



150 Years of Faith

A History of the
First United Methodist Church

Laconia - Gilford
New Hampshire

Written for the 150th Anniversary Celebration
September 2011

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Chapter I

The Early Days of Methodism in New Hampshire

John Wesley was sent to the Georgia Territory in America by the Church of England in 1735 to provide clergy for those who had immigrated there. John had high hopes of serving the immigrants and converting the Indian tribes in that area to Christianity. He struggled in Georgia to do God's will, however, his desire to earn his own salvation through good works kept him in confusion. The local Indians were not convinced that they should accept Christianity, as they had their own spiritual beliefs. John's stiff piety caused him difficulties with a young woman. He left Georgia disgraced and returned to England feeling a failure.

After his heart warming experience at Aldersgate in London, John understood he was saved by God's grace not by his own good works. He began sharing his beliefs with many of the less fortunate people in England.

Some of the Irish and English who were immigrating to America heard Wesley preach, and carried his ideas with them to America. Small groups of Methodist Societies formed in America and Wesley received appeals from them to send missionaries. Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmoor and Francis Asbury all volunteered to go as missionaries to America.

George Whitefield was sent to America by John Wesley in 1738. Whitefield provided leadership for a chain of revivals in the colonies stressing inner, personal religion. This period is often referred to as the "Great Awakening."

New England was well occupied by the Congregationalists at this time. The settler's religious, social and political life revolved around the local meetinghouse. Travel over primitive, bumpy and narrow roads was difficult and there were few accommodations for travelers along the way.

Whitefield crossed the Atlantic thirteen times. His final visit to New England was in 1770 when he visited Maine and spent a week in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Friends in Exeter persuaded him to stop there. Such a large group assembled that Whitefield was forced to speak out of doors. He spoke for as much as two hours, ate his dinner and then mounted his horse to travel to Newburyport, Massachusetts. A crowd had gathered there to hear this famous man speak. After speaking once more on what must have been an exhausting day, Whitefield retired for the night. He never awoke. Perhaps he had a heart attack; however, the primitive medical system of that day does not give us an exact cause of death

The First Congregational Church of Exeter divided after hearing Whitefield preach. One of the men who left the Congregationalists at that time was John Philips, the future founder of Exeter Academy.

Later, Philip Embury, an Irish Protestant who had been won over to Methodism, visited Chesterfield, New Hampshire, in the fall of 1772. He was encouraged to come there by James Robertson, who had heard of Embury's preaching from friends in New York. Many gathered to hear Embury speak on a hill which was part of the Robertson farm. Embury must have greatly impressed those who heard him. A Methodist class began in Chesterfield after his visit. Twenty-eight years later, the class became an organized church with sixty-eight members. Philip Embury promised to return to New Hampshire; however, he died in an accident a year after his first visit.

During the time of America's Revolutionary War, John Wesley oddly first protested against Britain's use of force against the Colonies but then changed his mind. This strange reversal temporarily halted the Wesleyan mission in America. All of the preachers who had been sent to America returned to Britain, with the exception of Francis Asbury.

When the Revolutionary War was over, Wesley once again began sending preachers to America. He ordained two lay preachers and sent them to New York with Thomas Coke as Superintendent in 1784.

In December of 1784, what came to be known as the Christmas Conference met in Baltimore and chose for itself the title "Methodist Episcopal Church." Fifty Preachers attended the conference; however, none of them represented New England.

Jesse Lee was converted to Methodism by evangelical preaching in his home state of Virginia and was sent as an itinerant preacher by Asbury to North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey. He traveled with Asbury in 1785 in South Carolina. There the two missionaries met a young clerk who was originally from Massachusetts. The clerk told them that he thought Massachusetts had need of religion. Jesse Lee decided to take the Gospel to New England. Asbury was not supportive of this idea. Lee persisted and in 1789, at the American Methodist conference, Lee received the commission to evangelize New England.

The Methodist movement was slow in New Hampshire. There were only 68 members listed in 1796 when New Hampshire was only one circuit in the New York Conference.

In 1797, New England became an Annual Conference with New Hampshire as part of that conference. With the effective ministry of the circuit riders, the New England Conference grew by 143% by 1801 and membership in New Hampshire grew by 892%. In 1829, the New England Conference decided to create a separate New Hampshire and Vermont Conference.¹

Institutions of Higher Education in New Hampshire

Methodists in New Hampshire became interested in developing institutions of higher education in the 1800's. A Wesleyan Academy was planned in Newmarket. Due to lack of finances, the Academy moved out of state.

A Franklin Academy took the place of the Newmarket school from 1834 to 1845. In 1844-45 the New Hampshire Conference Seminary was established at Northfield, then at Tilton. For many years, the school served in the world of education under the control of the Conference. Many pastors began their seminary education in Tilton and often served New Hampshire parishes while attending the seminary. Although the Conference continued to elect trustees to the Tilton board, the school eventually dropped its Methodist name and became known as the Tilton School.

It is interesting to note that New Hampshire provided the site for the first American Methodist theological seminary located in Concord. The school eventually relocated and became the well known School of Theology of Boston University.

¹ From *God, Grace, and Granite: The history of Methodism in New Hampshire, 1768-1988*

Chapter II

Local Methodist Churches

Trinity United Methodist Church -Lakeport

In 1872, fifteen people from the Church in Laconia began to organize a Methodist Episcopal Church in Lake Village (now Lakeport). They continued for a time until 1877 when the organized church ceased to exist.

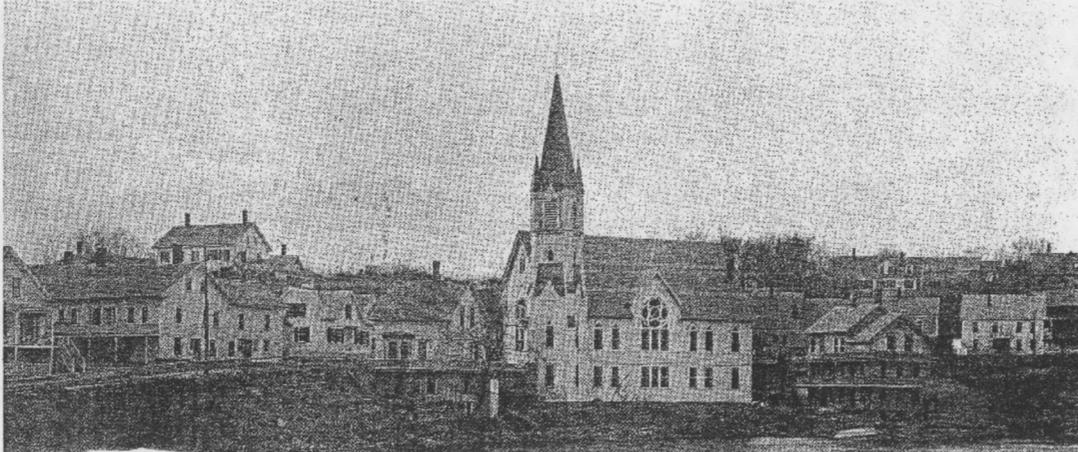
The church reorganized and on March 31, 1881 under the supervision of the Presiding Elder J. W. Adams Trinity Methodist Church was organized. Rev. N. C. Alger was appointed. It held services in what had formerly been the Advent Chapel on Gold Street. The next year, 1882, a membership of 23 was reported, including 22 received by certificate and the conference Elder stated in his report for 1882: "The church organized a year ago at Lake Village has proved a success, a good congregation and Sunday School have been gathered, and souls have been converted." However, in 1888 the chapel was destroyed by fire.

In 1889, a lot was purchased on the shore of Paugus Bay and fundraising for a new building began. A new church building was built on the corner of North and Belvedere Streets (on the Bay) and dedicated on February 16, 1892. Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church held its first service on May 24, 1891. In 1895, 100 members were reported.

In late May 1903 the great Lakeport fire, which destroyed over 100 structures, left the building in ruins. The pulpit set rescued by Thomas Adkins, one of the church officials, was the only thing saved from the building. By 1904 a beautiful new building had been built on the old foundation and was valued at \$5,000.²

Over the years ministers were supplied sometimes serving only the Trinity Church and sometimes a pastor served both the First Church in Laconia and the Trinity Church in Lakeport. By 1963, the Trinity Methodist Church membership had declined and the congregation merged with the Methodist Church in the Weirs. At that time Frank Gulinello was serving both the church in the Weirs and Trinity Church as a student pastor.

² From *History of the New Hampshire Conference* based on Historical Sketches by George Henry Hardy, Conference Historian from 1896 – 1920, Edited by Otis Cole and Oliver Baketel,



Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church before 1903³

Weirs Community Methodist Church

Enthusiastic summer services at the Winnepesaukee Camp Meeting caused the residents of the Weirs to organize and build a year round church facility. In 1882, when the ice had first gone off the Lake in April, a group met to worship and discuss organizing and building a permanent church.

At the Annual Conference in 1884, Reverend F. C. Libby was appointed to supply the Weirs. He was, at that time, still a student at the Seminary in Tilton. In April of 1884, Rev. Libby held the first class meeting with ten members.

The next year, officers were elected and plans began for the building of a Methodist Episcopal Church at Weirs Beach. The pastor, who was paid \$150 a year, found a nice building lot; and pledges of \$900 were obtained to build the church.

Augustus Doe donated the piece of land on the corner of Maple and Tower streets for the church to be built. By the end of the summer of 1885, \$1, 128.04 was in the building fund. The first service in the building, the final cost of which was \$2,290.21, was held in October of 1886.

The need for a parsonage became apparent, and in 1902, L. E. Warner, Eliza D. Morrison and William J. Morrison handed over a deed to the Pastor of the church, Reverend G. W. Jones. Rev. Jones immediately deeded the property over to the church trustees. Although people were skeptical about the possibility of raising enough funds to

³ From *Slates, Shingles and Shakes*, Prepared by David McLaren Hart and Associates, Architects and Peter B. Hance for the City of Laconia, Planning Department

build a parsonage, Rev. Jones was very determined to secure the funds. There are stories of him meeting people as they stepped of the train at the Weirs or while riding on the ship Mt. Washington and asking for donations for the parsonage project. The money solicited in this manner and by letters sent out requesting donations caused a parsonage to be built and all bills for the building and furnishing paid in full by 1905.

On the night of November 8, 1924, a fire swept through the Cook block and the Hotel Weirs, the Music Hall and the Weirs Community Methodist church were all lost in the flames. The church was a complete loss. Even the stained glass windows were destroyed.

A new building was raised and dedicated in 1926. By 1931, all costs of rebuilding the church had been paid. The pews for the rebuilt church were moved from the Appleton Chapel of Harvard University when remodeling was done there.

As is often the case in many churches, the women's organizations worked diligently to help with church finances. The first women's organization at the Weirs Church went by the name of "Willing Workers." In 1901, they became the Ladies Aid. In 1942, the name was changed to the Women's Society of Christian Service. With the change of all organizations of the Methodist Church in the 1960's, it became the United Methodist Women. Over the years, the work of these women has helped to keep the church free of debt.

In 1963, the Trinity Methodist Church in Lakeport merged with the Weirs Community Church and thus the merged congregations became the Trinity United Methodist Church of the Weirs. This larger congregation worked together to put on an addition to the building paid for by a \$20,000 20 year mortgage. Due to interest rates, the \$20,000 would have amounted to much more. In 1973, Edward Simpson paid off the amount of \$8,700 which was still owed. The addition is now known as Simpson Memorial Hall.

Between 1981 and 1985, the Rev. Dr. Philip Polhemus organized the Weirs Beach Ministry to serve the many summer visitors. Students from Boston University School of Theology were hired to conduct the summer ministry.

The Trinity United Methodist Church continues to serve the Weirs community year round.



Trinity United Methodist Church

From *History of the New Hampshire Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* Based on Historical Sketches by George Hendry Hardy, Conference Historian 1896-1920
Edited by Otis Cole & Oliver S. Baketel

Booklet: *Weirs Community Methodist Church, Weirs Beach, New Hampshire*
Compiled by Fred W. Hoyt, Mrs. Carl Davis, Sr., Francis W. Green, Romeo DeBlois
Weirs United Methodist Church newsletter of December, 1988

The Gilford Methodist Episcopal Church

In 1874 at the New Hampshire Conference, Abraham Lunt was appointed to serve Gilford. As far as is known there was no Methodist Society in the village. The Baptists and Universalists had established churches earlier. The Methodist preacher began having services and people arrived to hear him. In November of that year, the Gilford Methodist Episcopal Church was organized with three members. They obtained what had been a Universalist Meetinghouse. At the time of the sale to the Methodists, the church building was owned by Captain Benjamin Weeks.

In 1895, the congregation built a parsonage across the road from their church on Belknap Mountain Road.

