

# YE CHURCH AND PARISH OF GREENFIELD

THE STORY OF AN

Historic Church in an Historic Town

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1725-1913

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BY

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Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may  
tell it to the generation following. Psalm 48:13.

≡ pref. 1913 ≡

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PARISH IN ITS INFANCY.

THE Northwest Parish of Fairfield, now called Greenfield, had its beginning in the year 1725. From the time of the first settlement of the town in 1639, the residents of this section had on every Sabbath day made the long journey to the Fairfield Church, there to worship their God. Rev. John Jones had been the pastor there up to 1664, followed by Rev. Samuel Wakeman, who preached until 1692, and now Rev. Joseph Webb, already well advanced in years, and so feeble as to require an assistant, had been preaching to them the words of life for more than a generation. But in the month of May, 1725, the following petition was sent to the General Assembly, in conformity with the law concerning the formation of new parishes and the erection of new houses of worship:

“To the Honorable General Assembly sitting at Hartford the second Thursday of May, 1725. The humble prayer of the inhabitants of Fairfield North Village humbly sheweth, that there are about fifty-five families living north of Fairfield, at a considerable distance from the town, some five or six miles, and the nearest of them about two miles and a half or more, whose lists amount to 4,000 pounds, which inhabitants labor under great difficulties on account of their enjoyment of some of the precious means of grace, especially the proclaiming of the word of life, in the ordinary way and means God uses in the conversion and bringing home poor, lost and undone sinners. Not only ourselves are frequently obliged to be absent from divine worship, but our poor children are under a kind of necessity of perishing for lack of vision, both which are very troublesome to those who are inquiring what they shall do to be saved, and that are hungering and thirsting after Christ and salvation and righteousness in and through him. The distance of the way, especially in bad weather, utterly incapacitates many per-

sons, old and young, to go to the house of God, which makes us willing rather to expend considerable of our earthly treasure in maintaining the public worship of God among ourselves, than to lose our spiritual treasure and undo any of our poor immortal souls, esteeming each of them better than a one thousand worlds.

"Hoping and humbly begging and praying that the honorable gentlemen of the Assembly will pity us, and be nursing fathers to us, and deal with us as they would be dealt with; encouraging of us in our endeavor to honor God and obtain eternal happiness beyond the grave, that they would please to consider that there are many places made district societies, the less than we, and nearer the town; as West Haven, Newington, and many others; and also that the town from which we separate is well able to maintain their minister without us, they having without us, 13,000 pounds on their list. If the Honorable General Assembly will be pleased to hear this our prayer, we will ever pray, etc.

Signed by Thomas Hill and sixty-nine other men.

On consideration had in the lower house this petition was rejected.

Test, THEODORE KIMBERLY, *Clerk.*"

The time was not yet ripe for the formation of another parish, for strange as it may seem to-day, the mother church at Fairfield strongly opposed a separation, and even sent her agent to Hartford to present arguments against it, evidently believing the people of the northern section of the town could make the long journey for generations to come. Many of the church supporters from the upper parts of the town were men of means and the old society could not think of letting them go without a struggle. But through the persistence of Thomas Hill and a number of others, another petition was soon presented to the Honorable General Assembly, asking for a committee from that body to come down, look over the parish and report to the next Assembly in October of that year. This petition was granted and the committee was appointed consisting of Messrs. Copp, Lewis and Hawley. These men took back such a favorable report that the General Assembly at once

ordered the formation of a new parish, to be known as the Northwest Parish of Fairfield, as shown by the following order signed by the secretary of state:

"At a General Assembly holden at New Haven, in his Majesty's Colony of Connecticut, in New England, on the 14th day of October, in the 12th year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George, King of Great Britain, 1725, upon ye petition of Thomas Hill of Fairfield in behalf of himself and others of his neighbors living within ye bounds following: westerly by the west parish in said Fairfield; south-southwest by the rear of the building lots in Fairfield; easterly by the Mill River, so called; east-northeasterly by ye parish of Stratfield; north by the north bounds of Fairfield; first brought to this Assembly in May last and continued to this Assembly, desiring they may be made a parish:

This Assembly after hearing ye reasons offered by Mr. Ebenezer Wakeman, agent for the old parish in Fairfield why said Hill and neighbors should not have parish privileges granted them, as well as the arguments of said petitioners why they should be a parish; do hereby order and grant that said petitioners shall be a parish and are hereby enabled to set up the worship of God among themselves, and that the bounds above said shall be the bounds of said parish, and so be and remain until this Assembly shall order otherwise; and it is hereby enacted that said parish shall have and be allowed all the privileges and advantages as are by law allowed to other parishes in this government.

