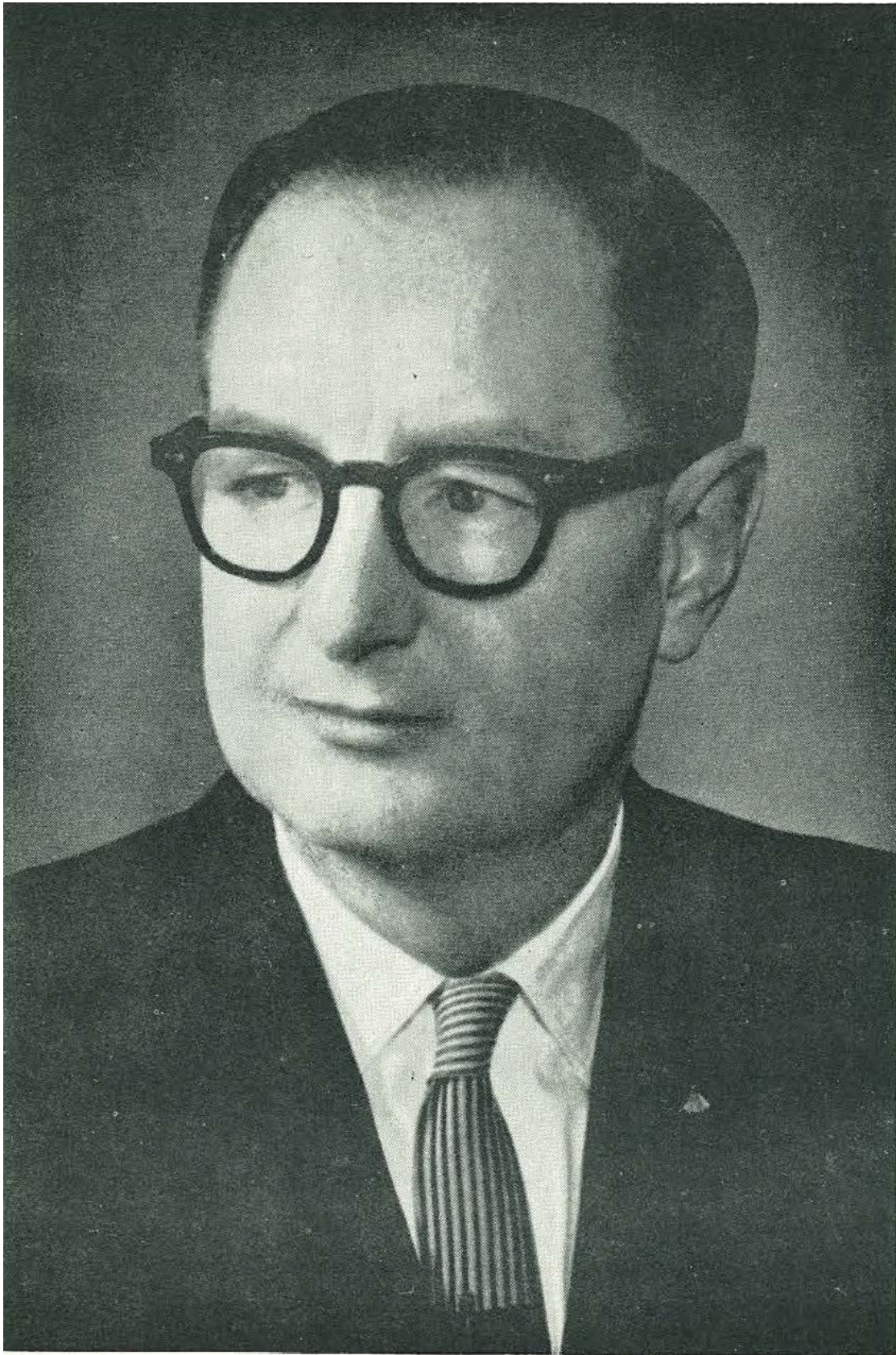
manner endear him to his parish. His leadership in Christian service is unflinching.

During Mr. Milnes' pastorate a Scholarship Fund has been established for the assistance of young people who desire to enter Christian service. This Fund was established in January, 1957 and continues to grow under the enthusiastic sponsorship of the Scholarship Club. The first Trustees of this fund were: Mrs. Arthur Middlebrook, Richard Benson, Allan Trott, Mrs. Sybil Oehrig and J. Harry White.

During the year of 1950, the church received an anonymous donation of \$2,500 for painting and re-decorating the interior of the church. However, the news of such a generous donation was bound to become known, and since then Mrs. Ethel Stucklen French has made it known that this donation was made in memory of her brother and his wife, Frederick and Ella Stucklen, who attended this church for many years.

In the summer of 1955, the town of Bethel celebrated the 100th Anniversary of its founding as a town. A celebration of a week's duration was planned a year in advance by a large committee composed of representatives from every organization in Bethel. Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., our Church Historian, was chosen as general chairman; James Rumbarger, also of this church, was one of the vice-chairmen. The symbol of the celebration was the old "wood cut" reproduction of the original meeting house built in 1760. In all, there were twenty-two committees for the big event. Frederick H. Judd, former first selectman and long-time member and former clerk of the church, was honorary chairman of the celebration. Deacon George H. Hinman was the Centennial King and Audrey Delaney was the Princess.

Many members of our church played an influential role in the Centennial program. The celebration opened with a church service in our church, when many of the church members attended in the costumes of one hundred years ago. Our pastor adorned with sideburns and frock coat, preached the Centennial sermon. Among the activities of the celebration was an outdoor pageant, the script for which was written by a member of this church, Mr. Emmett Crozier; many of our church people took part in the first scenes depicting the founding of this church. The early history of the town was actually a history of our church parish and was incorporated as such in the history published in the Centennial Book. In the Centennial parade, witnessed by thousands in spite of the bad weather, our church tied for first prize for the best historical float. At the Mardi Gras, where there was plenty of fun and frolic, and



Rev. Russell H. Milnes, Pastor Emeritus

prizes for the best costumes, among the winners were B. Curtis Taylor for the most original and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Goodsell, Jr., with children Susan and John for the most original group costumes. Many townsmen grew beards for the occasion, among them Richard Whittlesey from this church. Miss Mabel Ritzman was chairman of the genealogy committee, which published many write-ups on the old families in town. Several members from this church were on the landmark committee, posting all the old houses in the town. Mrs. Edward Stephany was co-chairman of the antique show, which brought many out-of-town visitors. Rev. Mr. Milnes was a member of the musical concert committee. A complete collection of news-clippings of the Centennial has been saved and put in a scrapbook by Deaconess Laura Goodsell for the public library.