By 1889, the plaster on the ceiling of the meetinghouse had begun to fall because the 6" by 6" roof rafters were spaced too far apart. The Methodists remodeled the Meetinghouse in Gothic Revival style. The church members were very enthusiastic about the renovation and money for the repairs was made available. Augustus Copp did the

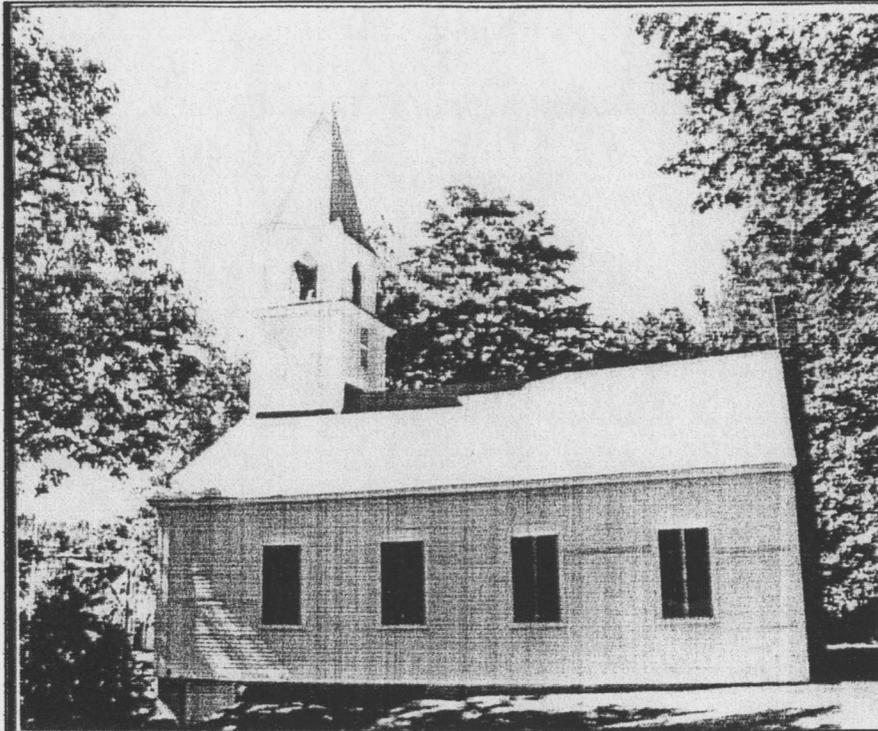
carpentry work which included elaborate interior of hemlock panels prepared in Copp's mill at Gunstock Brook. This interior is considered the best example of the use of beaded boarding in the churches of Belknap County. The inventive patterning with concentric rectangles and chevrons on the walls is unusual. A bell and bell tower, and new windows and doors with etched and stained glass panels were also added.

However, with time the congregation declined and in 1906, the Methodists merged with the Free Will Baptists. They did not begin to worship together in the same building right away. During the winter, each congregation had their own Christmas Tree and Christmas Concert in the Town Hall. The congregations alternated between the two buildings until 1924 when the Methodist Episcopal Church building was abandoned. The two denominations worshipped together served by alternating Free Baptist and Methodist preachers. The Methodist Conference continued to send preachers until 1927 when the two denominations merged into one Community Church.⁴

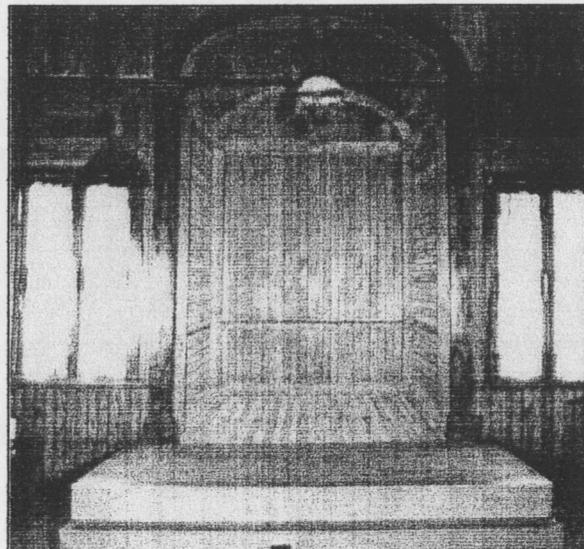
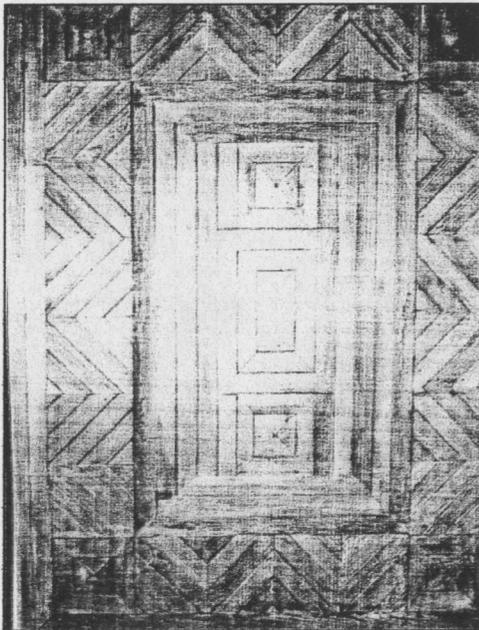
In 1940, at the Annual Conference, all assets from the Methodist owned property in Gilford were turned over to the First Methodist Church in Laconia. The parsonage and church were both sold and the money used to help retire the debt on the mortgage of the Laconia church.⁵

⁴ From *The Gunstock Parish: A History of Gilford, New Hampshire* by Adair D. Mulligan
Report of the Thompson-Ames Historical Society of Gilford prepared by Kathleen Parrish, Joan Nelson and David Ruel
History of the New Hampshire Conference from Historical Sketches by George Henry Hardy, Conference Historian 1896-1920 Edited by Otis Cole and Oliver S. Bakete

⁵ *Methodism in Laconia*. Historical record. Written on March 28, 1943 by Clarence S. Newell for the mortgage burning service at The Methodist Episcopal Church in Laconia.



Side view of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Gilford now the
Thompson-Ames Historical Society of Gilford



Some of the unusual interior woodwork in the ME Church of Gilford

Pictures courtesy of the Thompson-Ames Historical Society of Gilford

Chapter III

History of the Laconia-Gilford Church

Early History

The Reverend W.A. Loyne in a paper read by him as pastor in 1908 refers to a Class Meeting Record dated January 17, 1831, indicating that at that early date Methodism was organized in Meredith Bridge (now Laconia). The work in Laconia was part of a circuit which included Northfield, East Tilton (then Union Bridge), and Gilmanton. Gilmanton was the name of the territory east and south of the Winnepessiagee (sic) River. The first class record bears the name of Stephen K. Baldwin as leader and John F. Adams P. E. (Presiding Elder); Rev. B.C Eastman, Rev. N. Howe, Rev. A. W. Worthing, circuit preachers.⁶ In an article written by Rev. W. A. Loyne published in *The News and Critic* 1908, Rev. Loyne adds the following information, "There are 52 names on the class record. The name of Dolly Sewell appears third on the list and her maiden name was Dolly Clement. She was the mother of Mrs. Dorothea Gilman, the widow of the late Hiram Gilman and I am told on the best authority that she was the first Methodist woman in these parts. Miss Dolly Clement was born in 1785." The class records show that in 1832 there were two classes, doubtless one at Meredith Bridge and one at Lake Village and Gilford, with Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Samuel Bartlett, leaders, Revs. Jared Perkins, P.E., Warren Wilbur, Daniel Robinson, Sylvester P. Williams, circuit Preachers.⁷ "There came a critical period in their history when the work demanded a strong vigilant active, pious man full of faith and of the Holy ghost in the pastor's place. Lack of adaptation on the part of the appointed pastor led to the scattering of the congregation and the closing of the meeting in 1839."⁸

Establishment of the Laconia Methodist Episcopal Church

According to the church records, in 1860 a few determined to establish a Methodist Church in Laconia. Gove's Hall was rented and used to hold regular Sunday Services. This was on Main Street just on the north side of the river. However, on November 21, 1860, Gove's Hall burned in the great fire which also destroyed "practically all the business places in the village at the time."⁹ The records say, "They then occupied for a short time an abandoned church," which was possibly the old

⁶ From Historical Notes in *Church Bulletin* of First United Methodist Church Oct. 5, 1969. Compiled by Jan Kolb.

⁷ First Methodist Episcopal Church and Its Pastor, The Rev. W. A. Loyne. *The News and Critic*, Laconia, N. H. Wednesday, February 26, 1908.

⁸ Historical Record written by George W. Norris, Pastor of the First M.E. Church in Laconia 1868-1871. Record held at First United Methodist Church, Gilford NH. Pg.1.

⁹ *The Illustrated Laconian*, Charles W. Vaughan, 1899.

Universalist Church in Gilford Village. They prospered this time and on April 1, 1861, G.W. H. Clarke was appointed as minister to the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church at the Annual Conference held in Concord. James Pike was the presiding Elder of the District.¹⁰ Shortly after, the court house was procured and occupied several years, at a rental of sixty dollars a year. In reports by Rev. Clarke dated June 18, 1861, "I think we number in all connected with the School (Sunday School) some more than one hundred...our school is filling up quite rapidly and we are looking and praying for a gracious revival. We have great reason to be encouraged by this branch of our work."¹¹

"These were hard and trying times for this little Church, but their faith and courage never failed. A regular pastor was sustained during all these hard and trying years."¹² Pastors of record during these years were: 1863 W.H. Thomas, 1863 N.G. Cheney (appointed on December 1st), 1864 G.S. Noyes, 1866 C.W. Millen, 1867 Charles Holman. In 1868, Rev. G. W. Norris was appointed to the pastorate. During his first year it was decided a church home must be procured and the first Board of Trustees was chosen on February 6, 1869. The president of the Board was authorized to purchase from the Unitarian Society the old Universalist

Church. It was located on the 'Main Road leading to Winnipissiogee Lake' (Corner of Union Avenue and Baldwin Streets) in what was then the town of Gilford and after 1874 became part of Laconia. The church had been built in 1838. According to an accounting by the Treasurer of the Trustees, F.P. Lawrence, the following is reported: *Dated Dec. 29, 1869.* The Treasurer of the Trustees of the First M.E. Church in Laconia asks leave to report that he has during the current Conf. year taken deeds of church property costing \$2, 244.00.



Methodist Episcopal Church—Baldwin and Lake Street (now Union Ave) circa 1900.
Courtesy of Laconia Historical and Museum Society

¹⁰ From Historical Sketch in the *Directory and Program*, The ninety-fifth Session of the New Hampshire Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Laconia, N.H. April Second to April Seventh, 1924. pg. 9.

¹¹ Historical Record written by G.W.H.Clarke for the First Quarterly Conference of the M.E. Church at Laconia held at Lake Village June 18, 1861, Preacher in Charge 1861-63, First Methodist Episcopal Church, Laconia NH

¹² *Ibid.*

Improvements have been made at an expense of \$1297.95. Insurance has been effected at a cost of \$20.00 Making the cost of the Property as it now stands \$3, 561.95.”¹³ The money was raised through subscriptions [donations], the major donor being Mr. Hiram Gilman, although 55 contributors are listed. “On the 21st of March, 1869. We took possession of the Church edifice holding service there regularly and thus stopping the rent of \$60 annually for the Court House. We shingled the roof, remodeled and repaired the house and carpeted the floors throughout, cushioned the house uniformly. Aug. 1st We rented the pews¹⁴ and moved permanently into our own house of worship having been for seven weeks dependent upon the charity of the Unitarian Society for a place to preach none of the evangelical denominations knowing of our destitution until we had accepted the offer of the Unitarian house for one half of each Sabbath until ours should be finished.”¹⁵ Further notes indicate that subscriptions solicited by N. Richardson, Esq. brought in \$400 used to clear the debt, and in 1871, paint the house outside, erect two new chimneys and shingle the belfry.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church in Laconia 1872 to 1968

It appears from deeds held by the church that the first parsonage was purchased on Pleasant Street from John and Mary Baldwin in April of 1872 as Rev. B. W. Chase became pastor. James Bailey was probably the chairman of the Trustees as his name appears first on the deed.¹⁶ It was mortgaged in 1877 and the mortgage paid-off to the Laconia Savings Bank in 1893. It is not clear when the property was sold.

In 1873 while B.W. Chase was pastor a new pipe organ was purchased. A Bill of Sale shows that on Sept 13th the Trustees of M.E. Society bought of William Stevens one church organ, with two extra stops, for \$1098.40. Also paid was Davis and Stevens train fare to come to Laconia to oversee installation and their board--\$15.00. “The above organ I warrant to be in perfect order and thoroughly manufactured—signed Wm Stevens”¹⁷ Also a small vestry was built on the Baldwin Street side of the church at a cost of \$400.

In 1874, under the pastorate of B.W. Chase some improvements were made to the interior of the church. The old frescoing was partially removed and the walls were made to present a much neater appearance. Heat gas fixtures were also put up in both church and vestry. At the insistence of the pastor, “not liking a Methodist church without an

¹³ Archival material dated Dec. 29, 1869 and Jan. 4, 1870. Accounting of purchase of church. Signed F.P. Laurence.

¹⁴ Historical note--Pew rental was an important source of income for many churches.

¹⁵ Ibid. Norris. P. 2-3

¹⁶ Deed in Church records. Signed April 20, 1872. Belknap County Records. Book 54 Page 367. By Jacob Brody Register. 71/2 am April 22d, 1872.

¹⁷ Bill of Sale dated Laconia Sept. 13th 1873. Archival material. First United Methodist Church, Gilford NH.

altar, succeeded in getting an altar installed "at a trifling expense" and "soon after....the joy of seeing kneeling, at this altar for baptism, nearly a score of the members of the congregation and Sabbath School."¹⁸ During the last year of his ministry (1875-76) a 1,000 pound steel bell was purchased, largely through the efforts of Dr. A.H.C. Jewett, "a member of our church who is always ready for every good word and work."¹⁹

In 1887, during the pastorate of George W. McLaughlin, through whose efforts the membership had been largely increased, the church building was enlarged and a vestry built at the side. Furnace heat, and new pews were installed. The enlarged church was dedicated Oct. 13, 1887. The sermon was delivered by Dr. D. C. Knowles of Tilton from the text, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me." Dr. Knowles would five years later, be called upon to fill the pulpit for a few months.

