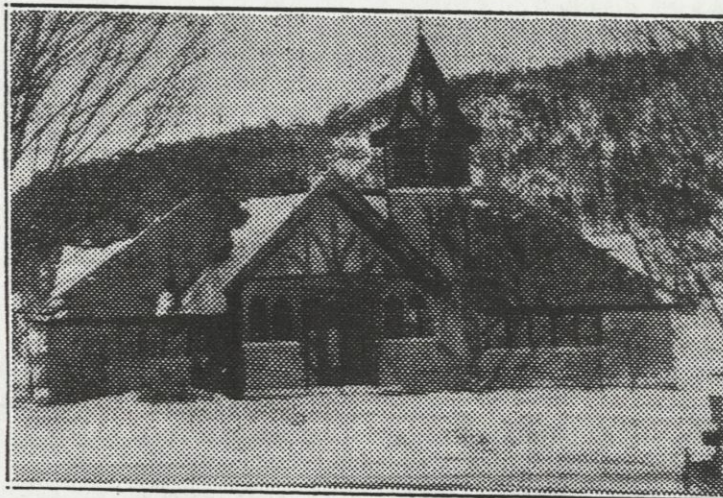


Historical Year Book

OF THE

First Congregational Church

North Pownal, Vermont



CHURCH OFFICERS — 1939

Minister	Clerk	Treasurer
Rev. Frank R. Tarling	Chester Church	Miss Regina Dean
Sunday School Superintendent		Deacons
John Hatch	Merritt Dean	Benjamin L. Powell
	Trustees	
Benjamin L. Powell	Frank Paddock	Merritt Dean
	John Hatch	Harvey Burdick

History of the North Pownal Church

Probably no church edifice in the Berkshires is more historically interesting than the quaint, pretty little structure long ago dedicated to Christian worship in the town of North Pownal, Vermont.

It was due to the generosity of a prosperous and much respected inhabitant, Andrew Whipple, that land was donated and to the enthusiasm of four of his fellow townsmen that a society was formed in 1849, for the purpose of erecting a two storied building to serve the double need of an academy or public school and a church. It may have been an architectural necessity or the very practical nature of the founders, it is hard to say which it was, that brought about the occupation of

the lower story by the 'academy' upon its completion by the expenditure of the last dollar that could be raised by the community. It may be truthfully said that the foundation for the church edifice was then laid, since it consisted of the roof of the academy, but it was not until a Williams man, O. S. Nutting of the class of '48, and a resident of Williamstown, raised a thousand dollars, that the church structure was begun and completed.

The interest of this alumnus began what has been for over fifty years a somewhat close relation between Williams men and the little struggling church eight miles away. —It was a proud day for that small community when President Mark Hopkins rode over from the college on May 11, 1851, to

preach the dedicatory sermon. This he did to the congregation of ten members, their friends and visitors from other towns nearby. It had been stipulated by Nutting '48 before he raised the funds that this should be a Congregational church, and it was so dedicated, but being at that time, as it is now, the only Protestant church in the village, it soon came to welcome in its membership people of every denomination except those of the Roman Catholic faith. It has maintained this broad un-denominational character ever since.

Williams was now called upon to supply material for a pastor, and on October 21, 1851, Elihu Loomis of the class of '47 having been called, was ordained in the church. He was not left very long in his undisputed supervision of the religious welfare of the community. In the winter of 1852 the Baptists of the vicinity asked for the use of the church auditorium every Sunday afternoon at five p. m., in order that they might have regular services conducted by the Rev. Mr. Arthur, father of President Chester H. Arthur, who was to come over from Hoosick where he had his own church. No objections were raised and the local excitement began.

Minister Arthur no sooner stepped into the pulpit than he began to assail the Congregational position on baptism. His arguments were lucid and forcefully expressed so that the Congregationalists needed no elated Baptist to inform them that their position upon baptism had been strongly attacked. Minister Loomis put in a hard week preparing an answer, and next Sunday before a large, eager and mixed congregation, vigorously responded to the attack and showed that it was necessary for Minister Arthur to add further logic to his arguments if he was to remain master in the theological controversy. The Hoosick pastor was back to the attack at five p. m. the same afternoon and the whole village was ablaze with heated arguments. Let me quote from the History of Bennington County: "Everybody tried to be a theologian. Never were the Scriptures searched so diligently before. 'Peters on Baptism' was learned by heart, and his Greek phrases quoted by those who had never studied that language. Groups of men stopped on the sidewalk and talked theology. The laborer in the cornfield leaned on the handle of his hoe, and with his index finger in his palm disserted learnedly on the meaning of baptism." The Congregationalists finally requested the Rev. Mr. Arthur to abandon his afternoon services in North Pownal, but he repeatedly refused to leave the field. A unique plan was now resorted to in order to bring about the desired evacuation.