Looking back over the recent years, we find again names of people who have passed on, to whom this church is indebted for loyal and unselfish service. None served so well as Deacon William H. Hickok, a direct descendent of Captain Ebenezer Hickok, one of the founders and first deacons of the church. Will Hickok not only served as deacon for many years, but as clerk of the church for one period and as treasurer in his later years. He will long be remembered as a loyal and devoted member. Deacon Harold Benedict Senior, a direct descendant of Captain John Benedict, another church founder, served as first trustee and deacon for many years, and many times it was his financial help which kept the church out of monetary embarrassment. Among the ladies, mention should be made of Deaconesses Anna Kyle, Mary Crofut, Mary Ohlweiler, and Rebekah Kyle.

Mention should also be made of the transition from times when the "old families" pretty much had the say in the running of the church to the present time when new people are arriving in town almost daily ; from the times when someone like Deacon Senior would make up the church deficits to the present time when each church member shoulders his share of the financial burdens of the church; from the times when young people had the alternative of either working in a hat shop, the area's only industry, or leaving town for some distant place, to the present time when we have many opportunities in all sorts of industrial and commercial enterprises.

This transitional period occurs between the pastorates of the Rev. Mr. Tishkins and present pastor, Russell Milnes. It has been noted that during the Rev. Mr. Walsh's pastorate few men were available at the church meetings. It is not uncommon today to have the men outnumber the women at a Church Cabinet

meeting.

The church is truly more Congregational today than during the days when, shall we say, the founding families held sway over the church affairs. No disrespect is meant in stating it so. The "founding families" have given us a rich heritage, as will the newcomers in our midst realize and appreciate after reading this history.

"The Bell Tolls," a monthly paper, was published for the first time in July, 1955. The picture of the tower with bell tolling, which identifies the paper, was drawn by Mrs. Vesta Milnes, wife of Pastor Milnes. The paper is mailed to each member of the church. The mailing has been under the direction of Allan Trott and presently by Miss Lucy Patee. The news has been gathered by Mrs. Trott; editorials by the first editor, Deacon Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., and the Pastor's corner by the minister. George Sherwood assumed the duties of the editor with the February, 1960 issue.



A group in costume for Bethel's Centennial service at the church in 1955. Left to right: Deacon Emeritus George H. Hinman; Mrs. Sarah Bailey Huse, one of oldest church members and daughter of Deacon Charles Bailey of Civil War days; Mrs. Lewis E. Goodsell, daughter of Deacon Hinman, and Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., General Chairman of the Centennial.

THE NEW PARISH HOUSE

At the annual meeting of the church in 1955 a resolution was proposed by First Trustee Emmett Crozier which would establish a committee to develop plans for a Parish House. The resolution was as follows:

"Whereas; Additional space and modern facilities are urgently needed for our church school for social activities and church work, meetings and recreation, especially for the young people of the congregation, and

"Whereas; This need was recognized 18 years ago in the creation of the Hattie M. Patchen Fund for the purpose of erecting a new educational building, church auditorium, parish house or any other building which may forward the interest of the church, and

"Whereas; The development of such a project requires a definite program, thoughtful planning and the cooperation of all elements in our church, now therefore be it resolved that the trustees be directed to form a project committee of not less than 12 nor more than 15 persons to study the problems involved in planning, financing and building such Church House, Parish House, or Annex."

There was a favorable vote on the resolution and the committee was requested to report by March 16, 1955. The committee did not report until the next annual meeting on January 16, 1956 when it was stated that the committee had been "stymied" because of inability to secure a site for locating the new building. The Church School had now been using the facilities of the V.F.W. building for some time, in addition to those provided by the church.

During September, 1956 a committee headed by Samuel S. Ambler was appointed to contact Theodore Beard, owner of the old brick house next to the church, to find out if it could be acquired. The church already owned the property on the other side of the brick house which had been purchased in June, 1935 from Mrs. Emiline Horton, using the bequest of Miss Florence Shepard for this purpose and giving Mrs. Horton life use of the property. It was supposed to have been, in part at least, one of the original sabbath houses built soon after the original church. When she passed away in 1938, the Horton homestead was razed and the property graded. Mr. Ambler's committee was successful in securing the Beard property which together with the Horton property would now make it possible to build the new church house.

At the annual meeting of the church, January 23, 1957 it was voted to accept with thanks the property given by Theodore Beard in memory of his grandparents, William and Emily Edward Beard. At this meeting a building committee was appointed with authority to spend up to \$1,000 for preliminary work on the project. The committee appointed was Raymond C. Rubley, chairman; Fred Gordon, Edward Stephany, John F. Hall, Mrs. Lydia Osborne, Mrs. Merlin Spiegelhalter, and Mrs. Edith Cushnie. At the same meeting the Church Cabinet was authorized to reorganize the Finance Committee for the project with Mario Tornillo and Charles Joyce acting as joint chairmen. When this committee reported to a special church meeting, June 17, 1958, it was recommended that the church employ the same concern used by the Newtown Congregational Church to raise the necessary funds. It was voted to authorize the trustees to enter into a contract with a fund raising agency. From here on plans began to take shape rapidly.

On June 23, 1958, the Building Committee reported to a special meeting in regard to the use of steel beams, and on June 28 it was voted to accept the architect's plans as submitted. At the annual meeting January 23, 1959, Mario Tornillo, co-chairman of the Finance Committee, presented a time-table for the starting of the work, the old Beard building to be demolished by March 1, 1959 and the new construction to be started April 1, 1959, explaining that satisfactory financing had been arranged for the construction of a \$60,000 building. The trustees were authorized to borrow in anticipation of pledge payments and if necessary arrange for a mortgage. On January 20, 1960, at the annual church meeting, the Building Committee reported the building complete except a small amount of interior painting, and that the building cost to date was \$59,991.46. The committee was discharged with thanks.

Due to the untiring efforts of Deacon Rubley and his committee with a lot of help from Harold Elwood, clerk of the church this building was completed in time for the Bi-Centennial celebration of this church. Because of the careful planning, the cost was kept within the amount authorized for the building, It was a job well done from beginning to end. About fifty-six thousand dollars had been pledged for the project up to the time of its completion; so another committee was set up to complete raising the rest of the money needed and to collect all money pledged for the project. This committee is composed of Deacon Peter Cushnie chairman; D. Gibbert Allen, Mrs. Ralph Johnson, E. Richard Benson, Charles

Joyce, D. Armand Menegay, Eugene Reed, William A. Schnabel, Jr., and Allan Trott.