In 1892, the Church went through a time of crisis in its history, when a split in the membership occurred under the pastorate of Mr. James Henry Haines who had been appointed in 1890. It was reported in the Conference Minutes of 1892 that there were 175 members, 23 probationers and 200 scholars in the Sunday School with \$200.00 raised for missions. In January of that year a complaint of falsehood was made against Haines to the Presiding Elder, the Rev. Samuel G. Keeler. It was alleged that "he had at a recent date repeatedly kissed a Miss Shapley, who was a boarder in his house." The accused was suspended from the ministry by a unanimous verdict, until the session of Conference. The friends of Mr. Haines absented themselves from the services of the church. They organized a Sunday School and met frequently until the Conference Session, a few of them still worshipping at the church. When Rev. Haines was not reinstated sixty members withdrew and a large number from the Sunday School, having been led to the new organization, which was styled "the Peoples Church" with J. H. Haines as pastor. It was located on Court Street in the former Court House, now moved to the opposite side of the street to make way for the new brick court house.²⁰ About half of the membership had left to form this new society, in all about seventy-five. It was nearly 30 years before the church recovered its numerical strength, but a steady recovery was made under the leadership of Rev. William Warren (1893-1896).

Under the pastorate of Rev. W. A. Loyne 1905-11, more extensive improvements were made to the interior of the Sanctuary. The good Reverend Loyne was also actively involved in the founding of The Laconia Home for the Aged (Taylor Home) and served on its first Board of Directors. He became interested in and concerned about the plight of

¹⁸ "A Brief History of First United Methodist Church of Laconia, N.H.". Prepared for the 75th Anniversary Observance of the Church—Nov. 1935 by Rev. Franklin P. Frye.

¹⁹ History 1874-1876. Written by Rev. Henry B Copp. Dated April 4th, 1876. Historical Archives of First United Methodist Church, Gilford, NH.

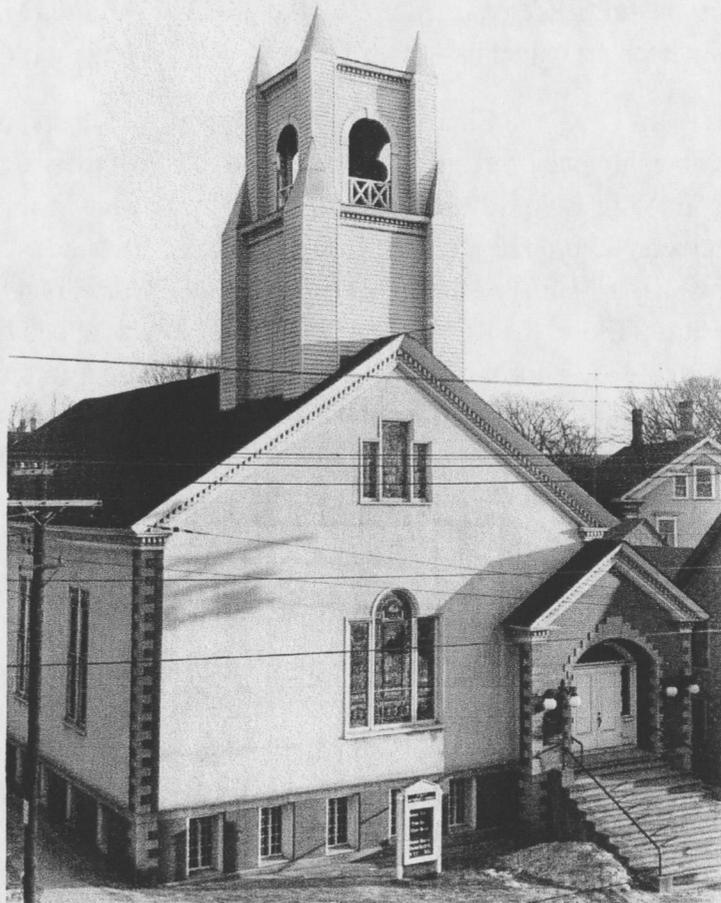
²⁰ Historical papers from Rev. Victoria Wood Parrish. From information recorded in the Conference Journal of 1893 (NH Conference of the Methodist Church), p. 389; also p. 411.

the elderly John Quincy and Lettice Adams, which brought him to be an integral part of the establishment of the Laconia Home for the Aged [Taylor Home].²¹

When Rev. A. M. Shattuck (1911-1916) was pastor, a parsonage at 27 Adams Street was purchased from Alfred E. Picard. The date was July 8, 1914. Mr. Mark M. Robinson was noted first in the list of Trustees on the Deed.²²

As James Nelson Seaver began his pastorate in 1919, pastor and people realized the need for a modern church edifice "to serve the present age",²³ and by his leadership, and their faithful cooperation and sacrificial effort, the Church was completely remodeled inside and finished in stucco, brick

and cast stone on the exterior. The building was raised and a large social hall with stage, kitchen and primary department quarters built underneath. New plumbing and heating fixtures made the building more useable and comfortable. The interior was also artistically redecorated with new colored glass windows, new pews, a new chancel area and other changes made including a choir room and a Pastor's room. The renovations were completed and on May 13, 1923 the church was rededicated in time to host the New Hampshire Annual Conference of the Methodist church in 1924. The total



results gave the Parish a fine church which was valued at about \$50,000. In connection with this renovation, fire again had to be reckoned with. Second-hand pews had been bought from the Knights of Columbus for \$400 and stored temporarily in the Dr. King

²¹ *Taylor Community*, David Bonhurst Hart, 2007.

²² Deed Homestead Warranty Alfred E. Picard to Mark M. Robinson et als. Received July 8, 1914, 10.50 am Recorded Book 139 Page 596 Martin B. Plummer Register. Deed held in First United Methodist Church files.

²³ A Brief History. by Rev. Franklin P. Frye, 1935. Church Archival Records.

barn on Pleasant Street. Just before they were to be placed, the storage building burned—and the pews with it. There was no insurance to cover them and new pews had to be purchased at a cost of \$3,100.

During the pastorate of Joseph Simpson, 1925-1930, a new Parsonage was secured at 46 Pine Street and paid for by the sale of the old one on Adams Street along with an additional \$3700 raised through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Simpson largely through church suppers. The property cost about \$7500. It is "Rated among the best parsonages of the New Hampshire Conference."²⁴

"Under the pastorates of J.N. Seaver and Joseph Simpson there was considerable growth in spiritual and material strength which helped this fine group of Christian people stand up very well under the difficulties of the depression years which became acute during the pastorate of H. Carl Steinheimer in 1930-34 and continued with slight abatement through the year and a half of the present pastorate...Rev. Frye"²⁵ The name of the church became First Methodist Church in 1932 when the word Episcopal was dropped from the denominational name.

Under Rev. Frye, the 75th Anniversary of the church was observed in 1935. He noted that the Mother's Club of the church refinished the walls of the Social Hall and Primary Department. He further noted that: "We have some 300 members, many additional friends and adherents, very good church property, a growing Church School, two large and excellent choirs, a spirit of fine fellowship, and a determination to build a Christlike Character and a Christlike World under the leadership of our Lord and Master." Also, he noted that the church purchased, just prior to the anniversary, an ample supply of the new Methodist Hymnals and the Sunday School presented a beautiful brass cross for the Communion Table.

Conference of 1940 found \$6, 175 of the original mortgage of \$15,000 from the repairs of 1919-23 still unpaid. The Ladies' Aid Society had taken on the responsibility of paying the interest and over the years it was estimated they had paid the equivalent of this indebtedness! In 1940 by action of the Quarterly Conferences of First and Gilford Methodist Churches, and by authorization of resident Bishop G. Bromley Oxam and Dist. Supt. H. Daniel Harver, the Gilford Methodist Church was merged with First Church in 1940 and its physical assets became the property of the latter organization. Six members were also transferred to First Church. Through this action approximately \$3,000 came to First Church. Encouraged by this 'windfall', First Church enthusiastically set itself to raise \$3000 in subscriptions, visualizing by the use of candles the progress of the

²⁴ Ibid. Frye. Pg. 1.

²⁵ Ibid. Pg. 2.

campaign. The goal was reached almost entirely without solicitations, and paid without shrinkage. On March 28, 1943 the mortgage was burned.

On Sept 29, 1948 a new organ was installed and on Jan. 16, 1949, Bishop John Wesley Lord dedicated the new Wurlitzer Electronic Organ and a set of Maas chimes, the latter having been given in memory of their father, Frank S. Willey by Rachel W. Matheson and Floyd M. Willey. A special Hymn of dedication was written by the Rev. Frank Fletcher, "Sound Forth O Organ". Mrs. Esther Hale was the organist.²⁶

During those years, under the pastorate of Rev. Fletcher, the church continued to grow with increased membership at all levels: with a large Woman's Society, an active Mothers Club and an adult Fellowship known as the Odd and Evens Club. Rev. Fletcher also served the Methodist churches of Lakeport and the Weirs—conducting three services on Sunday morning. He retired from this church in 1952 and later returned to Laconia, making his home at the Taylor Home. He was also the Poet Laureate of the New Hampshire Methodist Conference.



In July 1958, the church purchased the Laura Corriveau property immediately in back of the church and to the west of the church. The building behind the church on Baldwin Street was razed and the land converted into a much needed parking lot. On August 1, 1958 the so called Wells Property, immediately west of the parking lot, on Baldwin Street, was purchased. During the summer of 1959 this house at 17 Baldwin Street was turned into a Parish House and was dedicated as such at the 100th Anniversary celebration of the church on February 14, 1960. At that time the Rev. Louis Moulton (1952-1961) reported that the membership was 430 members, a record attendance of 192 in Sunday School, a Youth Fellowship of 30 in attendance, nearly 100 members of the Women's Society of Christian Service, an active Mothers Group, and a 'wide-awake' young adult group known as The Friendly Fellowship. The Records showed that 1,600 people had joined the church in its 100 year history.²⁷

²⁶ Supplementary Information by Rev. Frank Fletcher, Pastor of First Methodist Episcopal Church of Laconia from 1940 to 1952.

²⁷ Historical Record First Methodist Church written for the 100th Anniversary, at Laconia NH. By Lewis H. Moulton Pastor from 1952-61.

The New Church in Gilford

In early 1966 when Rev. Frank Gulinello, Jr. was pastor, Laconia City Council voted to become a part of the federal program called "Downtown Revitalization and Urban Renewal". It was termed "Winnepesaukee River Urban Renewal project", locally. The church property was included in this district and was deemed suitable for a high-rise elderly housing unit by the Laconia Housing and Redevelopment Authority. In November of 1967, the church building and all property was purchased by the Laconia Housing and Redevelopment Authority. The last service was held Nov. 5, 1967 at 11:00. Our friends in the Jewish Community, Temple B'nai Israel, on Court Street, offered their facilities for our services and Sunday School and we gratefully worshipped there until August 3, 1969. The 1875 1,000 lb. bell was given back to the church by Richard L. Cousineau of Rochester, the demolition Constructor, and it was stored in the Kolb barn for several years.

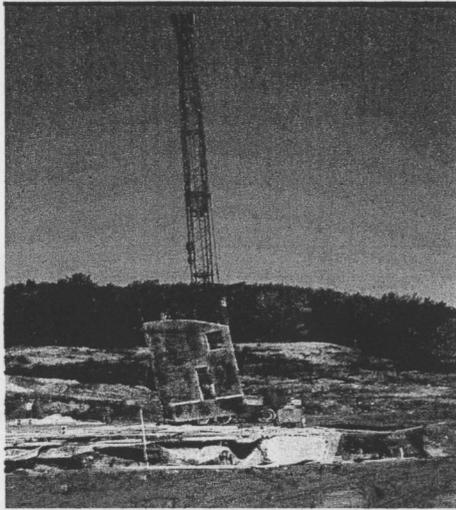


1967-Photo courtesy of Laconia Library Photo Collection

When looking for a site for the new church, a parcel of land on north Main Street was considered but then Royal and Verna Smith of Gilford—long time church members—came to the rescue. Their farm, High Maples, which was located on Morrill Street, had been cut in half by the new Rt. 3-11 by-pass. They generously donated part of their land for the new church site which would be located on Gilford Avenue as a memorial to their parents, Samuel W. and Winifred Page Smith and Fred W. and Ethel Collins Friend. The transfer of this parcel was expedited so the groundbreaking and subsequent construction could start as soon as possible. The surrounding 116.3 acres was also purchased from them by the church for \$22, 396.45 with the deed dated March 29, 1968.

Ground breaking services for the new structure were held June 30, 1968, in conjunction with the City of Laconia's Diamond Jubilee. That same year, the name was changed from First Methodist Church to First United Methodist Church when the United Brethren and Methodist Churches united.

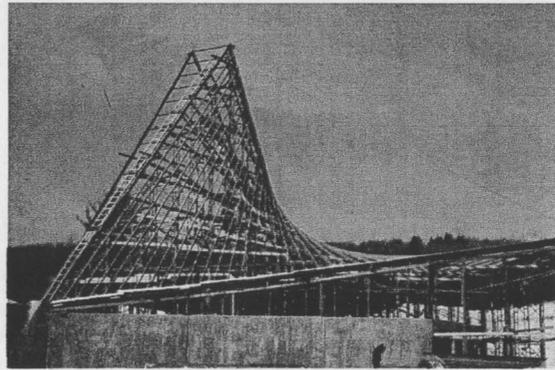
The building Committee chose Mr. Daniel Tully of Melrose, Mass., a graduate of M.I.T. and the Rhode Island School of Design, as the architect. He had designed 9 churches one of which was Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Church in Lakeport (1965). A



The first wall is put in place.

major fund drive was conducted in April 1967, headed up by Rev. Gordon Merritt from the Board of Missions in Philadelphia as the professional fund raiser. Edmund Sullivan and Maurice Simond were the General Chairpersons for the fund drive. By the end of April, \$61, 440 had been pledged by 127 people. In October of 1967, Rev. Frank Gulinello wrote, "Our new building is more than stone and wood. It is an idea, an expression of Our faith, symbol of the Christian spirit in the world of men. Its function will be to nurture the people that come into its doors and send them to the mission God's love requires of the world."²⁸

In the Church Newsletter of January 1969, it was reported that steady progress on the new building was being made. All the exterior concrete walls were solidly on their foundations, firmly welded together and back-filled. Most of the interior concrete block and stud walls were also in place. The roofs of the two educational wings and fellowship hall were closed in and a temporary roof coating (for the winter) had been applied. "It is hopeful that the main sanctuary roof will go on this winter."²⁹ In the April newsletter, the following is written by Bob Pierce, Chairman of the Building Committee, "the two hyperbolic parabolas that form the modern, unique sweeping sanctuary roof are causing great interest and discussion. Although the roof is not complete, its shape is readily apparent. The fellowship hall committee has solicited and ordered equipment to virtually complete the kitchen. Funds for the equipment were raised by the Women's Society of Christian Service, and gifts. Church pews and an organ have been ordered."