Upon the Sunday following their last futile request, the Congregationalists attended the after-

noon Baptist service in a body, and every time that Minister Arthur was in the midst of his most effective arguments, they joined in a rousing hymn and finally sang the surprised pastor out of church.

During this intense controversy between the two factions, young Arthur, afterwards president, taught 'writing' in the academy which occupied the floor under the church. He had just graduated from Union College and it was through the influence of his father that he was appointed to his position. When he left the school in '55 he was succeeded by James A. Garfield, then a student at Williams, who took this means of working his way through college. By a strange coincidence, these two men succeeded one another to the presidency in the same order. Some years ago the academy was moved to another building and the old home of the school became the Sunday School room of the church. In that same room President Harry A. Garfield attended a church supper and entertainment given by the Williams undergraduates, and there shook hands with a number of the old members of the community who had learned from his father the rudiments of their education. It may be interesting to note here that every president of Williams since and including Mark Hopkins has spoken in the little North Pownal church.

Resigning in 1853, Elihu Loomis was succeeded by Chas. Peabody, who remained until 1857, when Dr. Bascom, then Professor of Rhetoric and a graduate of the Andover Theological Seminary, was called, and was ordained in the little church of which he was to have the pastorate for eight years. Those were trying years for Dr. Bascom, who rode the eight miles on horseback every Sunday, through fair weather and foul, winter and summer alike for the entire period. He conducted two services on Sunday, made frequent weekly pastoral calls, conducted other special services and attended to many other details, for which it is recorded that he received \$5.00 a Sunday, out of which he was required to pay for his transportation to and from Williamstown. "During those eight years," Dr. Bascom says, "I never missed a Sunday. Often I arrived at the church when the weather was so bad that there was no one else there, and upon one occasion during a severe winter I can remember finding the roads almost impassable and being obliged to leave my horse in South Pownal. I walked the other three miles. . . . Harry Hopkins, afterwards president of the college, used to have charge of the Sunday school services regularly while he was in college, part of which time I was pastor."

During the next three years the college faculty seems to have supplied the pulpit of the struggling church. Calvin Durfee '25, Secretary of the faculty, Professors Lincoln and Griffin and Perry all

went over from time to time, although Mr. Durfee's name appears most frequently as having performed the regular pastoral duties. Then followed ten prosperous years under the Rev. Mr. Cook, Williams '68,

It was in the year 1881 that the Rev. Mr. Winchester came as resident pastor in answer to an urgent call. He seems to have been a man of considerable power as a speaker and leader. One of the old members of the church still living, who knew, recalls that Mr. Winchester "was a chaplain in the Union Army during the Civil War and officiated at the hanging of Guyteau." He remained pastor until 1885, when he was succeeded by another Williams man, and in 1896 by a Yale man, the Rev. Mr. Garatson.

In the fall of 1908, an undergraduate of the class of 1910 at Williams was offered the pastorate as a supply and has held it for two years, during his college course. He has been able to interest many of the other under-graduates in the little church and as a result much of the best talent of

the college has been used in giving church entertainments from time to time. President Garfield attended one of these and addressed a very appreciative audience, some of whom had known his father in his student days. Upon the graduation of the student who has been acting as pastor, it is probable that one of the faculty will continue the work, and thereby Williams will continue an interest which has done so much in promoting the welfare of the little community eight miles away.

The church was burned in March, 1910 during the pastorate of Colburn Pinkham. The present building was dedicated in 1911.

The pulpit was supplied in 1919 by the pastor of the Pownal Baptist Church, and later supplied by several young men who lived in the community.

The church was closed for the next two years, but in 1934 the pulpit was supplied by the pastor of the Pownal Methodist Church, and is being supplied by him at the present time.

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