One of the greatest savings made on the church house project was on the painting of the interior which was done by volunteers. A total of 568½ hours time was donated by men of the church. A total of four hundred hours was put in by four men: Raymond C. Rubley, Harold Elwood, Ralph Johnson, and Frederic C. Warner.

It should also be made part of the record that the laying of the cornerstone of the building was done with impressive ceremonies by the members of the Masonic order, Eureka Lodge #83 A.F.& A.M. and that a copy of the plans, the building costs and" the names of the church officers was sealed therein.

At the annual church meeting in January, 1960 a vote of thanks was given to J. Harry White, Eugene Reed, Frederick Bellesheim, Mrs. Anna D. Rockwell and Mrs. Ethel Haitsch for their many years of wonderful service to the church.

A Bi-Centennial Committee having been appointed at the annual meeting of the church in 1955, plans for this celebration are going forward with the following in charge: Deacon Frederic C. Warner, Deacon Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Harry Drucker, Mr. and Mrs. B. Curtis Taylor, Mrs. Joseph Hodgson, Mrs. Averice La Valla and Mrs. Allan Trott.

This brings to date the history of "A Yankee Church." Its members have been brought closer together in the Christian life during these years and will continue to carry on the traditions of those who have passed on, perhaps not with the stern disciplining of former years but with a more sympathetic understanding of the frailties of the human life, not softened by the easy years but rather mellowed by age and accumulated knowledge. Education, nurtured by the early church and fostered by the succeeding generations, has brought us many things to make life easier, but it has brought nothing that can take the place of Christian fellowship. It has brought no substitute for the teachings of Jesus but rather has given us a better understanding of His teachings.

The annals of the church would not be complete, however, without a record of the various organizations which have played and continue to play such a vital role in church progress. The following chapters, therefore, deal with the work of these groups of dedicated Christians.

CONTEMPORARY YEARS SUPPLEMENT, 1976

Two hundred years of our church history was incorporated in the "History Of A YANKEE CHURCH" from its first meeting in 1759 up to its bicentennial celebration in 1960. This supplement will deal with its happenings from 1960 to 1976. This is a period when its longest pastorate is completed by the Reverend Russell H. Milnes who retired from active ministry early in 1974. It is also the beginning of a new pastorate by the Reverend Michael S. Strah. It is appropriate that this supplement be completed in time for the country's bicentennial year in 1976.

Next to the celebration of the church's bicentennial in 1960 the change of pastors has probably been the most important happening during the past fifteen years. The Rev. Russell H. Milnes, whose picture may be found on page 49, completed a pastorate of 23 years. The longest of any pastorate to date. He resigned with the expectation of retiring to a new home which he and Mrs. Milnes bought and remodeled in Canaan, Connecticut, a community where he had served ten years as pastor previous to his coming to Bethel.

When the Rev. Mr. Milnes came to Bethel, we had a town population of about five thousand people, which has now grown to approximately fourteen thousand. When he assumed the leadership of our church, he recalled that there was some division in the church. He was the fourth pastor called in five years. He held the church together for twenty-three years and his influence extended to community affairs. He was Chaplain of the Bethel Volunteer Fire Department. He was also active in Masonic affairs having served as Chaplain of Eureka Lodge A.F. & A.M. He also became Grand Master of Masons in Connecticut.

During his ministry here, a new parish house was built adjacent to the church structure. An account of the building of this parish house is given the "History" in full detail. Since then, it should be recorded that the building was paid for in full during the term of First Trustee Eugene B. Reed.

Vesta Milnes, pastor Milnes' wife was active in church affairs during his pastorate. She conducted art classes in the church vestry for several years. Some of her own paintings were sold at our church fairs and were a source of considerable income to the church.

Our church will miss this quiet couple who worked among us for so many years. We wish them happiness in their retirement.



Rev. Michael S. Strah

1974--

54-B

Reverend Michael Strah, coming to us from the Second Congregational Church of Winchester, Massachusetts, started his ministry with us in February, 1974. Having been our pastor for over 2 years at this writing, it is apparent that his youthful vigor is beginning to show results. Born in Oskaloosa, Iowa, he graduated from Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. in 1962, and Chicago Theological Seminary in 1966. From 1966 to 1969 he served as associate minister of the Colonial Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, after which he moved to Boston, Mass., and entered the doctoral program in social ethics at Boston University of Theology. He was ordained in 1966 in the United Church of Christ.

The Church Bicentennial, marking 200. years of service by the congregation in this community, was a month long starting with the first Sunday of July 1960, with a regular morning service and Communion, the Rev. Mr. Milnes officiating. Guest speakers at Sunday morning services during the month included the Rev. Frank Johnson, Mrs. Frank Tishkins, Dr. James F. English and Doctor Davie Napier.

The Bicentennial banquet took place July 7th, at the Hawley Manor in Newtown. The guest speaker was Dr. Julius Hawley Bizler, President of Colby College in Maine and a direct descendent of the Seelye family which has figured so prominently in the history of this church.

Dr. Bizler, during his address, quoted Dr. Laurens P. Hickok, a son of this church and an eminent thinker and writer of the 19th century. It was Doctor Hickok who delivered a historical discourse on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his native Bethel Congregational Church in 1860. He quoted Dr. Hickok as saying "that he understood the need for adopting nature's products to man's use, but believed that a parallel appreciation and love for nature was essential."

A list of descendents of the original founders of the church present at the banquet included Miss Mirian Benedict, Howard Judd, Mrs. Bertha Sturdevant, Mrs. Harrison Hoyt, Miss Margaret Hoyt, Mrs. Euen McFarlane, Peter McFarlane and Dr. Bixler.

Mr. Judd was presented with a copy of the "History of a Yankee Church", having been a member of the church for 66 years, the longest of anyone attending the banquet. '

A tea honoring the elder members of the church took place on July 17, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Eleanor Tishkins, missionary and widow of a previous pastor, Frank Tishkins, was the guest of honor.

The Bicentennial was a successful affair and much credit was given the committee arranging the celebration. The members of this committee were, Frederic C. Warner, chairman, Mr. and Mrs. B. Curtis Taylor, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Drucker, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kirk, John E. Buttekofer, Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., and Mrs. Allan Trott.

1776 SERVICE DETAILED

The Congregational Church Sunday morning celebrated their service in a special way for the Fourth of July -- as if it were 200 years ago, by recreating a colonial service of worship.

Parishioners were urged to attend the service in appropriate colonial costume, and pastor Rev. Michael Strah was also dressed in 200-years-ago style.

The Rev. Strah preached a sermon from November 16, 1775, and instead of an organ during the service, a string quartet accompanied the singing of psalms.