A true copy of Record;

Examined by Hoz. WYLLYS, *Secretary.*"

In less than three weeks from the date of the above enactment of the General Assembly, there was assembled the first parish meeting ever held upon this hill. The exact date was November 4, 1725; Dr. John Hide was chosen the moderator and Thomas Hill the clerk. It is a matter of interest to note that practically the only business transacted was to choose a committee consisting of Dr. John Hide, George Hull, Benj. Banks, Jehu Burr, and Peter Burr, to treat with one, a Rev. John Goodsell, in regard to "settlement in the ministry."

between the residences of Wm. H. Banks and Mrs. Mary N. Milbank. Many of the older residents of the parish agree that this was the precise location, basing their opinion on what has been told them by parents or grandparents. Of course it is not impossible that the first church building may even have stood where to-day runs the highway northwest by southeast, past the Banks and Milbank residences, for Connecticut history states that it was not until about 1750 that carriages and wagons were used by a few wealthy in the larger towns, ox-carts and sleds being used for carrying produce, and journeys for business or pleasure being made on horseback. So the highways of to-day were nothing more than crooked paths and perhaps not even that in 1750. It is earnestly hoped that when the site of the first church on this hill shall have been determined that some public-spirited and loyal citizen or body of citizens shall cause to be erected there a monument with the proper inscription, so that generations to come shall never forget where stood the first temple in which Rev. John Goodsell so faithfully ministered.

It was during the year 1727 that the name of the parish was changed from Northwest Parish to Greenfield, as the following record will show :

“CONNECTICUT COLONY.

At a General Assembly holden at New Haven, in His Majesty's Colony of Connecticut, in New England, on the 12th day of October, in the first year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George Second, King of Great Britain, 1727. This Assembly orders that the Northwest Parish of Fairfield shall be called by the name of Greenfield, and be so recorded.”

The first time that the parish is called by the new name of Greenfield on the records is December 16, 1728.

The new meeting-house which was so acceptably framed during the summer of 1727, was not completed at once.

The members of the parish were evidently not inclined to tax themselves too heavily during any one year, for we must remember that all parish expenses were met by a tax rate levied at the annual parish meeting precisely the same as we now levy the annual town tax. So each year, for five years or more, the parish voted to raise a rate for Mr. Goodsell's salary, and for the carrying on of the work on the meeting-house. We have conclusive evidence that the new meeting-house was in use at least as early as 1730 for the records of the meeting held October 13 of that year state that "ye school shall be kept in ye old school-house where ye parish used to meet in."

We note the scarcity of clocks and watches by one of the records of this year which states that a meeting was adjourned until Monday next, sun an hour high at night.

In the early days at Greenfield all school matters were decided at parish meetings, and at least one meeting each year was wholly or in part devoted to school questions, up to the year 1798. At first school was kept only six months of the year, and that at Greenfield center. A few years later, it was kept four months at Hull's Farms, four months at Banks' Farms, and four months at the center. On October 27, 1796, it was voted "to form said parish into a school society agreeable to an act of the General Assembly of the state of Connecticut made in 1795, entitled 'an act appropriating the moneys which shall arise on sale of western lands belonging to the state of Connecticut' and also to choose proper officers for said school society." Accordingly, in March, 1797, a committee consisting of Eben. Hill, Lewis Goodsell, John Albert, David Hubbell, Jonathan Banks, Abel Wakeman and Hull Bradley, was appointed for the purpose of dividing and limiting the several school districts of the parish. This committee laid out eight districts and placed the bounds of the same on record. The districts are these: Center, Hull's Farms,

be allowed to bid at said vendue; that those who purchase the spots or places for ye purpose aforesaid, be obliged to build their pews by a limited time and to build them all alike; that ye spots or places and pews so built and purchased shall never be sold or conveyed to any person who doth not belong to this society, or to anyone of another persuasion; that one spot or place shall be reserved for ye society to build a pew on."

The following is the report of the committee appointed to sell the spots or places for pews:

"Greenfield, Dec. 2, 1761.