Hyperbolic parabolas in place are part of the roof-line

The first service in the new building was held August 3, 1969 in the Fellowship Hall and the Consecration Service was October 5, 1969 with Bishop James Matthews as

²⁸ First United Methodist Church Newsletter. October 1967.

²⁹ First United Methodist Church Newsletter. Written by building committee chairman, Bob Pierce. January 1969.

the speaker. The sanctuary had been completed but much work still remained to be done on the educational wings.

A Dedicatory Recital was given Friday evening, Oct. 10, 1969 by renowned organist and composer V. Earl Copes. The new organ was a Saville 2-manual organ. The 31 rank instrument was noted to be the largest electronically generated church instrument in northern New England. The Maas memorial chimes were also in use from the old church. The next day, Methodist musicians from the New Hampshire Conference attended an all day workshop with Mr. Copes as the workshop leader.

Symbolism in the church sanctuary includes the following:

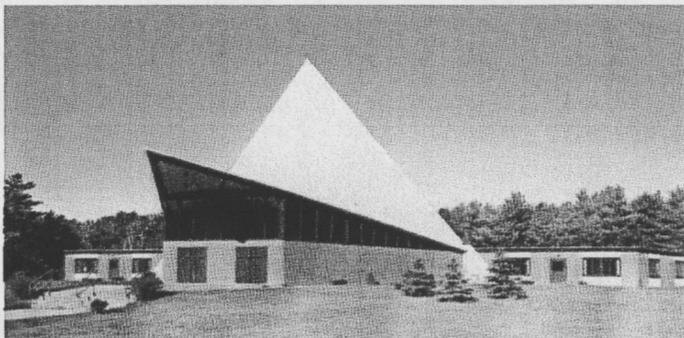
- Church-in-the-round. The central focus is on the communion table and the “circle symbolizes the continuance of unity and equality.”
- Up-swinging-roof symbolizes the uplifting of one’s life under the protection and guidance of our God’s love.
- Communion/Altar Table and Baptismal Font. The intertwining of the metal spokes on the base remind us of the nets used by the Disciples in their occupation as fishermen.
- Pulpit. The prominent pulpit is formed like the bow of a boat from which Jesus preached many times.
- Cross. The suspended cross is designed with the three metal rods to symbolize the Trinity and the circular meshing around the rods represents the Crown of Thorns Jesus wore at His crucifixion. The cross is designed so that it may be viewed anywhere within the church without its symbolism being distorted or destroyed.



View of interior of church.

The sanctuary was designed to be flexible in its use and function with the elements being moveable and removable. It can accommodate 300 persons. The East and West educational and administrative wings include large flexible rooms for all purposes. The Educational Wing was completed with funds given for this purpose by Mrs. Effie Scott Smith.

In June 1972, only \$53 of the \$1, 253 per month in mortgage payments was being applied to the debt of well over \$250,000. Under the leadership of Rev. David Bell, the Pine Street parsonage was sold relieving the second mortgage and a mortgage burning



Post card of the church in the early 1970s

was held in March 1973. Next the collateral loan was paid off by the sale of stocks and special collections. Finally, a program of paying the mortgage was established and by 1975 a new feeling, where financial matters were not the overriding issue, began to emerge. Slowly interest in completing the building saw first the lounge with its Franklin stove was completed and then the Day Care Wing.³⁰

In the early 1970s an average of 25 persons joined the church each year bringing new life, interest and increased attendance at worship and church school programs. The 2,000th person joined the church in December of 1976. Small groups emerged as viable ways to meet needs for Bible Study, prayer, dealing with life as a single adult, and men's fellowship. Because of the church's setting the overnight retreat became a useful tool and as many as 14 overnights were held in 1976 by Confirmation Class, youth groups, clergy support groups and study groups.

In 1977, the church hosted the New Hampshire Annual Conference—May 12-15. All of the churches in New Hampshire gathered to worship and conduct necessary business. Bishop Edward G. Carroll was presiding. Jan Kolb was Lay Leader and Jack Kirk was Host Committee Chairman. On Sunday May 15, the morning worship service was held at Gilford Middle-High School with the sermon by Bishop Carroll and service music a setting of Duke Ellington's Sacred Concert directed by Robert Cole, assisted by Mrs. Betty Welch. The Laconia Stage Band and First United Methodist Church Choir participated.

In the early 1980s, the Rev. Christopher Ives (1980-1986) and his family were appointed to First Church. There was no parsonage, as it had been sold in the 70's and no suitable rentals were available for a family with four teenagers, a dog and a cat. It was decided that a new parsonage should be built on church property. The Church Parsonage Committee co-chairs were Marian Hall and Nancy Marcoux. They worked with Karl Reitz, Hoyt Hall, Rev. Chris Ives, June Symington, Jim Rupert, Barbara French, Dennis Wood, David Witham, Byron Brooks, David Lund and Kathy Reitz. This group developed plans for the house, determined a time table and the work to be done. The four

³⁰ NH Conference Annual Conference Program Booklet. May 1977.

bedroom, energy-efficient home was designed by Marian Hall, who volunteered to be General Contractor.

The ground-breaking took place on March 11, 1984 at the location where the parsonage was to be built, approximately 100 yards from the church on the land donated by the Royal Smith Family. The construction took place between March and early October. Marian volunteered over 1,000 hours at the site and sixty or more church members volunteered a total of 2,500 hours of work on the parsonage. Some of the specialists were Hoyt Hall, Assistant General Contractor; Cedric Witham, electrician; Clem Cummings, who installed the heating system; Rick Fields, the vinyl siding; Fred Clark, who built and installed stair railings; plumbing was done by Tom and Nancy Marcoux, and bulldozing was done by Dennis Moore.

Area businessmen contracted to build the parsonage were Mid-King Construction, Seeley White, T&L Concrete Works, Lyman & Sons, Don's Tree Service, Gerrity Lumber, Energy Improvements of Concord, Mike Eithier, B&B Masons and Matheson's Floor Covering.

The new parsonage was consecrated and dedicated on Sunday, October 14, 1984. Rev. Dr. James Rupert performed the ceremonies with the assistance of Rev. Dr.

George W. Bashore, Resident Bishop of the Boston Area of the United Methodist Church. A tea was held after the consecration and all were encouraged to stay for a special music presentation by the United Methodist Church Choirs celebrating the church's Bicentennial. The total cost of the project came to \$75,000.

The church celebrated the 200th Anniversary of the founding of Methodism at the same time the parsonage was dedicated, October 14, 1984. The dedication at 6 PM was followed by a Bicentennial Festival of Hymns. A massed choir, including singers from the Gilford Community Church as well as area Methodist churches, sang arrangements of Wesley Hymns, an arrangement of Psalm 17, and included was much congregational singing. Also a narration of the events surrounding the early history of the Methodist Church was read and Bishop George Bashore spoke.

In the late 1980s, Rev. William Gardei (1986-1992) was appointed pastor. Music and the arts flourished with a strong Sacred Dance Choir, a strong Wesley Choir and the purchase of a new grand piano for the sanctuary. The piano that we had been using was loaned by the New Hampshire Music Festival and was returned to Plymouth as we were no longer hosting the group. Jim Rupert was key in researching the best piano and traveling to Symphony Hall in Boston to procure one of their practice pianos, a Baldwin



Parsonage shortly after completion.

events such as the Church Auction, an annual event since the ministry of Rev. Halvorson. She has encouraged strong lay leadership and much has been accomplished in building and in spiritual growth.

Continued upgrades have been done to the church building in part due to a successful Conference-wide campaign called Together for Tomorrow in which First Church exceeded the goal that was set and thus garnered additional funds. The church voted that funds raised would be split between capital needs and missions. New front doors, a new kitchen stove, a handicap bathroom, major upgrades to the heating system and upgrade to the fire alarm and safety systems have been completed.

During the ten years of Vickie's ministry, the church has fulfilled its obligations to the Conference for Mission Shares every year but one and a feeling of relief has prevailed at being financially secure. The Wesley Woods Senior Housing project on the acreage behind the church was completed in 2007 by The Deaconess Abundant Life Communities and now has 8 houses sponsored by The Preacher's Aid Society for retired pastors and 14 houses that others

have purchased. Their Community Room is located in the church building in the rooms formerly occupied by first Lakes Region Daycare then Headstart starting in 1986 and in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Lakes Region Day Care again. The residents of Wesley Woods have greatly added both in numbers and in talents to the ministry of the church.

The total number of persons who have joined First United Methodist Church since its founding in 1861 is two-thousand five hundred and thirty-three.



Rev. Vickie Wood Parrish and Rev. Herb Taylor at Wesley Woods ground breaking.

Chapter IV

Class Meetings and Sunday School

Class meetings were a central part of the development of the Methodist Church, both in England and in America.

When John and Charles Wesley were students at Oxford, they started a group called the Holy Club, students who met together for mutual accountability and spiritual growth. Even though they were all members of the Church of England, and remained so, this class meeting system was carried into the Methodist movement.

In England, Methodists worshiped in the churches, but also in meetings held in fields, factories, prisons and wherever people could meet with an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. However, Wesley felt that it was important for people to meet together more often than they could worship so they could grow spiritually. This became the start of the class meeting system.

The classes were especially important in America, both before and after the Revolution. Because there were few ordained ministers, especially after the break with England and the Church of England in 1784, the clergy who were available “rode the circuit”, traveling in a circle of towns on a three month rotation. They would come into town, lead worship, share the communion, hold baptisms, weddings and funerals, organize class meetings, and move to the next town, returning three months later to worship and meet with the classes.

In the meantime, class leaders met at least weekly with their classes. After prayer and singing, the question would be asked, “How is it with your soul?” Members would talk about their challenges and joys. Class members would hold each other accountable for their actions. If someone neglected to come to the class meeting, someone would visit them. If a person was having family problems, moral issues, etc., the class members were committed to helping them – and challenging them. The pastor would require attendance at the meetings between his visits. Anyone who did not attend a certain number of times could not receive the sacraments. Attendance at class meetings was a sign of commitment to Christ and to the Methodist community.

The church in Laconia developed out of the class meeting system. We know that there were functioning classes before the church was built. Various pastors came to preach and lead worship that first year, but the energy of the church went into establishing classes for all ages. Today we would call them Sunday School classes, but in

1860, they would have been a combination of study, prayer and accountability. "How is it with your soul?" was still the central question.

Early Methodism in Meredith Bridge (now Laconia) is recorded in 1831. Fifty five names appear, apparently of members of the class. In 1832, there seem to have been two classes, one for Meredith Bridge and one for Lake Village and Gilford. The class leaders were Mr. Samuel K. Baldwin "a man of much influence among the people" and Mr. Samuel Bartlett. These early efforts of the Methodists died out in 1839.

When the church was formed in 1860 and was recognized in 1861, classes again were formed for all ages. A history of that time written by Rev. George Norris (pastor 1868-71) states, "The church became established as one of the permanent institutions of the place despite the heavy drain which the war made upon us taking away many of the class which we could most illy spare, that is the young men of the place. Many of whom

G.W. H. Clarke reported June 18, 1861, that "we number in all connected with the School some more than 100...we have good reason to believe that one connected with our school has been reclaimed from a state of backsliding and now is a promising member and teacher in our school; another has given good evidence of conversion; to God be all the praise. Our school is filling up quite rapidly and we are looking and praying for a gracious revival. We have great reason to be encouraged by this branch of our work."

In early days the classes were generally split into men's and ladies classes. They had an organizational structure—President, Secretary and Treasurer. Each class collected their own money and had a yearly general meeting and social.

In 1889, under the pastorate of Rev. Silas Quimby, the church meeting schedule was as follows:
Class Meeting Friday 7:30; Sunday Service 11:00;

Holiness Meeting 2:30; Young Peoples Meeting 6:30; Regular Prayer Meeting 7:30; Prayer Tuesday Evening. The Young Peoples meeting came to be called Epworth League and in the 1940s became MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship).



First Grade Class 1964-65 held in the Parish House

Average Sunday School attendance at First Church from 1941 to 1960 rose along with church membership. Average attendance in Sunday School in 1941 was 80 and it

dipped in 1945-47 to 42 even though enrollment was 180. Church membership in 1940 was 330. In 1950 the average attendance at Sunday School was 66 and the enrollment was 142. Church membership at that time was about 325. Between 1950 and 1955 Sunday School

attendance increased to 91 students and by 1960, Sunday School enrollment was 350 while 160 was the average attendance. Church membership in 1960 was close to 450. It's no wonder that the church purchased additional property on Baldwin Street in 1958 to make room for more Sunday School Classes!

Recollections by Wendy Jordan and Joyce Cummings include "being taught by really nice teachers (Miss Proctor and Mrs. Stickney) and being able to play on the stage in Fellowship Hall when classes were over. Joyce and Wendy also remember being in church each Sunday and drawing on cards with the pencils in the pews."

When the new church in Gilford was planned, it contained a Sunday School wing. After the move to Gilford in 1969 it took some time until classrooms were finished. Some of the classes were held in the Fellowship Hall using dividers.

By 1974 the wings were completed and there was an adult class, preschool, kindergarten 1st grade, 2nd-3rd, 4th, 5th-6th, Jr. High and High School.