The following commentary on the service was prepared by the Congregational Church and traces each step of the ceremony.

The First Congregational Church welcomes all members and friends this colonial service of worship which celebrates the 200th birthday of our nation and our Congregational heritage.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

Drumming to Worship

Since the original meeting house had neither bell nor belfrey, a drummer, who stood at the meeting house door, summoned the congregation to worship.

Seating was segregated with married couples and families sitting together at the front of the meeting house, the single women behind them, and single men at the rear. We will follow this pattern today.

The Solemn Procession

The tithingmen opened and closed the service and maintained discipline if any was needed. They were to "carefully inspect the behavior of all persons on the Sabbath day, noting any inattention during the service."

The Opening Prayer

"Free prayers" and not "Stinted forms" were the preferred form of worship. This was a protest against the Anglican tradition with which the Congregationalists had broken.

Those ministers who felt most strongly about this issue would not even allow the Lord's Prayer to be said. The opening prayers ranged from fifteen minutes to an hour in length. The congregation stood for prayer.

The Sermon

"The Duty of Rejoicing Under Calamities and Afflictions."

Sermons of the time were closely knit theological discussions. Worshippers reportedly felt cheated if the minister did not have to turn the hour glass at least once during his sermon.

Two-hour sermons were quite frequent.

If the sermon lasted three or four hours, a noon day break was called in the middle of it. Some ministers shortened their sermons during the winter months as the churches were usually unheated and foot warmers gave out after the first hour.

During the long sermon, the people were not passive. Any person could say "Amen" to the portions of the sermon that he or she wished to emphasize. You are invited to do the same today.

The sermon we are hearing this morning was originally preached by the Reverend Ebenezer Baldwin, minister of the First Congregational Church in Danbury, on November 16, 1775, "a day set apart for thanksgiving in the colony of Connecticut."

Mr. Baldwin preached this sermon during a period which he regarded as "the most calamitous the British colonies ever beheld" in the hope that it would awaken the spirits of the people to the importance of the struggle in which they were engaged.

The original text of the sermon was 42 pages long, but it has been considerably shortened for this morning's presentation.

At the end of the sermon, the minister is required to sit down and the men of the congregation have the right to ask questions about what he has said, disagree with him, or add their own words of instruction.

CENSURING followed the sermon. At this point in the service the Senior Deacon chastises those who have gone astray; but those chastised have an opportunity of response to defend or humble themselves.

The Bringing of the Contributions

One of the deacons usually doubled as the treasurer and, at this point in the service, would urge assembled people to contribute heartily. Then, one by one, in order of dignity and standing, all the men who were heads of households would come forward .

The Blessing

The congregation stood as the minister gave the final blessing and exited. No one else moved until the tithingman rapped the end of the service. We will follow the custom used at that time, of the men exiting first (to protect women and children from any dangerous animals or Indians lurking nearby). We will not, however, follow the custom of some ministers in colonial times who led the men to the local inn to share a tankard of ale after the service!

The members of this morning's string quartet are: First violin – Mervin Whitcomb; Second violin - Edmond Finaldi; Viola - Hillary Triquax; Cello - Francis Ryerson.

CHAPTER 12

The Choir

The service of praise in church worship has been maintained from the earlier years of our history. As has been related, we have found that the first church choir was organized under the leadership of one Daniel Taylor, when they "chanted to the sound of the viol" as played by Appolos Benedict. According to the church records it was voted in 1798, after considerable discussion and opposition, to admit instruments of music into the choir. Specific selections were made of "the bassoon, clarinet, and flute." Again in 1801 there was a similar vote, but for a long time the use of instruments met with great disfavor from many of the church people. It must have been about this time that under the leadership of Ransome Seeley the singers "invested to themselves instruments like David's." Hiram Benjamin played upon the bass viol, Deacon Matthew Starr upon the flute, and Edward Stapleton upon the clarinet, and they did "make a joyful noise to the God of Jacob."

Then followed the choristers of the time of Henry Squires. Mrs. George H. Hickok, we are told, served as organist or chorister, or in both capacities at times for many years. Miss Anna Laura Smith was organist and choir leader for a long period. Later Miss Clara Versoy directed the choir. Mrs. Hollis Elzea and Mrs. Mabel Osborne played the organ. More recently we had Yale students as "Ministers of Music." Including John S. Bond, Jr., Miss Jean Knowlton, Isabel Ibach, and Rev. David Napier, who married Joy White, a daughter of the church, was one of these. Mr. Napier is now Professor of Old Testament at Yale Divinity School.

Dr. Mervin Whitcomb became Minister of Music in 1950 and maintains both a senior and junior choir. We are fortunate to have Dr. Whitcomb still with us. He is a professor of music and chairman of the music department in the State Teachers College in Danbury.

A small reed organ was introduced about the year 1855 and, although regarded by some at the time as a bold innovation, came to maintain its place. The first pipe organ, destroyed in the fire of 1926, was built by Johnson & Sons of Westfield, Massachusetts, and installed in the church in the year of 1881. Our present organ was built by the Estey Organ Co., of Brattleboro, Vermont, and was installed in the fall and winter of 1926, made possible by the bequests in the wills of Cornelia and Sidney Smith and the gifts of J. McPherson. Miss A. Belle Foster and George H. Hickok.

The Choir - 1976

Dr. Mervin Whitcomb this year completes a quarter of a century as our Minister of Music. We have been most fortunate to have this accomplished musician as our choir director and organist.

CHAPTER 13

The Church School

As has been said, in the summer of 1818, the first Sabbath School was organized by the Rev. Burr Baldwin. The next summer Deacon Seth Seeley gathered a school of about fifty members and provided for it a small library. This library was carefully nurtured by the Rev. Henry L. Slack during his entire pastorate and grew to over one thousand volumes. It was not discontinued until the opening of the Bethel Free Public Library.

The school increased in numbers and in spiritual strength under the leadership of the following superintendents: Deacon Seth Seeley, Deacon Elizur Benedict, Frederick Seeley, Andrew G. Hickok, Ezekiel Drew, Charles Dart, Deacon George A. Hickok, David T. Hubbell, Augustus A. Fisher, Frank W. Smith, Deacon William A. Judd, Deacon Andrew L. Benedict, and Deacon Charles Bailey who served faithfully for more than twenty-five years.

Deacon Bailey was followed by Alexander W. Twiss, who was forced to resign because of failing health; George E. Starr, who served for a period of eight years; Major Thomas, Howard Woodman, Deacon Arthur Fairchild who, encouraged and inspired by his pastor the Rev. Henry L. Slack (assisted by the very able Mattie Evans as superintendent of the Junior Department, and Miss Hattie M. Patchen as assistant superintendent) served as superintendent for two different periods.

