

Shelburne Churches -
Methodist

History told by
Sophia Bartlett ~~Harmon?~~
HARMON

I think you are putting that on pretty thick - especially the age business - Eleven months and two days is it so much - is it?

I didn't know where to start this tale - and at last decided to begin at the beginning and tell you the impressions of the first minister who came this way.

He was the Rev. Nathaniel Perkins of Hartford, Conn. - and in the spring of 1789 he toured Vt. on horseback. He kept a diary, and in short-sentences he registered his opinions of Vt. and the people. He complained of the food, the roads, the house keeping, the lice and the bed bugs. He thought the men rough, and many of the women homely, but he marveled at their contentment, and wished the women of Conn. were more like them.

This is what he wrote about this part of Vt. - From Burlington Bay I set out to Shelburne thro the wilderness - next to no roads - mud to my horse's belly roots thick as could be, no house for four miles, I got lost - my horse nearly gave out, excessively worried with bad trailing, I expected every step to be killed, might come on - found a log hut and put up there - could get no supper - my horse no feed - slept on a chaff bed without covering, a man, wife and three children all in same stinking room, rose by sunrise traveled thro woods, crossed the river Platte, passed an ugly swamp, and found Mr Smith, got breakfast, at

4 P.M. preached a lecture at Mr Smith, went home with Mr. Comstock. He sums it all up: "The people are dirty, no minister, no religion - no hell - no morality."

In 1800 the Methodist Society was founded and a minister from Vergennes held services in homes, or barns and in the forests.

In 1808, ^{Rev. Harrison} gave land for a church and parade ground and he was engaged to build a meeting house for 5000. This was to be used by all denominations in proportion to the amount of stock held by each society - This building was always known as the White Church, and stood about where the school house is - The Parade ground the green in front of the churches - There was no heat in the church - The money was raised by auctioning the pews Uzal Pierson paid 650 - for Pew No I - Ziba his brother 550 for pew No II - These were the sons of Moses Pierson the first settler, down on the lake shore - 6000 - was raised by this auction - At this time the Congregationalists were the strongest group, they flourished for about ten years - Next were the Methodists who held a small interest - There were also a few Episcopalians and Universalists.

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About 1825 the Methodists had grown strong enough to talk about building their own church, as soon as this rumor got about, as to what the Methodists were up to the Episcopalians started a ^{project} ~~rumor~~ of their own. This was to build a parsonage - this they did - ~~that was~~ the brick house across the R.R. tracks.

Garred Burritt, who lived in the Brick House on the hill, and recently torn down - owned the meadow from the Marrett road to the Parade ground - He gave the town land for the old part of the cemetery, and the land where the Catholic church is now - for the new church - the plan being to eventually build a parsonage where the Catholic cemetery is now. Instead they bought what is now the library for a parsonage. The church was built in 1881 apparently the new church was nearly identical with the church on the Museum grounds - (also a Methodist church) except the pews were square with a door opening on the side with seats around the other three sides. The choir sat in the balcony - It is said that in some churches with this arrangement the congregation turned their backs on the minister and faced the choir.

As the Methodist grew stronger their troubles began, a group of about 40, objected to the form of government, wanted more to say about how the church was run, also they wanted nothing to do with stew holders.

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that seems pretty far fetched as there probably wasn't a slave within ~~fifty miles~~ five hundred miles - Any how they seceded called themselves Wesleyan Methodists and built a small church where Mr Lull's house is now. They called themselves Then Nathaniel Gage, a strong minded & stubborn man, in the east part of town decided he had a grievance, and practically alone built a church at the four corners across from where George L'Brain lives. Gage lived where Mr Ewing does now. This church was affiliated with the Protestant Methodist Society and was always known as the Gage meeting house. This was in 1844.

By 1850 the Episcopalians had about died out and suspended worship in the White Church, the Wesleyans were also having a hard time so they joined with the Protestant Methodist ~~that~~ and held services alternately in the Gage meeting house & the White Church.