In the 1980s attendance began to fall and fewer children were brought to Sunday School. Possibly having to be driven to church made it more inconvenient for parents to get their children to Sunday School. In 1985, average attendance was 50. By the year 2000, average attendance was 40. The children continued to have meaningful classes and yearly pageants. In 1991, a full-fledged musical, "Wise Guys and Starry Skies" was staged by the Sunday School Children with an evening performance as well as a performance during worship. It was repeated by a different group of children in 1997.

Recently, classes consist of K-1, 2-3-4, and 5-7. There is an adult class before church but Sunday School is during worship. The children leave for "Faith Quest" after the children's sermon and are picked up by parents when worship ends.

In 2011, we have an established worshipping community. Being a part of a class is no longer central in the life of all church members. However, we still have Sunday School classes for all ages, plus midweek classes for those who wish to learn. There is a longing for accountability as a means of support as we face the challenges of life. "How is it with your soul?" is still an important question.



Kindergarten class at Parish House-
Joyce Cummings Keyser Cntr back--
Who are others?

Chapter V

Women's Ministry

Ladies Aid Society/Women's Society of Christian Service

Within the Methodist tradition, the Ladies Aid Society formed to raise money to supplement the church budget as well as for learning and social activities. The women were very important in contributing monetarily to the church.

Our local church was no different. Most of the women in the church belonged to the Ladies Aid Society. They paid a small monthly dues and had suppers and rummage sales to raise funds for the church. Many embellishments and improvements were done by the faithfulness of the women of the church.

In 1940 when Rev. Frank Fletcher became pastor, he found that the Ladies Aid Society, who had assumed the responsibility of paying the interest on the \$15,000 note



L to R Rachel Matheson, Pauline Elliott, Linda Barney, Betty Farnsworth or Barras, Mary Shorey, Vera Tucker, Dottie Williams, Kay Shorey, Louise Goodall, Edith Colby, Esther Clark, Ivy Cutting. Standing—Susan Fletcher.

for the 1923 renovations, had paid “more than the note itself”. In those days, \$15,000 was a lot of money. In comparison—in 1930 the pastor’s weekly salary was \$12.

Besides fundraiser’s, the women held social events and heard missionaries speak. A photograph in the church archives from

1944 shows a ladies theater production possibly relating to the late 1800s. The women are pictured on the stage in the Fellowship Hall which was located in the basement of the church.

Ginny Simond remembers preparing many chicken pie suppers in the kitchen of the old church. She began being active in the ladies group after her marriage to Maurice in 1947. She says, in those days, very few women worked outside the home and they put their energies into helping the church and raising their children.

In the early 1940s the name of Ladies Aid Society was changed to Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS) throughout the Methodist denomination. The Laconia WSCS continued the good work of the Ladies Aid Society. Three of the original members at that time were Mrs. Helen M. Kimball, Mrs. Florence B Croteau, and Mrs. Bernice B. Newell. These three were honored for their 30-year membership at a tea in 1960.

Each year the group held a Christmas Fair with many offerings. In a newspaper article from The Citizen dated November 1, 1961, the dates of Nov. 16, 17, and 18 were publicized. Ruth Hernandez was chairman of the event and the following departments were noted: Christmas, Country Store, Parcel Post and White Elephant, doll clothes, aprons, toys, jewelry, and a hand made goods table. There was a shopper's luncheon on Friday and a Chicken Pie Supper on Saturday

As preparations were made for the building of the new church in Gilford, the WSCS and the Ladies Sewing Group determined to raise enough money to fully equip the kitchen with brand-new equipment. Funds were raised through chicken pie suppers, church fairs and many rummage sales. The goal was reached and all was installed when the church opened in August of 1969. In the new kitchen, chicken pie suppers continued to be prepared. This local fare was famous in the community.

In the early 1960s the name was changed from WSCS to United Methodist Women (UMW). Each year a Program Calendar was prepared and the women enjoyed guest speakers, sacred music, filmstrips and films, a play—Come to the Cross in 1969 presented by Ruth Johnson with musicians and sacred dancers.

As time went on the women continued to raise money to contribute monetarily to the church and to buy Sunday School equipment. By the mid 80s, the number of active women had dwindled because more women were working full-time and many of the stalwarts were getting older. The UMW was discontinued in 1986.

Ladies Sewing Group

The sewing group has met to prepare for the annual Christmas bazaar/fair for many years. When there was no longer a larger group of women, the Tuesday Sewing group became the driving force behind the Christmas Fairs and was the only social group for women in the church.



Sewing Group-1977-Back: M. Parsons, A. Lunn, G.Hull, M.?, B.Newell, V. Smith, R. Hernandez. Middle: M. Philbrick, R. Vaughn, H. O'Shea, R. Johnson, L. Kennedy, L. Simington, E.Leazor. Front: E. Clark, M. Elliott, R. Humphrey, E. Milberg, P. Chapman, E. Anderson.

This group continues to meet each Tuesday morning from September to May, making various crafts, knit goods, and hand sewn items that are sold at the Fair. After their sewing sessions, they enjoy a social time with lunch and a shared dessert.

Chicken Pie

A dish Ginny Simond remembers. Whether you make it with biscuit or pie-crust topping, everybody will love it.

Chicken Pie With Crust

2 cut-up broiler/fryers	¼ t. marjoram
1 large onion, quartered	2 t. salt
2-3 cups water	1 t. pepper
¼ t. rosemary	1/3 cup butter
½ t. thyme	1/3 cup flour
1 cup cream	2 chicken Bouillon cubes

Put chicken into pot with onion. Add water to cover, rosemary, thyme, marjoram, 1 t. salt, and ½ t. pepper. Bring to boil and simmer, covered, for about 45 minutes or until chicken is cooked. Drain chicken and reserve broth. Remove bones and skin from chicken pieces and cut meat into bit-sized chunks. Return chicken and bouillon cubes to pot. Remove 1 ½ cups broth from pot. Melt butter in saucepan and blend in flour. Gradually add hot broth and cream, stirring constantly until thickened and smooth. Add remaining 1 t. salt and ½ t. pepper. Pour sauce over chicken, add more broth if necessary. Place in 9 x 13 pan then cover with crust of choice.

Biscuit Crust

2 cups flour
7 tablespoons of chicken fat or shortening
1 teaspoon salt
3 teaspoons baking power
1 cup milk

Mix together, roll into crust to fit 9 x 13 pan. Cook in 450 degrees oven for 10 minutes then reduce to 375 degrees for 30 minutes.

Chapter VI

Music for Worship

Musical Instruments

Organ

The first organ purchased for the church was made by William Stevens of Boston and was purchased in September of 1873 at a cost of about \$1100. With the cost of transport and the train fare for Mr. Stevens and Mr. Davis along with their board, the total cost was \$1200. The Stevens brothers were well-known organ builders. At one time there were 4 Stevens organs in Laconia, the Methodist church, the former South Baptist building, the Congregational church [former building, now the Evangelical Baptist across the Street from the railroad station], that organ was dismantled in the 50s. South Baptist organ burned when the first building burned and was replaced later with the present building. And St. Joseph Roman Catholic church was the other Stevens organ and it is still in the present building. The previous building was on Messer St. and the organ was bought for that building and moved to the present building when it was built about 1932.

On Sept 29, 1948 an electronic organ was installed (the pipes from the old organ were not removed) and on Jan. 16, 1949, Bishop John Wesley Lord dedicated the new Wurlitzer Electronic Organ and a set of Maas chimes, the latter being given in memory of their father, Frank S. Willey by Rachel W. Matheson and Floyd M. Willey. A special Hymn of dedication was written by the Rev. Frank Fletcher, "Sound Forth O Organ". Mrs. Esther Hale was the organist.³²

When the new church was built in Gilford in 1968-69, a new organ was needed. The new organ was a Saville 2-manual organ. The 31 rank instrument was noted to be the largest electronically generated church instrument in northern New England. The Maas memorial chimes were also installed from the old church. A Dedicatory Recital was given Friday evening, Oct. 10, 1969 by renowned organist and composer V. Earl Copes. At that time, Carol Pierce was the church organist.

Our current organ was purchased in January of 2000 to replace the 1969 organ. Betty Welch was the organist and when she would try to play certain keys they wouldn't make a sound or would make unusual sounds. Her husband, Ford, made numerous repairs but it was time to give up on the old Saville. A new Rogers Classic organ was purchased to replace the Saville organ from 1969. Over 75 persons contributed to the organ fund.

³² Supplementary Information by Rev. Frank Fletcher, Pastor of First Methodist Episcopal Church of Laconia from 1940 to 1952.

Piano

In the 1970s and 80s, the sanctuary piano was on loan from the New Hampshire Music Festival. It was returned to Plymouth in the late 80s as we were no longer hosting this group. A suitable piano was needed. Jim Rupert took on the task of researching the best piano to buy and traveled to Symphony Hall in Boston to procure one of their practice pianos, a Baldwin concert grand. Many parishioners donated to the piano fund and a choir concert and rummage sales were held to raise funds. The new piano was dedicated in 1989. It has been used for many events including a concert by noted pianist, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, Professor at Oberlin College in Oberlin Ohio. Jeanne Davis Porter, a member of the church who studied under the professor, arranged for the concert. Betty Welch also gave a concert on organ and piano in March of 2009.

Hand Bells and Hand Chimes

The Hand Bells were purchased with memorials to Ralph Dube, Royal Smith, Robert Stetson, Mary Proctor and in honor of Katie Boyden, and were dedicated May 26, 2002. Additional bells and hand chimes were dedicated May 20, 2004 with memorials to Lois Reynolds and Olin and Doris Ford. Vickie Wood Parrish had been playing hand bells most of her life and introduced the church to this graceful sound when she arranged to borrow bells from the Gilford Community Church. After only a month or two, everyone was enthusiastic and it was decided to use memorial funds to procure two octaves at a cost of around \$4000. There have been one or two choirs going ever since. They play during worship about once a month.



Hallelujah Bells 2010

Choir

First Church has always had at least one choir throughout its history and sometimes two—junior and senior choir. One of the earliest references to the choir is in the writings of Rev. B. W. Chase concerning the one year ministry of G. W. Rowland (1871-1872). He writes, “There were many hindrances to his success—his radical temperance measures did not please the church, which ought to have sustained him; disturbance by the choir whom he sharply reprimanded for whispering....” Perhaps these factors and others, led to his short pastorate.



A photo in our archives taken during Rev. Steinheimer's tenure (1930-1934), shows a youth choir of twenty-eight young people in black robes with white collars. Mrs. Steinheimer, the pastor's wife appears to be the organist and choir director. In 1935, Rev. Franklin Frye writes, "We have a growing church school, two large and excellent choirs, a spirit of fine fellowship..."³³

Betty Welch remembers when she was in high school in the early 1950s, there were 18 to 20 in

the choir which was directed by Mr. Edward Hale. Mrs. Esther Hale was the organist.

In 1962, Betty became choir director. Carol Pierce was the organist and Betty was just out of college at that time. She remembers the choir room at the side of the church and entering the sanctuary near the choir loft.

The new church brought new excitement and new challenges. At first it was decided that the choir should have no choir robes so they would be an integral part of the worshipping community, the church being in-the-round.

To get a sense of what was happening in the church's history in 1969 Alice Beyrent has typed up Betty's report just as she wrote it for the Annual Church Conference. At that time Betty was the Choir Director.

Annual Report 1969---Betty Welch's Report on Worship/Music We look back at those early months of 1969 as a time of much soul-searching. There we were, waiting for that great day when our beautiful new church building would be open to us, but never daring to let one precious Sunday go by without making some effort, however feeble, to make a "joyful noise". In spite of the frustrations—a room which was acoustically dead, a bad piano, a choir which sometimes dwindled to only six or seven, we are grateful for having had the opportunity to pull back a bit and survey the situation. We thought much about the meaning of worship, the place of music in the service, to have a choir or not to have a choir, and what is sacred music really?

³³ Historical Record. Rev. Franklin P. Frye. Ibid.

Then came that wonderful day in August when we were finally able to come together in our new church. The glorious experience of our Consecration Service, on October 5, when we sang "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" in a combined choir, and we Methodists were so proud that it is indeed just that!

Our new 31 – rank Saville Electronic Organ was played in a Dedicatory Recital on October 10 by Mr. V. Earle Copes. On October 11 Mr. Copes, Mrs. Robert Pierce and Mrs. Whitman Ide conducted a day-long workshop on church music. This, the first of a series of such workshops in the New Hampshire conference, was attended by 32 choir directors, organists, and interested lay people. We shared our ideas, as well as our problems, and one came away with a warm feeling that there are others, after all, who are deeply concerned about music in the church.

And then, the excitement over, we settled down to our regular routine of Sunday services. We were thrilled by the wonderful sound of our new organ, but the choir was rattling around in their section of pews. The call went out, and people responded. We grew— from a maximum of twelve members to an overwhelming group of twenty! Well – sometimes twenty. We are most grateful to those new members, who add so very much. We are also grateful to those old faithful members who were persistent when the director wavered and understanding when she was difficult.

On Sunday, December 14, under the direction of Mrs. Whitman Ide, a combined interfaith choir of approximately 100 voices, sang Vivaldi's "Gloria" and other seasonal music. Our very first Christmas concert was attended by over 600 people.

What about the future? We are neither complacent nor discouraged. Presently we are still lacking enough tenors in the Senior Choir. There is perhaps a place for a youth group, in addition. We are most grateful to Mrs. Pierce for beginning a Junior choir in time for our Christmas services. But we must not stop there. It should be obvious, now that the choir is part of the circle and indeed wearing the same kind of clothes, that what we are really saying is this: the choir is part of the congregation and, more importantly, the congregation is part of the choir. Our ultimate goal is to involve all of the people at times in the music of the church. We will be looking for new ways to do this.