Miss Hattie M. Patchen attended our school for more than fifty years, and fully half of these years, she served as assistant superintendent.

Mr. George Starr again served as superintendent, followed by Deacon Joel Taylor, who in turn was followed by Deacon Fairchild for his second period.

At the annual meeting of the church in 1920, two definite steps were taken with regard to the Church School. First, a Board of Religious Education was established, to secure teachers and supervise the type of lesson used. Second, it was voted to henceforth consider the superintendent a church officer, to be elected at the annual meeting. Deacon William H. Hickok was first to be so elected and served from 1920-1923.

Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr., served as superintendent from 1923-1926, during which time a Worker's Council for all workers of the Church School was organized, a constitution and by-laws adopted,

and Junior Officer system installed, with Richard Benson as the first Junior Superintendent. The school at this time became and has remained financially independent of the church.

Mr. Goodsell was followed by:

James B. Osborne	1926-1930	Mrs. Euan McFarlane	1943-1947
Milton Williams	1930-1931	Allan R. Trott	1947-1950
Frank Warner	1931-1933	Frederic Warner	1950-1951
James B. Osborne	1934-1942	Paul Kellers	1951-1955
Frederic Gordon 1956-			

The plan for a memorial entrance to the Church School for pupils who died while members of the school was conceived during Mr. Warner's term, and the fund for its erection was earned and set aside. The entrance was completed, and was dedicated before the beginning of the 175th Anniversary Celebration.

THE CHURCH SCHOOL - SUPPLEMENT 1976

The church school superintendents who have served since 1960 are:

Robert Saydah
Mrs. Frederick Schork
Mrs. George Grumman

CHAPTER 14

The Mission Circle

In 1884, under the leadership of Mrs. Sarah O Chapman, a group of young ladies organized to do mission work. Under the name of "Willing Workers," they supported a colored girl in Talledega and sent \$50 to a school in Georgia. The next year they were made an auxiliary to the Women's Board and have since supported both home and foreign missions. In 1887 the name was changed to the Young Ladies' Mission Circle.

There seems to be no record of when the first Ladies' Mission Circle was formed. By 1884 the Ladies' Mission Circle was well established and composed of the older women of the church. Later the two societies joined forces and continued as the Ladies' Mission Circle. Although known as a Mission Circle the minutes of the meetings show that their interest extended to local affairs also, doing sewing for the needy families and appropriating money to redecorate the church or parsonage. The amount appropriated at the annual meeting continued for a long time at \$40 to home missions; \$30 to foreign missions; and \$20 for local relief. This gives but a small idea of the amount of money raised and expended as is indicated by such items as missionary box sent, valued at \$90; famine relief, \$30; and money for repair fund, \$766.61. Gradually the annual amount for missions was increased until it reached \$100 for foreign, and \$100 for home missions. In no year has this group failed in dedicated support for the extension work of the church, nor has any year failed to record an appropriation from their treasury for work in our parish. .

Regular study meetings were held with programs of missionary speakers, reports from conventions, mission books reviewed and special missionary subjects. Beside the study meetings, regular sewing meetings were held, usually two afternoons a month. If the work accomplished during these meetings could be reassembled, what an exhibit it would make! Aprons, quilts, clothes for the needy, comfortables, pile upon pile.

LIST OF PRESIDENTS

1884-1887 Sarah Chapman

1888 Anna Smith

1889 Anna McGregor

1890 Fanny Woodman

1891 Mrs. L. Smith

1892-1893 Ethel Chapman

1894 Lisbeth Barber

1895 Ursula Benedict

1896 Anna Smith

1897 Mrs. Etho Smith

1898	Mrs. Stuart H. Kyle	1939-1940	Mrs. Howard Knowles
1899	Cora Banke	1941	Mrs. Floyd Wood
1900-1904	Mrs. H. L. Slack	1942	Mrs. Milton Rockwell
1904-1910	Mrs. George Hickok	1945-1946	Mrs. Ralph Johnson
1911-1914	Mrs. A. T. Steele	1947-1948	Mrs. Ronald Taylor
1915-1918	Mrs. George Beard	1949	Mrs. D. F. Wood
1919-1921	Mrs. Louis Ohlweiler	1950	Mrs. James Kyle
1922	Mrs. Charles Vernon	1951-1952	Mrs. J. H. White
1923-1924	Mrs. Louis Ohlweiler	1953	Mrs. Edna Williams
1925-1928	Mrs. D. Floyd Wood	1954	None
1929-1932	Miss Gussie Levine	1955-1957	Mrs. Peter Cushnie
1933-1934	Mrs. James Kyle	1958-1959	Mrs. Ralph Johnson
1934-1944	Mrs. Floyd Wood	1960-	Mrs. Ralph Johnson
1935-1936	Mrs. Fred Benson		

THE MISSION CIRCLE - SUPPLEMENT 1976

Presidents of this organization since 1960 are:

1961-1962	Mrs. Peter Cushnie
1963-1965	Mrs. Lydia Osborne
1966-	Mrs. Peter Cushnie

CHAPTER 15

Bethel's Missionary

Minnie Esther Carter was born in Redding, Connecticut, June 13, 1886, the daughter of Ammi and Enna Griffin Carter. The family moved to Bethel about two years later. She was graduated from the Bethel High School in 1904, valedictorian of her class, her average setting a new high record. In 1906 she was graduated from the Danbury Normal School, and taught school for nine years.

She attended the Sunday School from the time she entered the beginner's class and joined the church July 2, 1899. She taught a class of boys in the Sunday School. She was also active in the Christian Endeavor and in the Sunshine Society. Besides her interest in her own church, she was active in the Christian work of the places where she taught.

While at the Northfield Summer Conferences of 1914, she learned that there was a need for trained teachers on the Foreign Mission field and decided to offer her services. She was accepted and appointed to the Natal Mission, South Africa, in the spring of 1915. The following year was spent in preparation at the New York Biblical College. While in New York she taught a class of Chinese youths at the Church of All Nations in the Bowery. In New Haven, May 1916, she was commissioned as a missionary of the American Board and sailed for South Africa on August 10, 1916.

Inanda Seminary, where she has been stationed, is of special interest to our church, as our women have given to its support for about fifty years. A school for Zulu girls has grown from a primary school to its present standard of a three-year high school course, and an advanced course in teaching Bible, English and science. She has returned for furlough three times. On each furlough her studies have been continued, one term devoted to Bible, at the New York Biblical College; the second term, to science at Columbia University.