By 1870 the Methodist Church needed repairs and besides they wanted a larger church. Probably the fact they had out-lived the other organizations went to their heads and they were a bit uppity.

By this time there were a goodly number of

well to do farmers in town, as the west-part had many prosperous farms, mostly Methodists; and the east-part of town wasn't too badly off. It was voted to build a church - then the trouble began - some wanted wood - some wanted stone. Ezra Much probably the wealthiest farmer wanted stone, this argument and others took two years to settle - As Ezra had a strong voice when there were decisions to be made, he won. The minister ~~who had~~ prophesied financial trouble if such an expensive church was built - lost not only his argument, but his job.

The stone came from a quarry across the lake at Willboro Point and was delivered ^{in the summer of 1871} to three points in Shelburne, Meeks Bay - Little Point; and the mouth of the river - ^{in the spring} during the summer of 1871 - During the winter the stone was drawn up the river on the ice, some times there were 20 or 30 teams at work. The church was dedicated in 1873 - Near -

The ministers prophecy came true, some had pledged more ^{now moved away} than they could pay - some had had financial troubles also the Episcopal church had ~~ruined~~ and many who were not born & bred Methodists were siphoned off - so there were a number of lean years -

Now do you have you anything you want to

2nd 1870

I a

The first drive netted 2650- which paid for the stone
In May 1872 another drive - ~~#999~~ - 14604 -

" " 1873 " " netted 3195-

The Church cost - 2⁵/₁₀₀₀ -

There were also other ~~sums~~ of monies raised by the ladies
and altho at the dedication it was announced the church
~~was~~ had no debt, I have always understood some pledges were
not paid, because some had pledged more than they could
pay - some had had financial troubles - some had moved away -
so in a way the minister prophecy came true and there were
some lean years -

The ~~money~~ church was supported largely by renting the
pews - One year 750 - was raised that way, but
only 75 from collection - Of course there were always
donations. During the depression we had one here for
Mr Benn -

Nau

Now the Methodists had two churches, one brick, one stone so the Tracy Henry's grandfather took the brick one off their hands and with it built the house where we live. I think he must have bought two, and the other was white for as the red paint wears off you may have noticed our house is speckled, red and white.

In 1883 it was voted to sell the old parsonage and buy the present one. This ^{new one} was originally a farm house tho we never figured out where the farm was - ~~the~~ ^{but} the land between the two parsonages was an orchard.

Meanwhile all was not sweetness and light with the ladies, I don't know what happened but the Ladies Aid, as it was called, which had flourished until about 1900, suddenly had a crisis, and a rival society started which was soon joined by the ^{members of the now} ~~now~~ defunct Ladies Aid, ~~members~~. The new society was called the Ladies Improvement. Their object - "to create & sustain an interest in the church socially and to assist in the improvement of the interior." Eventually the interior of the parsonage was added to their responsibilities and many a hair has been split as to where the interior began & ended.

The records show that the average attendance was not more than ten or twelve, but their accomplishments were out-standing. They recarpeted the church, had the cushions recovered, paid for a furnace, and many other things, they some times served sandwiches, doughnuts and coffee for \$5. One of the biggest money makers was serving ice cream & cake at the High School graduation. ^{at the camp so} home made ice cream ^{of course} at that. They ^{the} made 40 - The graduation exercises were always held in the M. E. Church ^{and were very} ^{elaborate} ^{social} ^{affairs}. One of the events of the summer was Camp meeting held for two weeks in August at New Haven. This was in the horse buggy days - also the day of passenger train service and the trains would stop there.