We cannot worship in this magnificent sanctuary, this room which frees us from the old forms of the past, and yet fail to perceive the challenge which it makes to us. As we look for new and more meaningful ways to worship, we will also look for new ways to sing His praise. We will not forget Bach, Handel, Brahms, and Franck; neither will we turn our back on folk music, jazz, or rock, if it can truly be put to use to the Glory of God.

Respectfully submitted, Betty Welch, Choir Director

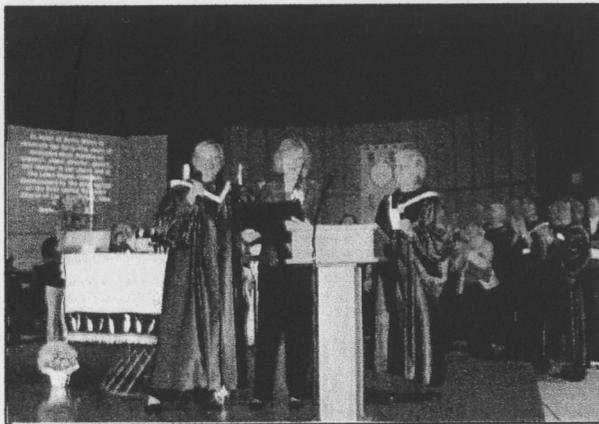
In the early 1980s Douglas Renfroe became choir director and then Judy Buswell. It was decided by the worship committee in 1988 that the choir should have choir robes. The robes were ordered in kits and were sewn by Martha Glidden, the Ladies Sewing Group and others in the congregation. Donations by choir members and others made up most of the cost. The new robes were first worn in 1989 and were a flax colored material in a straight cassock style. Each robe had 2 interchangeable scapulas and a stole to reflect the six colors of the liturgical year---green, red, purple, blue, white and gold.

In 1998, Karen Jordan became choir director full-time after having shared the position with Judy Buswell for about 3 years. The choir has been a part of many events including –In 1969 Vivaldi’s Gloria, in 1971, “A Day of Dancing” by Lloyd Pfautsch at two performances and more recently two gospel concerts, the yearly Community Epiphany service, Christmas Cantatas each year, and of course it has been an inspiration in worship services over the years. The Community Epiphany service has been held each year since 1982.



First row: Betty Welch, Judy Buswell. Second Row: Faith Rupert, Gail Gardei, Polly Stimson, Jessica Keyser, Bonnie Ehmann, Ellen Kirk, Martha Glidden. 3rd row: Nancy Svindland, Edith Wyatt, unknown, Sandy Eberly, Barbara French, Celeste Renfroe, Sharon Lauria. 4th row: Annette Auld, Kristie Ratcliff, John Glidden, Stan Piper, Carol Fitzmaurice, Mary Albert. Back row: Dennis Wood, Cecil Jordan, Jim Rupert, Don Nelson, Jayson McCarter, Dave Reimers, unknown, Paul Stickney

In 2005 dark green choir robes were purchased as the others were getting worn and stained. These lovely robes are graced with only one stole that has the Methodist logo on it. The choir currently averages about 18-20 members. In 2009, the church recognized Betty Welch for her forty seven years of music ministry at First UM Church. A piece of sacred choral music was commissioned in her honor and written by Joseph Martin, one of her favorite composers. The piece is



called *Rhythm of Peace* and is a jazzy upbeat number that was written with Betty in mind. At a worship service in September, followed by a luncheon, this new anthem was sung as a surprise to Betty and the Wesley Choir was joined by a number of members of the Lakes Region Singers for this presentation. A framed copy, signed by the composer, was presented. The inscription reads: In honor of Betty Welch to celebrate her

forty-five years of dedicated music ministry as organist, choral director, pianist and teacher in our church and in the Lakes Region community Commissioned by the

congregation of First United Methodist Church of Laconia-Gilford, New Hampshire. September 28, 2008. The music has been published by Shawnee Press.

The Church Bell

The church bell was purchased in 1875 and weighs about 1,000 pounds. It is made of cast bronze and was cast by Holbrook and Sons of East Medway, Massachusetts. The bell rang out to summon parishioners to Sunday School and worship services each Sunday while in the bell tower of the Union Avenue church.



Rev. Frank Gulinello. Left with Contractor Right.

When the church was demolished in 1968, the bell was returned to the church by the contractor. Since the church wasn't finished it was placed in Kolb's barn.

In the early 70's a yoke was constructed and the bell moved to the church lawn.

In 1976 the people of the church decided to enter a float in the Laconia parade celebrating the 200 year anniversary of our nation. The bell was placed on the float with the theme '200 Years of Religious Freedom—Committed to Christ—Called to Change'. Later that summer it was also in the Gilford Old Home Day Parade. After the parade was over, the bell remained on the trailer which was parked in the church parking lot for a few



1976 Float

days until the bell could be removed. In the meantime, it was stolen, trailer and all! It was later recovered at Bell Oldsmobile in Revere, Mass. Apparently, someone had sold the bell to the automobile agency as an advertising gimmick, having seen the bell still on the trailer. Thankfully, the culprits were caught and punished.

A Memorial Bell Tower was erected in 1999. It is approximately 14 ft high with an upsweeping copper roof and is dedicated in memory of Arthur Roy by the Roy Family. Thus the bell is again returned to a place of honor and can be rung each Sunday to call all in the Gilford neighborhood to services.

with fabrics and garlands and hot punch, cheese and crackers were served to warm the 'travelers' in the December cold. Musical entertainment was served up as well. All servers and greeters were in costume to set the mood. Guests were always addressed by wenches, pages and the Madrigal Court as M'Lord and M'Lady. After their pleasant repast in the ante-room, guests were escorted into the Great Hall (Fellowship Hall), where they were overwhelmed by the hanging candelabra, the long tables set with Old English metalware and being personally greeted at the door by Lord and Lady Hampshire. As they were seated they noticed coppers (pennies) at each place setting. These were later used to donate to the wandering minstrels and beggars. After much music, acting troupes, dancers, and a final musical farewell, the guests were given a piece of fruit as they left the hall to designate the bounty of the season and as a token that the church was giving this lovely gift of musical entertainment to the community. That was the 'spirit' of Madrigal.

Of course, no medieval dinner would be complete without the "Boars Head". As the *Boars Head Carol* was sung by the Madrigal Singers, the litter bearers would bring forth the boar's head whose open mouth contained the required apple. Dick had the honor of finding and fetching a head from a local pig slaughterer, Jed Gilpatrick, in New Hampton. It was the day of the very first Madrigal Dinner and Dick drove over to New Hampton. He was handed the head in a closed carton and put it on the seat beside him in the car. As he was driving back to the church he decided to take a look. What a surprise when he saw two halves of a pig's head! It had been rent in half along with the whole pig's body by the butcher's saw. What to do? Dick thought of the veterinary clinic beside the church and stopped to see if Dr. Michael Ware might be able to sew the poor pig back together. When Dick talked to the receptionist and showed her the inside of the box, she 'freaked out'. However, Mike Ware, who had some expertise from sewing up hapless animal's wounds, did the job and the 'boars head' was splendid for the evening's festivities.

The Madrigal Dinner

Compiled by Alice Beyrent

First produced in 1975 ♦ 25^h Anniversary Production in 2000 ♦ Reproduced in 2008

Greetings

So did it begin, this Celebration of Christmas in 320 AD when the fathers of the Church in Rome chose to convert the pagan festivals of the winter solstice, the birthday of the unconquered sun, into a birthday party for a son more deserving of the honor. And with it, they did maintain, the ancient "laws" for such festivities laid down ages before by the Priest of Cronus,

- 2008 Rick Morten Scrubwomen: Ursula Boutwell, Erin Lovett Sherman
- Lord and Lady Hampshire
 - 1976 Richard Stewart, Judy Stewart
 - 1983 Paul Stickney, Betty Welch
 - 1985 Don Nelson, Bonnie Ehmann
 - 1990 Paul Stickney, Ellen Kirk
 - 1991 Don Nelson, Karen Jordan
 - 1992 Paul Stickney, Ellen Kirk
 - 1994 Paul Stickney, Celeste Renfroe
 - 1996 Don Nelson, Judith Buswell
 - 1997 N. David Witham, Judith Buswell or Bonnie Ehmann
 - 1999 N. David Witham, Carol Fitzmaurice
 - 2008 Scott and Jessica 'J' Alward
- Madrigal Singers – members of the church choir and other community members
- Singers the first year were Richard Stewart, Robert Cole, Dick Ricker, Charlie Beard, Rick Weeks, Gwen Lund, Judy Cole, Jan Kolb, Betty Welch, Lunada Stewart, and Nancy Fields.
- Head Waiters over the years were Karl Reitz, N. David Witham, Dick Walden
- Head Chefs include (over the years) Nancy Svinland, Ruth Hernandez, Leonard and Gwen Hooker, Marian and Hoyt Hall, Annette Auld, Joan Carlson, Rachel and Joel Young, Carl and Lorraine Gebhardt
- Waiters and Waitresses (also known as wenches)
- Dinner staff
- Costumes
- Set Design

Original sets created by Richard Ghertz and Larry Frates in 1975; still in use, also Karl Reitz, Dick Tapply and additional art work: Marilyn Coffin

The Program

- First Fanfare – Processional “Deck the Halls”
- Second Fanfare – Entrance of the Wassail Bowl “Gloucestershire Wassail”

The great bowl of holiday spirits called Wassail came from the Saxon term “Weshael” meaning, to be healthy, a salute that greeted every visitor – friend – or stranger, to pass through the door.

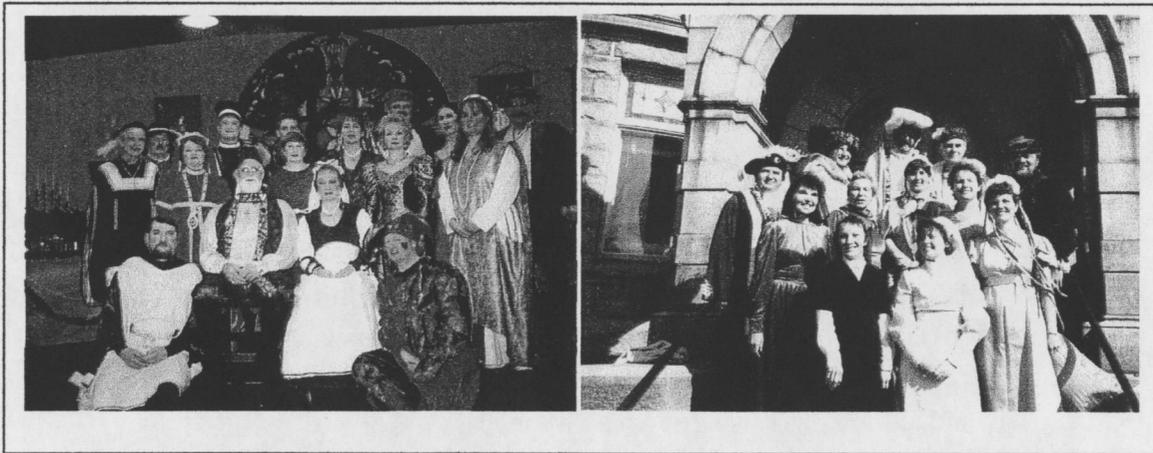
- Third Fanfare – Entrance of the Boar’s Head “The Boar’s Head Carol”

The Boar’s Head, said by some to be a Christian affront upon the Jewish Law banning pork, probably alludes to the great boar Saehrimmer, feasted upon by the armies of the Norse God Odin and more recently represents the conquered Satan himself, “the wild boar out of the woods”, from Psalm 80.

- Fourth Fanfare – Entrance of the Pudding “A Merry Christmas”

The Christmas Pudding first appeared as “furmenty” or “frumenty”, a harvest porridge of boiled wheat grains, milk, and eggs, that was later thickened and baked into shapes to symbolize sacrificial animals with fruit and nuts added to represent the gifts brought by the Magi to the infant Jesus.

- Skit – added beginning in 1985
- Fifth Fanfare – Madrigal Concert
- And so does it come together in this Manor House, centuries of ceremony and tradition, offered to you our guest and to the communion of your senses, a great flame of spirit to delight, to amuse, to entertain you, to warm your soul and leave within you the sparks that shall kindle the flame of countless Christmases to come.



1997—Dick Walden, Dave Witham, Bonnie Ehmann, Peter Ayer, Tom, Cunningham, Paul Stickney, Patte Sarausky, Wayne Ives, Edward Wassell, Elaine Halvorson, Carol Fitzmaurice, Ginny Barunas, Edward Redmond, Melissa McCarthy, Jeanette Wassell, Bill Schoonman

1985--Bonnie Ehmann, Ellen Kirk, Betty Welch, Nancy Svindland, Carole Taylor, Ann Ellen Akerley, Debbie Brown, Don Nelson, Paul Stickney, Rick Weeks, Jim Rupert, Dave Reimers

Wassail Recipe

¼ lb. cinnamon sticks

3 (16 oz) cans frozen orange juice

1/4 lb. cloves

5 gal. cider

5 (46 oz) cans pineapple juice

¼ c. rum extract

2 lb. brown sugar

5 (12 oz cans) frozen lemonade

3 gal. water

Wrap cinnamon sticks and cloves in a cheesecloth bag. Boil in 3 gallons of water for 1 hour. Remove cheesecloth bag. Add brown sugar, cider, pineapple juice, orange juice, lemonade, water and rum extract. Keep hot until ready to serve. Makes 160 eight ounce servings.

*Revised Plum Pudding Recipe (Figgie Pudding)**

(*Revised to remove the suet called for in original recipe. Also original recipe called for the pudding to be baked in coffee tins). Revised by Jane Reep around 1996.