"Minnie Esther Carter (1916) retired on August 22, 1957. Although she spent over forty years, twenty-four of them as high school principal, on the staff of Inanda Seminary and was regarded by her colleagues, her pupils, and the Natal Department of Education as being an educator of great skill and ability, it is not her educational contribution, great that it is, for which Minnie Carter will be remembered. Neither does any mere listing of her extracurricular activities, preparation of religious education material

for district Sunday Schools, and community service give a real idea of her greatest and truest contribution.

"One could catch a glimpse of her influence, seeing her in the yard at Inanda on a Sunday afternoon, very small, very dignified, mounted on a tall horse starting off with a troop of girls to visit some out-station church or Sunday School. For all their normal schoolgirl noise and chatter, it was easy to see the great love and respect they had for their teacher.

"But the truer measure of her influence could be found by talking seriously to the older sisters or mothers of these girls, women who in their own schoolgirl days had also gone out on Sunday afternoons with the tiny graceful lady on the tall horse and had sat under the teacher's eye on weekdays. All over Natal and in many other parts of South Africa, African women of all ages are grateful for the years they had under Miss Carter, for what she taught them in class, for how she taught them to enjoy life outside the class, but especially for the ideals that she gave them, ideals which have carried most of them through many dark and troubled hours. Always gentle, she nevertheless had a force and a firmness which made a lasting impression on many." (The American Board Calendar of Prayer.)

BETHEL'S MISSIONARY - SUPPLEMENT 1976

In Memoriam

Miss Minnie Esther Carter who retired from her labors in the missionary field to live in Bethel with her sisters Jennie Middlebrook and Abbie Warner passed to her heavenly reward Sept. 29, 1974. Beloved by all who knew her, Miss Carter will be greatly missed.

CHAPTER 16

Women's Guild And Men's Club

The Women's Guild was organized at the parsonage February 20, 1931. There were thirteen charter members. The officers elected the first year were: Mrs. Lewis E. Goodsell, President; Mrs. Henry French, Vice President, and Miss Grace Paddock, Secretary and Treasurer.

A set of by-laws was drawn up and a constitution adopted. Under the constitution, an advisory board was elected. The members of the board were Mrs. Louis Ohlweiler, Mrs. Joseph Hodgson, Mrs. D. Floyd Wood and Miss Mary Crofut.

According to the constitution the object of the Guild is "to provide opportunity for social activities and to work for the Congregational Church." With this object in mind the Guild has held a great number of socials and parties of various kinds and has also contributed to the financial support of the church.

The Guild has sponsored many money-making events, most of which have been financially successful. The income derived from these sources has been used in many ways, such as helping to build the stage in the vestry, providing flowers for Communion Sunday and for sick and shut-ins, fulfilling of pledges made to the repair fund, upkeep of parsonage and scholarship fund to a student at Northland College.

GUILD PRESIDENTS

1931	Laura Goodsell	1942	Helen Judd
1932	Olive French	1943	Helen Pearson
1933	Lydia Osborne	1944-1946	Dorothy Tarrant
1934	Rebecca Taylor	1947	Helen Rubley
1935	Ethel Haitsch	1948-1949	Betty Trott
1936	Gladys Iles	1950-1951	Lydia Osborne
1937	Lillian Bradley	1952-1953	Edith Cushnie
1938	Ethel Haitsch	1954-1955	Ruth Rumbarger
1939	Bertha Bennett	1956-1957	Naomi George
1940	Laura Goodsell	1958-1959	Margaret Haitsch
1941	Marion Kirk	1960-	Edith Cushnie

WOMEN'S GUILD - SUPPLEMENT 1976

The presidents of this organization since 1960 are:

1961	Mrs. Catherine Rowland
1962-1963	Mrs. Joyce Schork
1964-	Caroline Garve!
1964-	Mrs. Laura MacDonald
1965-	Mrs. Edith Cushnie
1966-	Mrs. Laura MacDonald
1967-1968	Mrs. Evelyn Stange
1969-1971	Mrs. Charlotte Thomas
1972-1973	Mrs. Lenore Buttikofer
1974-1975	Mrs. Evelyn Stange
1976-	Mrs. Arline Menegay

CHAPTER 17

Church Trustees And Financial Problems

There have been some interesting changes in the financing of the church since 1759. As has been recorded, at that time, the pastor, Mr. Wetmore, was paid one hundred and ten pounds a year. This was in Colonial times, when we were still using English currency. It seems however for the first four years he was on a trial basis and mention is made in the records that part of this was to be returned if he did not "conform." Should he come up to expectations however he would be retained on a permanent basis with a stipend of one hundred ten pounds a year.

The expenses of the church at that time were raised by taxation. When Rev. Mr. Wetmore was called, a tax of five pence on the pound was imposed to be paid in three months. Other items of expense were met in the same manner. Each member was taxed according to his own financial worth.

As previously mentioned, years later, during the pastorate of Rev. Mr. Lowe and sometime between 1822 and 1829 the tax method of financing was discontinued. Necessary revenues to operate the church were then raised by the auctioning of pews.

In 1898, the expenses had increased to \$2,835.28 for the year, with the pastor, Rev. Henry L. Slack, receiving \$1,500 per annum. By 1929 the church expenses increased to \$4,659.91, with the pastor's salary at \$2,500. The church expenses have increased steadily through the years, partly due to the growth of the church but mostly due to inflation.

Several times during the history of the church, it has been in financial difficulties. As early as 1784, it considered reuniting with the Danbury parish. The church struggled through until the early 1830's when an upswing in its finances permitted extensive repairs.

Another financial crisis was precipitated by the burning of the church in 1842, although no mention is made of it except that work was started toward the building of a new edifice.

During the Civil War period and in spite of the financial pinch of the times, a church debt was reduced. Following the war, when disaster struck again, our people came back strong and built the present building. A high wind had toppled the church spire over on the old building causing considerable damage.

In the late eighty's and all during the Rev. Slack's pastorate the church seemed to thrive. A parsonage was built and an organ

was installed. The church has weathered each storm to return to a period of prosperity. During 1902 a heating system was installed.

The year of 1910 and we were still going strong under the guidance of the Rev. Mr. Steele. The church built a new church house on Centre Street (now Greenwood Avenue). Political differences in 1912 over the Presidential election caused a split in the church so that a number of members withdrew their support. There followed a number of years when our financial situation was impaired. The new church house had to be sold. There was even talk joining another church in 1919.