There was a boarding house, a pavilion, ^{one of which the Tracy's} a number of cottages privately owned, surrounding the pavilion. Uncle Henry always attended and one year he chaperoned some of the young folks over the week end. We girls slept upstairs, one girl accidentally dropped her shoe, it made such a satisfactory noise, the rest followed suit and as there were five or six of us there were a series of loud thumps ^{that} sent Uncle Henry who was directly under us into a tizzy, as he was sure everyone would wonder what was going on in the Tracy cottage. The preaching was the old time revivalistic kind, the like of which is heard no more. Praise be - after ^{the sermon} ~~which~~ an opportunity was given for the congregation to speak - or pray - or sing freely. The story goes that one night a woman was

moved to sing - She started out - all right - but - in
her excitement - forgot how to end it, ^{so} she kept on
going on, till some one took pity on her joined in
and brought her down - (if you will help me now we
will demonstrate) ^{you have a story haven't you now}
while these meetings were not as sensational as the
free methodists they had their moments -
^{we used to have revival meetings for about - two weeks in}
This organizations disbanded about 1910 - ^{the winter till about -} 1915

There used to be Temperance meetings too, with a
speaker from out of town - ~~for~~ one of these the Episcopalians
joined with us and the Episcopal rector entertained the
speaker. For ^{dinner} supper Mrs Atwell served braided
peaches which the ~~guest~~ ^{guest} apparently enjoyed so
much Mrs A- offered him a second helping, he thanked
her saying - no more peaches, ^{thank you} but - I would like some
more of that delicious sauce -

Until about 1915 our communion set - consisted of two goblets -
and a plate for the bread. The minister was always careful to
rotate the goblet - after serving each person, but - after once around
it didn't help much.

Another ~~big~~ event we looked forward to was the S. S. excursion
on the lake - Druman Webster's grandfather always made the
arrangement - with the Champlain Trans - Co - For years the
boat - came to Shelburne Harbor to pick us up - we either went south
to Fort - Frederic, where we ate our lunch and explored, till the
boat - came back from Ticonderoga as we went north to N. Hero
to picnic grounds there

while the boat went to St. Albans Bay. It was always a very exciting day. We were always so afraid of missing the boat.

Some parents had a wild time rounding up the children at the end of the day. as soon as one was located and told it, ^{still} another couldn't be found. while hunting for him - no child disappeared. There was a lot of courting done on those ^{days}

As the 75th anniversary approached plans were made for a celebration - but much had to be done - the carpet - which had worn for nearly fifty years was shabby - the walls dingy with smoke - ~~the~~ but everyone went to work, ^{to raise money} the walls

painted, the pews and woodwork which had been yellowish were stained darker - a new carpet ^{laid} and paneled around the

hoor replaced a red velvet curtain. There wasn't money enough for cushions so the seats were stained and we went without cushions. Several years later when we had

caught our breath - a drive was started for cushions - we found them too expensive to buy. so we made them -

Our church service has changed also - we always sat during the second hymn. There was always a long prayer - and 2

mean long - and a shorter one. ^{at the end of the service} The short one being longer than the modern long one - we didn't bend just our heads -

we bent our bodies, the proper position was to place your hands on the back of the pew in front - and rest the forehead on them

the lady in front had on too tight clothes to bend and sit straight; you made the best of it. In our time it was considered

ad form to cross the legs, when I did, a hand reached out - and ^{my leg} ~~was it~~ went down there. About this time the new hymnals

began using the Amen, at the end of the hymn. There was

some opposition to this but it was finally overcome. I suppose it hinted too much of Episcopalianism or worse.

I have a picture of the front of the church before the organ was installed. I wish it included the top of the clock for there was an inscription there, which can always lend a friendly argument. Was it = Praise ye the Lord? was it = The Lord is in his holy temple?? This will never be settled for obvious reasons.

We used to have a Sunday School library, ^{the books} which were kept in the cupboard in the hall - which accounts for all those sections. ^{occasionally} Periodically there were exchanges with other churches and it was quite a game to be sure we got as good as we gave. Ever read Elsie Dinsmore? How we loved it - the whole ten or fifteen goody-goody volumes.

There are a few things we old timers regard as hoots in the hall vestibule where an extra coat can be hung - and the one their hats - and the mirror which always hung in the window for last-minute prinking.

I asked Henry if he thought I had my facts right - he said he thought so, but anyway there wouldn't be anyone there to contradict old enough to contradict me. What do you suppose he meant?