

JULY 2016

# FLASHBACKS

VOLUME 7

A CELEBRATION OF THE HISTORY OF WINDSOR, MA

## Windsor Houses of Worship

*Compiled and written by Susan Phillips*

The first one burned down twice and was struck by lightning once – but persists. Another was sawn in half, moved to West Cummington, bolted back together and turned into a residence. The fate of a third is hard to determine. A fourth still stands, but has yet to find its perfect second act. Like many things Windsor, our community spaces for worship have had to contend with many challenges.

## Church & State, Indivisible

Among the requirements laid upon the speculators who bought Plantation No. 4 at auction in Boston in 1762 was that within five years, there “must be settled a Protestant Minister and there must be reserved for him one-sixty-third of said township, and one sixty-third part for the use of the ministry.”

This manner of linking the establishment of Protestant Christian worship with settlement was policy throughout New England. Early meeting-houses served both for worship and for town business – separation of Church and State being no part of the Puritan conception of a proper community. Public financing of church and pastoral salaries persisted in Massachusetts towns well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Rising from the Ashes

The early settlers missed the five-year deadline. Only four pieces of land had been sold by then. However, the community grew and a Congregational Church was established in 1772. That year, the town voted to build a meeting house.

Following the vote, logs were cut from the land set aside for the church. But there’s no record that anything was ever built with them. In 1779, the town again voted to build a meeting house on land off what is now Hill Cemetery Road, right at the top. When the Ladies Society met to clean up the site after the carpenters were finished, an outdoor fire ignited wood shavings under the building, and it burned to the ground before hosting a single gathering.

Another meeting house was quickly built, and apparently served well for some time before also burning down. In 1823, it was replaced by a brick building.



*Intrepid man investigates lightning damage to Windsor Congregational Church, c. 1938*

Just 20 years later, for unknown reasons, the brick building was demolished (as were other hilltop buildings such as Monk’s Tavern) and the current church erected a bit west and south of the original site in 1847.

The steeple of our handsome Greek Revival-style church was struck by lightning in about 1938, but otherwise the last century or so have been quieter than the preceding period.

*Check [friendsofwindsor.com](http://friendsofwindsor.com) for more information on the topics covered in our FLASHBACKS series.*

*Thanks to the Central Berkshire Fund of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation for making this project possible!*



## THE TOWN’S FIRST PASTOR



In 1773, before a meetinghouse had even been built, David Avery was engaged as Gageborough’s first pastor. Only a few years later, Avery asked to be released to join the war of independence as an army chaplain. The congregation agreed, and in 1777 he marched off to Boston with a group of young Windsor men answering the call.

Avery became a renowned member of what the British disparagingly called “The Black Robe Brigade,” observing the Battle of Bunker Hill, wintering at Valley Forge with General Washington, and ministering to the spiritual and medical needs of soldiers.

Avery’s diaries offer a grim window on the war. One snippet: “Arrived at Crown Point...No provision made for the sick, except only a horse stable cleaned of dung and the sick laid on the floor of the stinking stable...This morning Obed Hatch died of the small pox.”

### *In My Father's House, There Are Many Mansions*

No one can argue but that the hilltop Congregational Church lies at the heart of Windsor. But other houses of worship were built and did, for a time, flourish here.

In 1805, a group of several dozen townspeople petitioned to establish a Baptist Society in Windsor. Opposition in town and in the legislature held things up for two years, but in 1807 the society was recognized and in 1819 the members (some 250 people by this time) voted to build a meeting house. Noah Y. Bushnell and Hosea Trumbull are named as elders of this church in Josiah Holland's 1855 book, *The History of Western Massachusetts*. But membership declined and the society was dissolved in 1852.

(Opposition to the formation of the Baptist Society seems to have stemmed from the fact that Baptists and Quakers were for a time exempt from paying the ministerial tax that supported the Congregational church.)

In 1811, a new Congregational church was founded in the Bush, with members drawn both from the church on the hill, and from Savoy. The church building was initially located near the Savoy town line on Windsor Bush Road, but later moved about two miles east, closer to West Cummington.

