

Although the Advent Christian Church in South Vernon celebrated its 100th birthday in 2009, its roots actually go back to the Pond Road Chapel built in 1860 and before that to homes of individual families. When the kitchens or other available spaces were outgrown, the Chapel was built and served well the needs of the people until it too was outgrown and there was need of a bigger facility. In 1909, the new church was built near the Vermont-Massachusetts border....

Written by Carol Hammond for the 20010 town report

Brick upon brick, we have built on one another & our Rock, Jesus Christ. by Brenda Crider

The building site of the Advent Christian Church in South Vernon, Vermont has a long history. Nearly 160 years ago (1840), William Miller came to Vernon to preach the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This preaching, as well as others that followed who held the same conviction, inspired a woman named Lydia “to begin a good work” in the South Vernon-Northfield area.

This “good work” (our “roots”) is described in the Northfield Press, 11/12/1909 and reads as follows:

“The first movement made toward building an Advent Church in Vernon was by Mrs. Lydia Tyler, who called upon those families who had supported Advent meetings in schoolhouses and private dwellings for many years. She told them she felt they needed a chapel, and was taking pledges for that purpose. Nearly all of those visited responded with pledges.

A meeting was called and held on March 5, 1860. The matter of building a chapel was freely discussed and favored by a majority provided a suitable site could be obtained. A few days later another meeting was held. Mr. George W. Lee offered to make the Society a present of a building site. It was voted to accept Mr. Lee’s offer. Also voted on was to build a chapel. A building committee of three was chosen: E.G. Scott, Robert Allen and Wm. A. Newton (son-in-law of Lydia Tyler). (Also on the committee were Fayette Stoddard, Alvah Scott and Gilbert Gould according to the South Vernon ACC Historians, 1975). A lease of the land was obtained on April 17; work on the building was begun immediately. It (know today as the Pond Road Chapel) was completed in June and dedicated July 7, 1860. The sermon was preached (to a full and overflowing crowd, according to the SVACC historians, Jan. 1975) by Rev. J.V. Himes of Boston. The founders were Dwight Johnson, Jesse Frost, Willard Titus, Robert Allen, J.C. Allen, E.G. Scott, O.A. Scott, A.E. Scott, Moses Merrill, Wm. A. Newton, C.P. Combs, Geo. P. Stebbins, Nathaniel Brooks, Henry Brooks, Geo. M. Brooks and Wm. N. Brown. Many citizens of Vernon contributed to the building fund.”

For the next 49 years, the Pond Road Chapel was the meetinghouse where church services were held. The faithful preaching of God’s Word from local and guest preachers, (H. Munger, M. Grant, W.A. Burch, H.L.Hastings, W. Tenney, H.A. Hewitt, G. Sediquist, Mrs. M. McKinstry, F.L.Piper, Dr. L. Baker, I.M. Blanchard, J.W. Denton, Ira Sanky, G. Stebbins, Mrs. W.R. Moody and the more notable D.L. Moody) contributed to the growth of the church body. By the end of 1908, it was clear that a larger church building was needed. From the Northfield Press, 11/12/1909, we read:

“At a meeting in held on Jan. 19, 1909, it was voted to build one (a church building) provided the necessary funds could be raised. A building committee of three was chosen, consisting of A.A. Dunklee (great-grandfather of Judy Underwood, current church secretary), J.C. Allen, and Wm. A. Newton. One week after the above meeting, the church committee called a meeting at E.B. Buffum’s and citizens of Vernon, W. Northfield, Northfield and Mount Hermon were present. Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Martindale (Vera Vaughan’s grandparents) donated the land for a site (present site of ACC). E.B. Buffum and son and A.A. Dunklee pledged one thousand dollars each toward the building fund. E.B. Buffum and L.W. Brown were chosen to act with the church committee in raising funds, and as a whole, to constitute a building committee. The chairman, A.A. Dunklee was asked to secure plans for a suitable structure, the cost of which would be about six thousand dollars, and to take charge of the work. Soliciting funds began at once and there was a generous response. Aside