We, the subscribers, being appointed by this society at their meeting of ye 10th of November last to sell the spots or places, then voted to be laid out in our new meeting-house for pews to be erected on, have according to ye vote of said society at their abovesaid meeting relating to said pews, laid out and sold the abovesaid spots or places for pews, in the manner following, viz:

"With the assistance of David Bradley, joiner, beginning at ye east side of ye south double door, have laid out ye spot or place for Pew No. 1, and so successively laid out and numbered said spots all around the house, till we come to ye west side of said double door, they being in number twenty-six; and have also this day sold ye above spots or places, except number 15, for the purpose aforesaid, to ye following persons at public vendue, with ye sum each spot or place sold for, annexed to his name, which persons are all obliged by ye conditions of said vendue, to have their pews well built and completed upon their own cost and charge by the first day of October next or forfeit their spots or places to ye society.

Sold as followeth:

		To Gershom Banks the spot or place No.		1 for 14 pounds, 15 shillings	
"	Samuel Bradley	ditto	" 2	" 16	" 10 "
"	Jedediah Hull	"	" 3	" 20	" 7 "
"	Daniel Sherwood	"	" 4	" 19	" 2 "
"	Joseph Hill	"	" 5	" 20	" 7 "
"	Cornelius Hull	"	" 6	" 17	" 3 "
"	Daniel Sturges	"	" 7	" 10	" 0 "
"	Moses Wakeman	"	" 8	" 15	" 0 "

To David Bradley the spot or place No. 9 for 24 pounds, 0 shillings						
" Gershom Hubbell	"	10	"	26	"	12
" Gershom Bulkley	"	11	"	23	"	15
" Jonathan Dimon	"	12	"	23	"	1
" John Jennings 2nd	"	13	"	20	"	7
" Gershom Bradley	"	14	"	20	"	3
" Reserved for the Society"	"	15				
" Nehemiah Banks	"	16	"	24	"	0
" Ebenezer Banks	"	17	"	20	"	10
" Joseph Bradley Jr.	"	18	"	27	"	0
" John Banks	"	19	"	17	"	0
" Samuel Whitney	"	20	"	15	"	4
" David Williams	"	21	"	15	"	0
" Benj. Sherwood	"	22	"	17	"	14
" Hezekiah Bradley	"	23	"	19	"	11
" Samuel Bradley Jr.	"	24	"	23	"	1
" David Banks	"	25	"	20	"	5
" Daniel Bradley	"	26	"	19	"	5
				Total		489
					"	12
					"	"

JOSEPH BRADLEY JR. } *Committee*  
 DAVID BANKS }

Soon after the sale of the pews on the ground floor, the society voted to lay out pews in the gallery in the same manner, and sell under the same restrictions. About this time, December, 1761, Nehemiah Banks and David Williams were appointed to look into the expenditures already made on the building and report how much more would be needed. This committee looked over all the accounts and in January, 1762, reported all satisfactory "except ye boarding of ye joyners, which in our opinion is charged higher than ye common price, and what we think reasonable; and likewise ye wages of David Bradley's two youngest boys, and ye hinges made by Lieut. Jennings, we think is too high. Ye cost already arisen we find to be 990 pounds. According to our best understanding, one-half of ye ten penny rate made in November last to complete said house may be abated."



## CHAPTER V.

REV. TIMOTHY DWIGHT, 1783-1795.

FOR several months following the dismissal of Rev. Mr. Tennant, the pulpit was supplied with candidates. August 28, 1782, Mr. Abram Baldwin of Greenfield was invited to preach during the coming winter, but as he did not accept, the society voted in October of the same year to send to New Haven and invite a Mr. Dwight "to preach with us." No doubt Rev. Timothy Dwight was one of the candidates who had supplied the pulpit during the previous months, and now he comes to supply the pulpit almost continually until he is formally called and settled as pastor.

About this time we find on record this little interesting item. "Dec. 12, 1782. Voted to apply to town for a piece of the Place of Parade on which to build a parsonage. The following committee is appointed to apply to the town meeting: Gershom Hubbell Esq., David Williams, Capt. Ebenezer Hill, and Doctor Rogers." We must suppose that the request was not granted as the parsonage was not built, and the report of the town meeting does not even mention the matter.

We find on record the following in regard to the offer extended to Rev. Mr. Dwight: "May 19, 1783. Voted unanimously by 62, to approve and make choice of Mr. Timothy Dwight to take the pastoral care and charge of this church and congregation; to pay Mr. Dwight one hundred and fifty pounds for his annual salary so long as he shall continue our minister; to pay Mr. Dwight three hundred pounds for a settlement to be paid in three years, one hundred pounds a year; to give Mr. Dwight the use and improvement of about six acres of land belonging