Makes 3 Loaves. Pan size approx 8X4. Should be made at least one week ahead.
Preheat oven to 325 degrees

Place in a large bowl and mix together:

2 c. currants
3c. raisins
3c. red delicious apples peeled and chopped

Add the following and stir in:

2 t. salt
2 t. cinnamon
2 t. allspice
2 t. baking soda
1 t. baking powder

Then stir in: 2 c. granulated sugar

Mix in:

¾ c. vegetable oil
5 c. pre-sifted flour Add one cup at a time, thoroughly mixing and adding water as need—
approx. 2 c. water until you have a thick but not stiff batter.

Spray 3 foil pans with cooking spray. Distribute batter evenly and smooth top.
Place in oven in the middle. Bake 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. After 45 minutes, place foil loosely on top of
pans to avoid burning. Figgie is done when a knife blade inserted comes out clean.

Remove each pan from the oven when it is done baking. Allow to cool at least 30-45
minutes. Loosen on sides, turn over, and remove from pan to cool completely. Leave upside
down on wire rack until thoroughly cool.

Wrap in foil and freeze until ready to use.

Hard Sauce (for topping)

Makes enough for 140 servings

Whip the following with an electric mixer until light and fluffy:

3 lb margarine
6 lb confectioners sugar
3 tbs. vanilla

Holiday Celebrations in the 21st Century

Compiled by Alice Beyrent

After 26 years of Madrigal productions, a change in the type of performances offered to the community was proposed. The original dinner theatre format was maintained.

2001 Wesley Arts and the Madrigal Committee presents *A Christmas Carol*

- Adapted for the stage and directed by Pater Ayer
- Dinner Directors: Sharon Walden and Jane Reep
- Sets: Jessica J. Alward, Mac Keyser
- Cast of 45--Church members, Friends, and Children

2002 *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson

- Director: Peter Ayer
- Producer: Sharon Walden
- Sets: Mac Keyser, Karl Kimball, Dick Walden, kids of cast and crew
- Cast of 47 Church members, Friends, and Children

2003 Streetcar Company presents Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*

- Adapted by Lynn Stevens (The Classic with Music)
- Director: Lynn T Dadian
- Producer: Joanne Morin
- Dinner Theatre Coordinators: Jane Reep, Sharon Walden

2004 Streetcar Company presents *Christmas Around the Corner*

- One Act Play *A Partridge in a Pear Tree* by Lowell Swartzell; holiday music; stories
- Dinner Theatre Coordinators: Jane Reep, Sharon Walden

Dinner Theatre evolved into a Holiday Feast with musical entertainment during dinner followed by a Holiday Concert. This format changed in later years to a Dessert Concert.

2005 Holiday Feast and Lakes Region Singers Christmas Concert

2006 Christmas at the Castle Holiday Dinner and Carter Mountain Brass Band "Season's Greetings" Concert

2007 Holiday Dinner and Carter Mountain Brass Band Concert "An Old Fashioned Christmas"

2008 Streetcar Theatre Company Production of Madrigal Dinner

2009 Dessert Concert with the Carter Mountain Brass Band, "A Christmas Prism"

2010 Dessert Concert with the Carter Mountain Brass Band, "Christmas Sweets"

All Holiday Events took place the first weekend of December.

Other Drama Productions

Mentioned earlier was a drama performed by some of the women of the church in 1940. In the 1960s, Joyce Cummings Keyser remembers an old fashioned Vaudeville-type show being performed on the stage at the Union Avenue Church. Her father, Clem Cummings, dressed as a ballerina.

"You're a Good Man Charlie Brown" took to the stage in April of 1978 as a Dinner Theatre presentation. Directed by Bob Cole, the cast included Cal Kolb as Charlie Brown, Dick Ricker as Linus, Paul Stickney as Schroeder Mary Albert as Lucy, Barb French as Peppermint Patty, and Nancy Fields as Snoopy. It had a three night run with a roast beef buffet and during intermission--dessert.

In 1984, the Wesley Arts Committee was formed by Faith and Jim Rupert and Celeste and Doug Renfro and Debbie Brown. Through the years the membership has expanded and changed. Many productions have occurred under the auspices of this group with the performing aspect of the group being named, Wesley Players. In the early days productions included, *Agnes of God*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Thurber Carnival*, *The Heidi Chronicles*, *A Few Good Men*, and *My Three Sons*. In the 1990s, *Godspell* was performed in the Sanctuary, also *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the late 90s a series of Murder Mystery dessert theater productions drew crowds during the summer months and *Miracle Worker* was also produced. In 1998 an original play, *The Elms*, written and directed by Peter Ayer, displayed the talents of fifteen children and two adults. More recently we have seen *It's Never Too Late* and *Wait Until Dark*. All plays are done with 'open auditions'.

In addition to plays, many concerts have been sponsored by the Wesley Arts Committee as well as art shows and worship dramas. The purpose of the group is to bring drama and arts events to the community that would not otherwise have a venue. Wesley Arts is also an outreach of the church to the community.

Pastors Serving First Church
1861 – 2011

1861	G. W. Clarke	1896	A. L. Smith
1863	W. H. Thomas	1901	C. D. Hills
1863	N. G. Cheney	1904	George B. Goodrich
1864	G. S. Noyes	1905	William A. Loyne
1866	C. W. Miller	1911	A. M. Shattuck
1867	Charles Holman	1916	William Thompson
1868	G. W. Norris	1919	James Nelson Seaver
1871	G. W. Ruland	1925	Joseph Simpson
1872	B. W. Chase	1930	H. Carl Steinheimer
1874	H. B. Copp	1934	Franklin P. Frye
1876	Truman Carter	1940	Frank P. Fletcher
1878	E. R. Wilkins	1952	Louis H. Moulton
1881	H. Woodward	1961	William T. Wallace
1883	S. C. Keeler	1963	Frank Gulinello
1885	W. McLaughlin	1972	David Bell
1888	S. E. Quimby	1980	A. Christopher Ives
1890	J. H. Haines	1986	William Gardel
1892	D. C. Knowles	1992	Huntley Halvorson
	William T. Hill	2000+	Victoria Wood Parrish
1893	William Warren		

The Music Ministry of Betty Welch

I was brought to First Methodist Church, Union Ave., Laconia, by Carrie Smith in order to attend Sunday School sometime in the mid 1940's. I remember well a particular Sunday when during an assembly where there were a sizable number of Sunday schoolers I was asked to play a hymn, which I totally destroyed (a bad beginning for a future organist!) I sang in the choir, directed by Edward Hale through high school. There were 18-20 members at that time. Esther Hale was the organist.

I went away to college for five years, continuing to study the piano, but with no interest in organ lessons.

When I returned to the church in the early sixties I began to direct the choir and Carol Pierce was the organist. Subsequently Carol expressed an interest in teaching me to play organ, and so I began playing the old Wurlitzer electronic organ at the church now and then. But of course, then came Urban Renewal and the demolition of the old church. We were blessed to have the people at Temple B'nai Israel allow us to use their hall for Sunday services while the new Gilford church was under construction.

Ah, the new church! It was an exciting time for all of us. I was on the Building Committee--the worship section. There was much discussion about the design, as you can imagine.. I was all in favor of the "service in the round" idea. A new organ was needed, and with the suggestion of V. Earl Copes, Carol Pierce and I decided we liked the sound of the Saville organ, which was selected. Carol remained as organist and I as choir director until the mid seventies, when I became organist and Bob Cole took the choir director's position. Future choir directors were Doug Renfroe, Judy Buswell, and at present Karen Jordan.

In 1977 our church hosted the Annual Conference.. Bishop Carroll was in attendance. Bob Cole had gotten permission to arrange some of Duke Ellington's "Concert of Sacred Music" numbers (read jazz!) for band and choir. He used some of his high school students in the band; I played piano; and the choir sang. We were a bit apprehensive about how this would all be received (especially by the Bishop.) To our great relief he shared with us that he had been a drummer in his younger years and had sat in with Duke Ellington's orchestra on occasion.

Then there were the years of conducting the sixteen *a cappella* singers for many, many Madrigal Dinners. In 1992, I decided to leave the Madrigal Dinners behind and I founded and directed the Lakes Region Singers, which still continues, but now under the able direction of Karen Jordan. Kelly Cleveland still continues to accompany the group, having been aboard since 1992.

After much soul searching I resigned my position as organist in September of 2010. I have done some subbing since. Over the years I had also taught public school music, given private piano and organ lessons, played for many musicals, but I saved the best job 'til last. It has been a blessing!

Written by Betty Welch

Recollections of Ellen Spurr Cosgrove

My earliest memories of church were kindergarten in 1956. We lived a block from the parsonage. Mom used to let my brother Phil and I walk the block as she watched us meet Nina. Nina Moulton would walk us to the church – Phil went to nursery and I to kindergarten. Mom and Dad, Jean and Franklin Spurr, would meet us after church. As we got older, Sunday school was in the main room – there were dividers. We had a short “church” service at some point during the Sunday School time and also met with our grade levels for lessons. We would then walk upstairs and meet Mom and Dad for church. We also met for classes in a building on the other side of the church parking area in junior high and high school. Some of the students in class with me were Donna Simonds, Kathy Warren, Maureen McDonald, Karen Rollo(?) and Gary Pinard. I can't remember the others.

We attended some of Phil's family activities for the Boy Scouts and Mom's Church Women's groups, Mother-Daughter Dinner. I was in the junior choir and remember meeting at the home of Marilyn Tanny, our choir director, in Lakeport for some rehearsals. One group that I really remember was MYF. We had weekly meetings. At one point the group decided to work with a particular building at the State School. We had some meetings with them and a party. We also worked with the nursery children at times.

When I was close to graduation from high school I remember being told that our church would be torn down for Urban Renewal. I couldn't understand why they would do this. There were disagreements over the design of the new church. Some people even left the church, which I couldn't understand. We remained even though my father would have preferred a New England style church. After we had to leave our old church we attended church in the Jewish Temple community room. The Youth Group visited the new church at times – some of us climbed up on the roof – we also spent time envisioning what the church would be like. We also did other activities within the church and local communities.

After college graduation I began to attend church quite regularly and remember teaching the Kindergarten Sunday School Class. I was also on the Missions Committee. I helped by baking for the fair, coffee hours, suppers, etc. I remember my mother's baking for the fairs – she filled our dining room table with 20 plus dozen rolls, pies, bread, etc. I was married to David Parisi in the church in 1981. I continued to support the church in many ways. There was a Mother's Group, which I joined even though I didn't have children. I enjoyed the group and we did other activities together outside the church. The group included Karen Jordan, Gail Garfield, Tracey Petrozzi and Lynn.

The nineties were a difficult time for me and I was so appreciative of my church family. I remember many days of sadness as my marriage ended and my father, died of ALS in 1991. The church members were so supportive, and my belief in God was strengthened. Mom and I attended church together and worked on the fair and at suppers. At some point I was on the Administrative Council and then the Staff Parish Relations Committee. During this time frame I met my current husband, Mike Cosgrove, and we were married in the church in 1996. Mike and his son Chris have brought me much love and happiness. Mike helped me care for my mother as she died of lung cancer a few months after our marriage. It was a very difficult time, but God, my family, and the church family helped.

I currently attend the church regularly and assist in activities, such as baking for the fair, suppers, coffee hour, and the Hands Across the Table Supper. I have been on the SPRC for years and have enjoyed the challenge of providing the church with an organist twice in as many years. I attend the Administrative Council and assist with other activities. The church and God have played a vital role in my life and will continue to do so as I age.

A Letter from Barbara Smith Turner

One summer day in 2010, I took granddaughters, Madeline (10) and Allena (12) on a family history tour around Laconia and Gilford. The girls had not visited the area since Allan and I moved away five years ago. The plan was to revisit some of the places they had read about in *The High Maples Cookbook*.

As we drove by the site on Union Ave. where the old Methodist Church once stood, I told the girls of a day, more than seventy years ago, when I was taken by my grandmother Friend to the nursery room. It was my first day of Sunday School. I held tightly to her hand when I first saw the circle of children, several of who would become fast friends in the years to come. Ethel and Fred Friend had been active members since early in 1900 when they moved with their daughter, Verna, to the farm in Belmont.