Through all these financial reverses, the church trustees have always had to cope with these difficulties. We cannot find in any the historical sermons any mention made of these men who bore these problems. Mostly the speakers, concerned with the spiritual end of the church, have praised the deacons; but nowhere have we found any mention of the trustees. Perhaps this is due to the fact that when the spiritual side has been high, the necessary finances have been forthcoming. When discord and divisions have used a falling off of the spiritual standards, damaging reactions have resulted to our finances; the burden then of survival has fallen upon the trustees.

Within our own memory, John H. Cordes was first trustee when the church house was built in 1910. He served as trustee when national politics had split the church. He was succeeded by Harrison Hoyt (senior) in 1919 and James E. Kyle in 1920, both of whom helped to bridge the hard years.

Mr. Kyle was followed by Lewis E. Goodsell in 1924, assisted by Stuart H. Kyle and Jerome L. Allen. At this annual meeting there were only six men present, three of whom were placed on the nominating committee, the other three elected to be trustees. Mr. Goodsell, age 26, was probably one of the youngest men ever elected to this responsible office. No one was anxious to take on the burdens of the office of trustee. Had these men known the trouble in store for them, they might not have accepted either.

The church finances were improved at the beginning of their term of office. They also raised the sum of thirty-four hundred dollars to make the necessary repairs. Then two years later disaster struck again, the interior of the church being destroyed by fire. Ably assisted by a good committee, the same trustees brought the church through another crisis.

Deacon Harold B. Senior succeeded Mr. Goodsell as first trustee in 1926 and steered the finances for several years, leaving them in excellent condition. In 1947, Raymond Rubley became first trustee

CHAPTER 18

Clerks Of The Church

Another group of people have by their conscientious work kept the church records in such good condition that it has made work of your historian much easier. These are the clerks of the church who have kept the church records in a safe place, and from the very beginning of the church the records have been well preserved.

It gives one an awesome feeling to handle the books written many years ago. The very first meeting of the church is carefully recorded as well as all the subsequent meetings for two hundred years. The old familiar names of founders of the community appear again and again in the records. From generation to generation the pen has passed on from one to another that the business of the church be properly recorded.

Probably the most recordings were made by the Rev. Henry L Slack when he was clerk of the church. Following him were persons like Frederick H. Judd, William H. Hickok, Lydia Osborne, Lewis E. Goodsell, Frank E. Warner and Helen Rubley. The present clerk: served twice in this capacity, once before his military service during World War II, and again upon his return home. Always amiable, Harold Elwood carries on the task begun so many years ago, that future historians may know who served this church of God in Bethel.

CLERKS OF THE CHURCH - SUPPLEMENT 1976

It should be noted that Harold A. Elwood, our church clerk until 1976, began his duties in 1937 and served in this position for 35 years, interrupted by three years in the armed services during World War II. Such loyalty and devotion church service deserves our highest praise.

CHAPTER 19

Gifts To The Church

Among the papers of Miss Anna Laura Smith has been found a list of gifts to the church over a period of many years. Miss Smith had given a "Book of Remembrance" to the church, and it is presumed that the information in these papers were to be transcribed into this book. This was done before her death. The "Book of Remembrance" which was given by Miss Smith in memory of the Rev. and Mrs. H. L. Slack is now in charge of a committee headed by Mrs. Lydia Osborne and Mrs. Katharine Hodgson.

The donors of the Estey Organ, as has been previously mentioned, were Mrs. J. McPherson, Mrs. A. Belle Foster, Mr. George H. Hickok in memory of Mrs. (George H.) Carrie Foster Hickok, who gave 25 years of faithful service as organist and choir leader; also through the bequest of Miss Cornelia A. Smith and Sydney H. Smith.

The Memorial Tablet to the Rev. Henry L. Slack, who served as pastor of the church 22 years, given by friends in the church.

A silver flower vase in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Frank W. Smith, given by their daughter Anna Laura Smith.

The Pulpit Bible in memory of Mr. and Mrs. E. Romine Barnum, given by their children.

The Baptismal Font in memory of Hugh Sands Reid, given by the Church School. (Note: Some say the font was given by Hugh's mother and that it was made from an old melodeon.)

A silver flower vase in memory of Mrs. (Silas Henry) Mary Ambler Hickok by William Hunt Hickok.

A silver flower vase in memory of Mrs. Inez H. Hall by J. F. Hall.

A cut glass flower bowl, a family heirloom by Mrs. Madaline Lafferty.

A stained glass window (entry to vestry) by the Sunday School. (Designed by Edward Terhune, and it is thought by some that Mr. and Mrs. Terhune participated in the gift.)

Money memorials to the Rev. and Mrs. H. L. Slack by their daughter Elvira J. Slack.

Money memorials to the Rev. H. L. Slack by his daughter Mrs. Grace Slack McNeil.

Memorial gift to missions in memory of Mrs. Fanny Phelps Slack by Mrs. J. M. Smith of New York.

Honor Roll of our church's young people who were in the armed services. (It is reasonably sure this was a gift of Miss Anna Laura Smith.)

Gift to Book of Remembrance in memory of Miss Mary Weed Shepard, by Miss Elvira J. Slack.

Iron railing at steps of church in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart H. Kyle by Miss Anna D. Kyle; in memory of Mrs. W. D. Cornell by Miss Katherine Hodgson; in memory of Mrs. M. Louise Hill by Mrs. Evelyn Downs.

Other notes indicated that the American flag was given in memory of Deacon Charles Bailey by Mr. William P. Bailey, and the Christian flag was probably given by the Mission Circle.

The brass flower vase in memory of Mrs. (George H.) Anna Margaret Hinman by George H. Hinman and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis E. Goodsell, Sr.

Donations to the Deacons Chapel: In memory of Deacon Charles Bailey by Carroll P. Bailey, Charles K. Bailey, Edward H. Bailey, Harry F. Bailey, and Mrs. Sarah Huse.

In memory of Deacon William Beard by Theodore H. Beard.

In memory of Deacon Ebenezer Hickok by Sidney J. Hickok and William H. Hickok.

In memory of Deacon Phenias Judd by Howard M. Judd and William S. Judd.

In memory of Deacon Stuart Kyle, by Anna D. and Mary Kyle and Clifford A. Kyle.

In memory of Deacon Samuel Kyle by Henry F. Kyle, Louis H. Kyle and Samuel Kyle.

In memory of Arthur H. and Evanna B. Senior by Harold B. Senior.

To the glory of St. Stephen, the First Deacon, by Rev. Frank Tishkins.

In memory of Deacon Alexander Twiss by Mrs. Alexander W. Twiss.

Donation by Milton S. Williams, Sr.

The Chapel Curtain by Rev. and Mrs. Frank Tishkins in appreciation of the services of Deacon William H. Hickok.