from the two larger gifts, Mrs. A.B. Gould pledged \$300, Mr. & Mrs. W.N. Dunklee \$200, and right in almost the immediate neighborhood sixteen \$100 gifts were made by the following persons: Mr. & Mrs. T.W. Johnson, R.W. Russell, Mr. & Mrs. E.E. Brooks, Mr. & Mrs. W.D. Johnson, W.A. Newton, Mr. & Mrs. Charles S. Tenney (Judy Underwood's grandparents), Mrs. Harriet E. Johnson, Mr. & Mrs. D.C. Fairchild, Mr. & Mrs. G. E. Alderman, Mr. & Mrs. F.A. Adams, Lend A Hand Society, E.E. Aldrich, Mr. & Mrs. E.A. Pratt, Mr. & Mrs. E.S. Corse, Mr. & Mrs. F.L. Tyler, Mrs. D.L. Preston.

Outside friends contributions a like amount as follows: E.L. Holbrook, Keene, NH; Elijah Belding and mother, Springfield, MA; H.D. Holton, M.D., Brattleboro, VT.

About \$600 was raised from Northfield friends, aside from the Northfield Seminary and the Northfield Bible Training School, whose contributions were gladly received. Mount Hermon School also came with there offering, and with all the friends, with A.J. Branig's donation of paint for both the church and parsonage, the sum total of subscriptions to date (11/12/1909) is about \$6500."

The total cost of building the church and parsonage was \$10,521.71 (according to SVACC historians).

In November of 1909, A.E. Phelps, was called to be the first pastor of the South Vernon Advent Christian Church. A native of Westfield, MA, he was a whip manufacturer in that city prior to his conversion. A dedication service at 1:30 p.m. was held on Wednesday, December 29, 1909. That evening, a recognition service and reception for the pastor and his wife was held.

The organ from the Pond Road Chapel was loaned to the new church. Wesley Dunklee installed the lighting plant (acetylene) for the Church and parsonage. The first two people to be baptized at the church were Warren Dunklee and Charles S. Tenney (uncle & father of Hazel Kimball and great uncle and grandfather of Judy Underwood.

Rev. A.E. Phelps preached until 1912. He was followed by Rev. Frank Leavitt (1912-18), Rev. Raymond Keeney (1919-21), Rev. Clarence Hewitt (1922-23), Rev. George Tyler (1924-30), Rev. George Gray (1930-39), Rev. Benjamin White (1940-42), Mrs. Florence White (1942-43), Rev. Elvin Blackstone (1943-52; deceased husband of current parishioner, Anna Newton), Rev. Everett Moore (1952-61), Rev. Charles Bentley (1961-66; deceased husband of current parishioner, Mary Lou Bentley), Rev. Elvin Blackstone (1966-71), Rev. Michael Gantt (1971-76), Rev. Victor Osborne (1977-79), Rev. Harold Patterson (1980-86), and Rev. Bruce Burks (1986-present).

Over the years many changes have been made to update the building. Electricity replaced the "lighting plant" north of the church, an oil furnace replaced the wood burning fireplaces and furnaces, the horse sheds made room for parking lots, and black top covers the dirt driveway. In the 1940's, Mr. & Mrs. Spiller purchased a set of chimes still in use today. During that time, Gordon Buffum's Sunday school class built the "Wayside Cross" (made of concrete). It was moved to its current location (just below the second parking lot) in the 1990's to make room for the new sanctuary. In 1953 the basement was dug out (18' x 40') to provide more room for Sunday school classes and an assembly room.

By the 1990's, it was again apparent that an expansion was needed. A new sanctuary was begun in the early 90's and completed in 1998, more than doubling the size of the church. The entire church building was vinyl sided and a new metal roof replaced the old one. The original sanctuary was converted into Sunday school classes, an office and a foyer. An upper or third parking lot was built in recent years as well as a handicap ramp.

A hundred years is a long time. That "good work" that was begun over a hundred years ago is continuing still. Today, sitting in the pews of our church are some of the descendants of those who helped build the original church in 1909 and sitting next to them are some of the new faces who have joined our church in 2009. Many things have changed. Most everyone who attends church today drives a car, not a horse drawn buggy. What hasn't changed is what is preached: the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the certainty that Christ is coming again! ✦