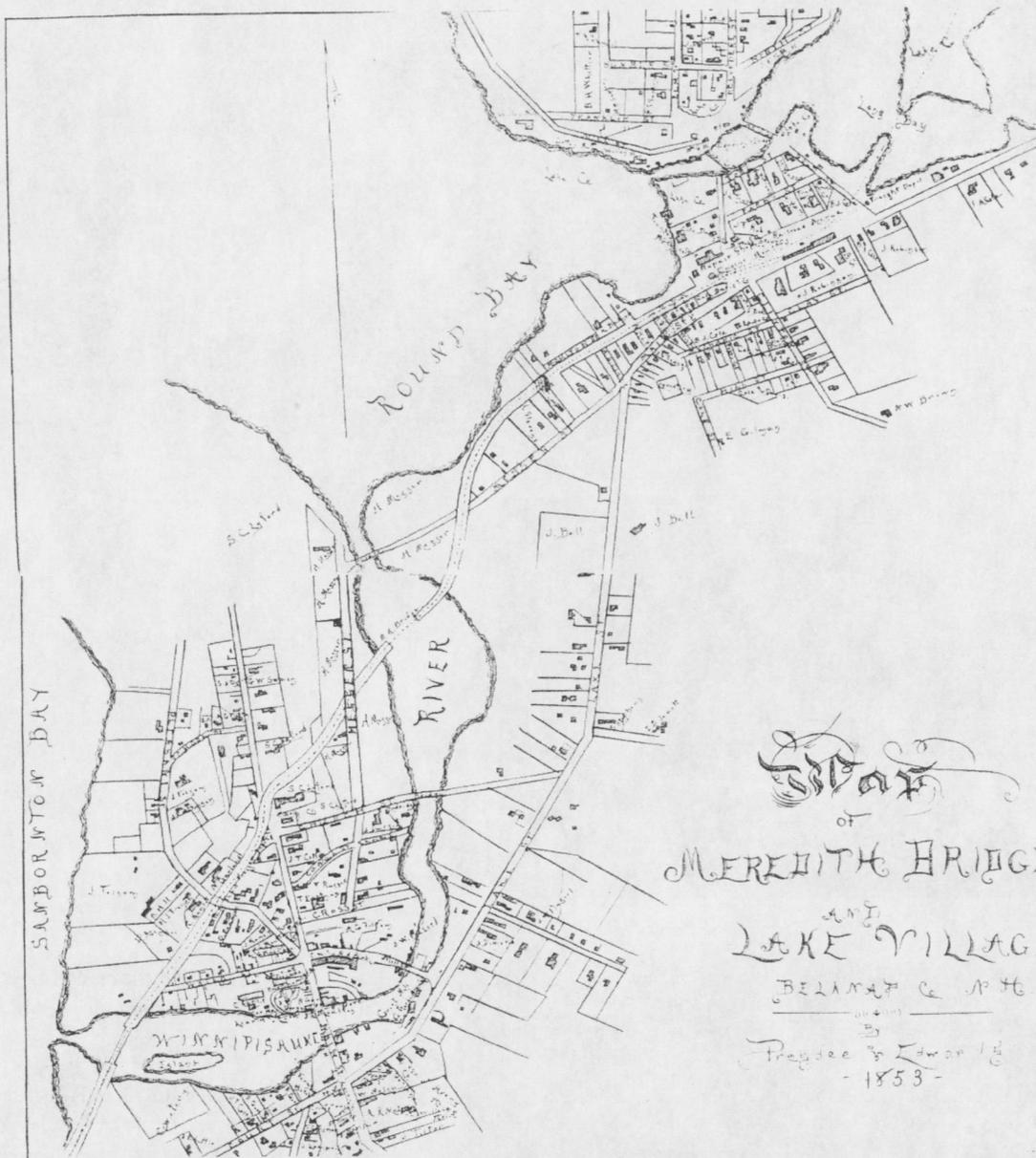
Later, we found ourselves walking around the grounds at the new church. We climbed the path into the woods to see the outdoor worship center, then walked through the trees to the site where the girls' great-great grandfather Sam Smith's sugar house once stood. The girls knew the story of my parents' involvement in the planning and building of the new church. I asked them to picture Verna in the kitchen working on a chicken pie supper, or Royal, supervising the burying of the huge cast iron pots containing beans for the Harvest supper.

Perhaps they don't remember but the girls and cousins attended services with Allan and I when they came to visit. I have a memory of a Christmas Eve or two when pajamas were proper attire for small grandchildren who might have fallen asleep while carols were being sung.

Knowing that they were the 5th generation of their family with a connection to this church, I snapped a photo of them beside the plaque bearing the names of their great-great grandparents in whose name this gift of land was dedicated by Royal and Verna Smith.

Allena and Madeline, granddaughters of Barbara Smith Turner shown with the plaque placed to honor their great-great grandparents, Samuel W. and Winifred Page Smith and Fred W. and Ethel Collins Friend on the grounds of First United Methodist Church.



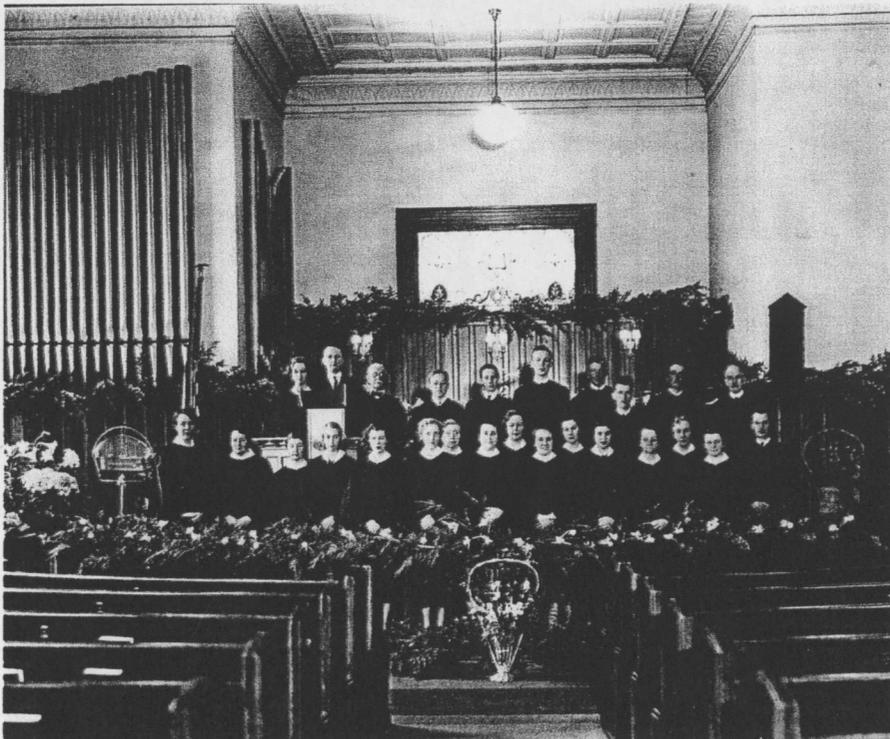


Aerial view of downtown Laconia before urban renewal. The church is shown in the box at left. Photo from the Laconia Library Photo Collection. Used with permission

Winnepesaukee
Campground 1903. The
Laconia House. Forrest
Smith held by Effie Smith
in center rear.



Rev Frank P. Fletcher with the Ladies' Aid
Society 1947.



Methodist Church Choir
1938 (photo supplied by
Lela Corbin)

Back Row L to R-Esther
Hale, Organist; Rev. Frye,
Minister; Mathew Newell;
Bud Chapman; unknown;
? Hayward; Stan Kidder;
Charles Corbin; Mathew
Wyatt; Robert Foss

Front Row L to R-Edna
Newell; Carrie Smith;
unknown; Gladys
Simonds; Barbara Hale;
Abbie Kidder; unknown;
Merle Colby; Ethel
Hayward; Edith Colby;
Alta Corbin; Edwina Hale;
Minnie Simonds; Stella
Day; Grace Foss; Edward
Hale, Director



Sunday School Children and teachers in early 1960s.



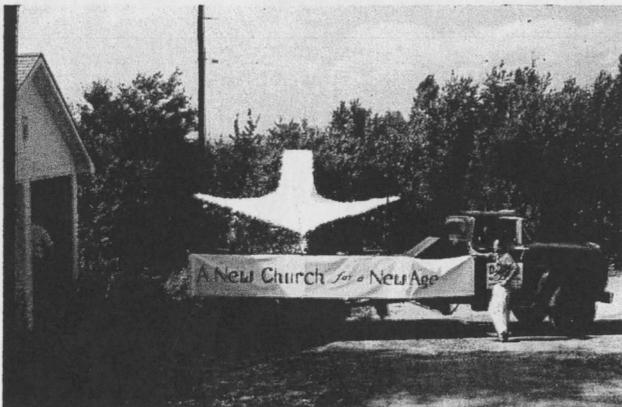
Interior view of First United Methodist Church on Union Avenue, Laconia.



Demolition of church building during Urban Renewal in 1967.



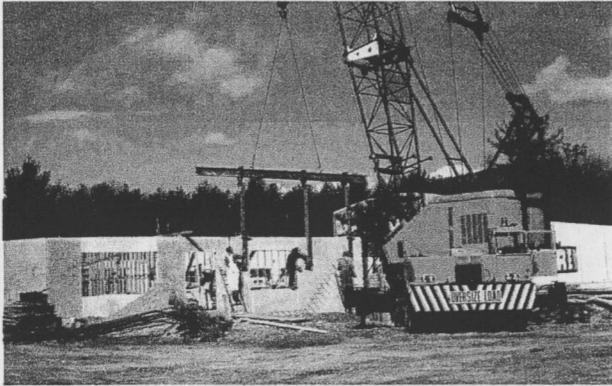
In picture to right is Rev. Frank Gulinello.



Parade float announcing the shape of the new church to come.



The old plow was used during the ground breaking for the new church building in Gilford on June 30, 1968.



Construction of concrete walls for the new church in Gilford.



Rev. David Bell with the 1875 bell on the lawn of the new church grounds.



Sacred Dance in the new sanctuary.



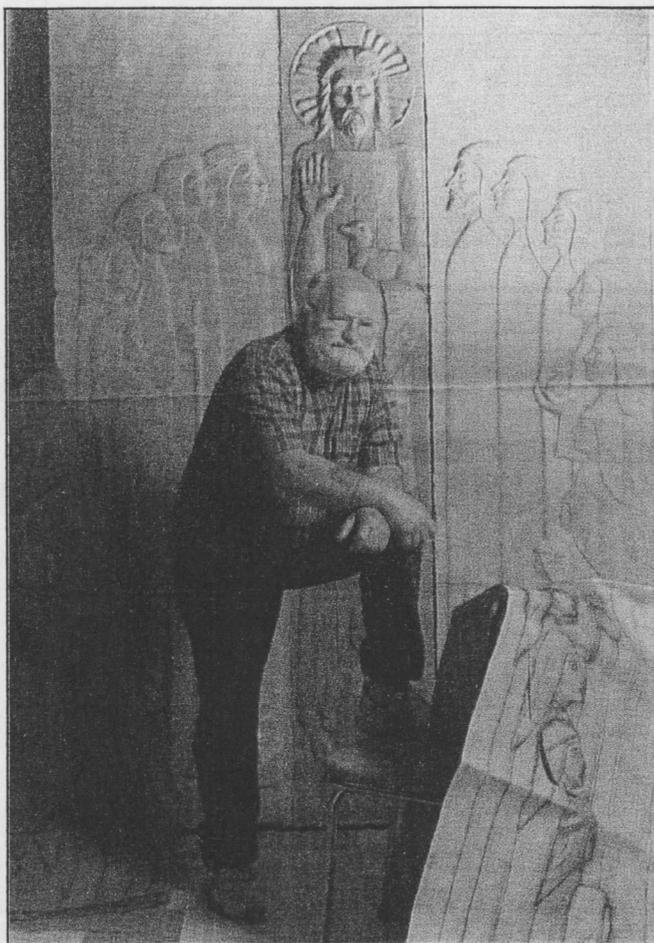
Parsonage ground breaking 1984. Left to right: Sandra McGonagle; Jim Rupert; Marian Hall, General Contractor; Dave Witham; unknown; Rev. Christopher Ives; Bruce Lund; Karl Reitz.



Confirmation class 1996 with mentors. Left to right: Alicia Amirault, Paul Weston, Sharon Walden, Megan Fitzmaurice, Adam Weston, Jack Rollins, Rev. Huntley Halvorson, Joan Carlson, Lacey Parris, Brenda Craft, Lois Cilley.



Rev. Halvorson with Pedro on Palm Sunday 1999.



Artist Stan Piper posing with a model of a 7-month sculpture project. The final product, a plaster bas relief sculpture depicting Jesus and the peoples of the world. This artwork is located in the Narthex along with others he has produced for the church. Dedicated in 1998.



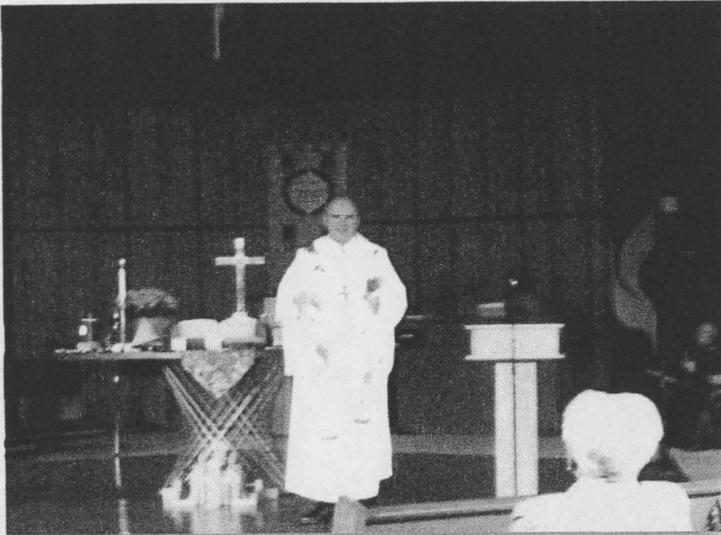
The Sanctuary on Christmas Eve.



First Bell Choir 2003. Left to Right back row: Sharon Walden, Krystin Cooper, Krysten Stewart, Vicki Stewart, Karl Kimball, Rev. Vickie Wood Parrish. Front row Left to right: Diane Malcolm, Rosemary Kacprzyński, Leslie Smith,



Ladies Sewing Group. Left to right: Marian Hutchins, Joy Noble, Jessie Kirk, Edith Hillis, Nancy Thomason, Violet Morse, Lois Reynolds. 1999



Bishop Peter Weaver preaching for the Anniversary Celebration Worship Service at 10:30 AM on Sunday September 25, 2011.



Cast of the play "Man of One Book--the Life of John Wesley" presented for the 150th Anniversary celebration in September 2011. Directed by Peter Ayer. John Wesley portrayed by Bo Guyer. Back row, Left to right. Jordan Tankard, Alger Conger, Peter Ayer, Ann Lowery, Phil Polhemus, Vickie Wood Parrish, Paul Stickney, Dick Walden, Bill Morley, Dick Evans, Steve Zackowski. Front row, Left to right. Susan Campbell, Suzanna Beetham, Joy Noble, Nancy Morley, Bo Guyer, Josh Chandler, Myrna Evans, Dick Miller, Eric Marsh, Sharon Walden. Children—Julie, Christopher and Melany Campbell. Not shown, Randall Scheri.



2011 Gilford Old Home Day Parade float. The parade theme was 'Jungle Safari'. The float depicts the 1860s through to the present day.