The Altar by Rev. Tishkins in appreciation of services of Deacon Harold B. Senior.

The altar brasses by Deacon and Mrs. John F. Hall.

The altar cloth by Mrs. Leroy Stone in memory of her husband.

The altar chairs by Deacon William H. Hickok in memory of his parents, Silas H., Josephine, and Mary Hickok.

The lectern by Augusta and Lucy Patee in memory of their mother Jessie Foster Patee.

The Holy Bible by Mrs. Ida Evans Schwiezer in memory of her grandparents.

The baptismal font by Mr. and Mrs. Howard Judd in memory of Phenias Judd, the first deacon of this church.

The chapel lights by Mr. and Mrs. Harold B. Senior.

The prayerbook by Mrs. Alexander W. Twiss.

The hymnals by Deacon William H. Hickok.

The electric heaters by Deacon Harold Senior.

The kneeling cushion by Marion Fitch and Mrs. James Osborne.

Chapel Pews

In memory of Deacon Alexander W. Twiss by his daughter Mrs. Harold B. Senior.

In appreciation of Deacon and Mrs. George H. Hinman by their grandsons Lewis E. Goodsell, Jr., and Kenneth Hinman Goodsell.

In memory of Edward H. and Emma F. Miller by their son Ernest E. Miller.

In appreciation of his church school class of boys by Edwin Brundage.

In memory of Deacon Stuart H. Kyle by his sister Miss Anna D. Kyle.

In memory of Archie and Jacobina Evans by their daughter Mrs. Ida Evans Schwiezer.

In memory of Thomas and Anna Kyle, George W. and Elizabeth Kniffen by their children Clifford and Estelle Kyle.

Also pews were given by the Milton S. Williams family, Allen and Claire Griswold, George and Margaret Hinman, Ronald and Anna Mae Taylor.

Two silver candlesticks in memory of Miss Hattie M. Patchen by the trustees of the Hattie M. Patchen Fund.

The red cover for the Communion Table was brought from Lithuania by Rev. and Mrs. Frank Tishkins.

Miss Smith in her notes indicates that the Communion Table may have been given by Mr. and Mrs. Dunning.

A picture to the Sunday School in memory of Jamie Signor.

A crocheted cover for the Communion Table by Mrs. Ida Tucker Underhill.

The chandelier for the Deacon's Chapel by Mrs. (Harold B.) Grace Senior.

Memorial Donations to the Parish House Fund

In memory of Joseph E. Brown, by Mr. and Mrs. Lester A. Menegay and Mr. and Mrs. L. Armand Menegay.

In memory of Claude E. Marble, by Mr. and Mrs. Horace L. Shepard, Jr.

In memory of Arthur N. Bergen, by his sister Mrs. Fred A. Benson.

In memory of Anna Laura Smith, by her niece Mrs. Lemuel Sanford.

In memory of Mrs. Rebecca Kyle, by her daughter Mrs. T. A. Shannon.

In memory of Mrs. Louis Ohlweiler, by Mrs. W. W. Ohlweiler and Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Dunse.

In memory of David J. MacDonald, by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Johnson.

In memory of Mrs. Clara Brandt, by her daughter Mrs. Gerhard Endler.

In memory of Caroline K. and Frederick T. Andrews, by their daughter Mrs. Garfield Morrison.

In memory of Mr. and Mrs. George B. Fairchild, by their daughter Mrs. Merah F. Sherwood.

OUT OF THE PAST

A 130-year-old Bible, first used in the original Meeting House in Bethel, was given to the church by Attorney Burton Fairchild Sherwood, in 1959. It had come into his hands years before from his grandmother Mrs. George B. Fairchild, but only recently he had found a note in it which explained that it had been given to Mrs. Fairchild by Mrs. Greenwood, wife of the Rev. John Greenwood, who was pastor of the church when it burned in 1842. Apparently the Bible was in his possession when the fire occurred.

This Bible, printed in England in 1829, was in excellent condition considering its age. It would seem to be a coincidence that Mr. Sherwood should discover its origin when we are about to celebrate our Bi-Centennial. No doubt but what it will be used in the special Bi-Centennial service.

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH - SUPPLEMENT 1976

Many more gifts have been made through the "Book of Remembrance" and these have been duly recorded. The "Book of Remembrance" is kept in a separate case at the left of the pulpit in the front of the sanctuary.

Gifts made through the trustees include:

J. Harry White 1967

Ward Dann 1964-1966

Robert Stange 1969

Lewis & Laura Goodsell 1972

Florence S Reimers 1974 – Added to Investment Funds

Notes Of The Author

In compiling this history, most of the material was taken from the records of the church during a period when the writer was church clerk. Many of the essential facts were taken from the "Century Sermon" by Doctor Laurens P. Hickok, from the 125 Anniversary sermon of the Rev. H. L. Slack, from the 150th Anniversary sermon of the Rev. A. H. Steele, and the 175th Anniversary sermon of the Rev. Frank Tishkins.

Many of the facts regarding the town's history and the remarks of P. T. Barnum were gotten from J. M. Bailey's history of Danbury.

The author is obliged to those from the various organizations who provided data concerning those organizations and to the clerk of the church, Harold Elwood, who was most co-operative. Also to Emmet Crozier for his encouragement and fine suggestions, I am deeply grateful. A thank you to Barbara Johnson for her typing and Laura MacDonald, who edited this manuscript and for their helpfulness on the committee which arranged for its publication. Also to Albert Kirk, Mario Tornillo and Arthur Harris for their fine help on the committee. A special "thank you" to my pastor, Russell Milnes, for his encouragement and help.

And finally to my wife and family to whom I would dedicate the fruits of my labor as church historian.

LEWIS E. GOODSSELL, SR.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE REMEMBERED THE CHURCH
IN THEIR WILLS

Samuel Smith-Dunning	1905
Sydney H. Smith	1927
Evanna B. Senior	1929
William Leigh	
Vinnie Bradley	
Lillie H. Hill	1936
Ella F. Stucklen	
Frederick H. Stucklen	1938
Henry Bourne	1960
Albert Magnus	1961
Howard M. Judd	1963
Ruby Klein	1967
Mabel Dunkley	1968
Martha Hawley	1968
Grace Slack McNeil	1968
Robert L. McNeil	1968
Fred O. Benson	1970
Mary Beard Holley	1971
Augusta Patee	1971
Carolyn Wight	1971
Henry Judd	1972
Estella Finch	1973
Eva M. Paul	1973

Publication of this history has been made possible through the generous assistance of the following members and friends of the Church:

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