The Rev. Jephthah Poole of Plainfield was apparently the only pastor, serving from 1811 to 1816. After that, the church continued for some time without a settled minister. When a Congregational church was established in West Cummington in 1840, it drew most of the worshippers away and the church was discontinued.

The building, which had already been moved once before, was purchased by someone in West Cummington. The story goes that due to the narrowness of the roads the church had to be sawn in half before being moved in two pieces to its new foundation. It was riveted back together and used for some time as a dwelling house.

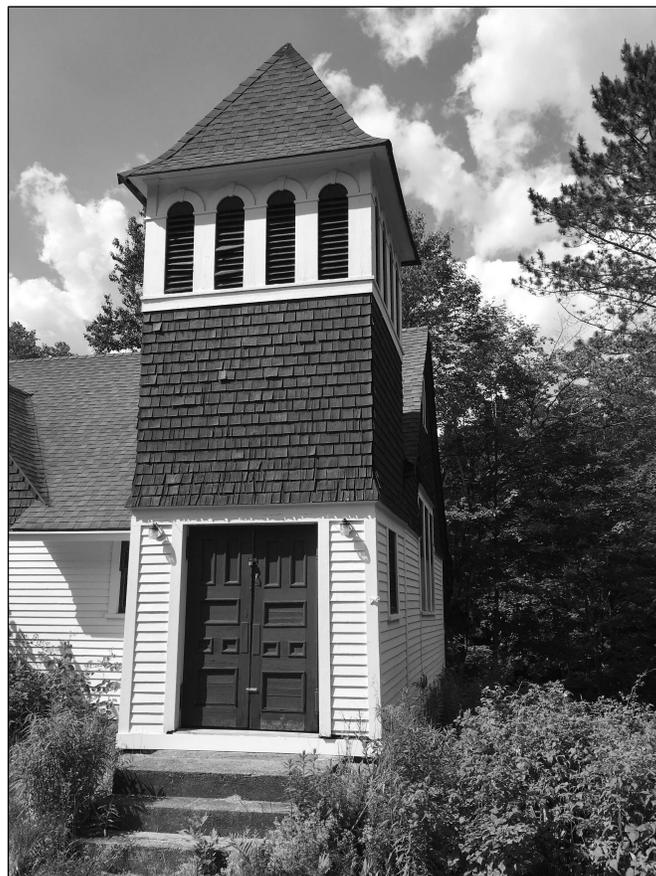
In East Windsor, leading community figures including Charles Ball (the subject of our first FLASHBACK) donated land and raised money to build the East Windsor Chapel in the early 1900s. The opening of the chapel was celebrated on June of 1911, and the final religious service was held there in early 1940.

A sustained community effort, powered in large part by Ball's daughter Mary Bowman, gave the chapel a second life as a community center and focal point for the energies of the East Windsor Progressive Club. The club for many years produced a monthly subscription newsletter to raise funds in support of the chapel.

#### **BEGINNING WITH A FUNERAL, ENDING WITH A WEDDING**

The East Windsor Chapel was the setting for a funeral some months before it was officially dedicated as a church – that of Cora Ball, beloved wife of Charles Ball, who died in February of 1911.

It seems fitting that a month or so after the last regular service was held there, the chapel took a curtain call as the setting for the wedding of Hope Lyons Mattis and Arthur Bernard Garceau. The *Berkshire Eagle* of March 9, 1940, reported that "The church has been dusted and scrubbed by some of the townspeople... Even the bridegroom has been put to work firing the furnace... The bride has been pretty much occupied with the green boughs from nearby woods and the roses with which the church is being decorated." This final wedding at the chapel was also the first wedding to be held there in a decade.



*The East Windsor Chapel today. A building in search of a new purpose.*

## **Dedication Services of the New Chapel at East Windsor Massachusetts**

**RALPH H. ABERCROMBIE  
MINISTER**



**June 8, 1911**

*Let's make FLASHBACKS a community effort! If you have historical information, artifacts, photos or ideas for us, please share them. E-mail Susan Phillips at [susanphillips57@gmail.com](mailto:susanphillips57@gmail.com).*