

Built in 1802

This quote from the writings of Asahel Upham for the churches' 100th anniversary in 1902 - "But it is necessary that 'ere the memory quite die out, some one of us who saw these things should write them down" substitute "heard" these memories for "saw" and you have one of the reasons for this article" still holds true, for this majestic old building has been a land mark for many generations and shall continue to be so as long as it remains standing.

Windham was chartered with the adjoining town of Londonderry as the town of Kent. Edward Aiken, the name that heads the list of first members of the church, settled in 1773 on the farm that was owned in 1902 by Lyman Howard, (In 1973 this is Tater Hill Country Club!) These settlers were Scotch Irish from 'Derry N.H. and they were "notable men and women". Ed. Aikens name appears in the minutes of the early convention - 1776 - 1777 as a delegate from Kent along with such names as Col. Ben Carpenter, Col. Thomas Chittenden, Col. Seth Warner and Capt. Hermon Allen, the last convention before The Battle of Bennington in 1777.

In due respect for all our present Sen. Aiken has done for Vermont and to help R.E.A. and our Co-op, we are proud to note that these were his ancestors.

This building was raised on July 8, 1802 - a building 45' by 55' and 1 story high, by 100 "picked" men from 5 towns - 20 from each Peru, Weston Londonderry, Andover and Windham. Apparently several different men agreed to hew out and contribute the beams. Each one of the 6 or 7 beams, which cross the plates above, represents a full grown tree, hand hewn with graceful artistry. It is reported that once the work was finished, one man "Joseph Parsons" stood on his head on one of these plates, his feet, though he had no way of knowing it, some 2,040' above sea level, said to be the highest elevation of any church in New England.

Much has been made of the barrel of rum procured for the workmen of the day. Original receipt of which showed "Received of Deacon John Woodburn the sum of \$16.67 for rum and loaf sugar which he had for the Gentleman Committee Concerned with the building of the Meeting House in Windham". It is noted that the barrel of rum was not "broken-out" until the work was completed at the end of the day. Deacon John Burnap was "appointed to deal-it-out". It is noted there was enough, for the Peru delegation returned after starting home and took another drink!

It was clapboarded and glazed in 1804, painted in 1825 and the interior finished. A belfry added in 1849 with a bell costing \$337.68 and weighed 1,206 pounds with Mr. Clark Stearns "going with his team to Troy for it".

In 1950 the whole interior was altered, raising the gallery to a higher level sanctuary and the lower part of the house to be the vestry and town hall to be used for town meetings, this is how it is today.

Services are held only 10 or 12 weeks between June and Labor Day now, with guest pastors and a small but faithful congregation. The lower part not only is the town hall but also houses the town library.

Still fitting are Mr. Uphams words of 1902 -

"The Glory of Windham depends on the General Intelligence of her people. Let there be a deep Heart felt interest manifested on the part of her citizens in the maintenance of the Gospel Ministry and in the support of good schools. Let the young have access to a good library of well chosen books where they can drink deep at the fountain of ancient and modern lore - and let her Sons and Daughters remember that righteousness alone exalteth a nation.

Special Thanks for the  
(Material for this article, furnished by  
church official Mrs. David Newton. Taken from the files on  
100th and 150th anniversaries of this building.)

Col. Cobb sat astride one of the plates and was raised with it. After the body of the frame was up, he was standing upon the plate when one of the rafters fell upon those that had been placed and came rolling down towards him, - he jumped up and let it slide to the ground. He did not come down until every timber was in its place - then started from the ridge pole head foremost and past down the rafters and so reached the ground. Joseph Persor stood on his head on one of the plates.

Several of the first settlers were in the Bennington fight, viz. Samuel Ayers, Nathaniel Aiken, John Burnap. John Gould, Archibald Mack,

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John Mack, Archibald McCormack, Nehemiah Pierce, Benjamin Pierce, Daniel Putnam, James Smith and Stephen Twitchell.

The presumption is that if they were all living at this time that they were all present.

There is but little doubt that Capt. James Stearns was one of them.

I have sometimes drawn on my imagination for a picture of the dinner that was given the raisers by the town people - what a prodigious quantity of food would have to be provided; what a jolly time they would have while eating it. Wouldn't we have liked to hear the stories they told. I hazard a guess that Archie Mack told how "awfu cauld" his brother Johnnie was on that August day ( August 16, 1777 ) just a hundred twenty five years ago day after tomorrow. James Smith would tell how he got away from Burgoyne's army and enlisted in the Continental army as an artificer. He came from old Birmingham and of course

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a worker in iron as some of his descendants are that are with us today. John Gould who came from Westminster would tell how William French was shot to death in the court house fight. The Barrel of rum would remind Daniel Cobb how he won the election of Col. of the New Hampshire Militia regiment over a man which he said was better fitted for the office than he was - but as Kipling is wont to say that is another story - that happened across the Connecticut.

Rufus Edson of Andover if he had his fife with him would be called on to play the tune that he played when Baum marched out his Hessians to stack their arms in front of John Stark and the Green Mountain Boys. Nathaniel Aiken would tell of his march from Bennington to Yorktown and describe how Washington and Lafayette appeared at the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

7.  
Within a year of the raising, meetings were held here - a carpenter's bench serving as platform for the speaker.

The first sermon preached in the house was by Rev. William Hall of Grafton.

It was clapboarded and glazed in 1804. James Rogers, son of J1, i.e. Rogers the Tory, gave the glass - one authority has it that he gave the glass and the paint - but this is doubtful as the house was not painted until 1826. James Upham has it that it was finished in 1825 and that Rev. Philetus Clark preached the dedication sermon. The committee to finish it were Maj. Peter Aiken, Amos Emery, and James Stearns. Capt. Stearns had ten cows and he told the other members that if they would let him off, they might pick out the best one - they did not take the offer. It cost \$1,000 dollars to finish it. The work was done by Rice Harrington, probably other carpenters were employed.

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A belfry was put on it in 1849. Silas Stewart, the father of Mrs. Cronin and Mrs. Wiltshire Mack, doing the work. A bell was procured, Mr. Clark Stearns going for it with his team, to Troy. This was broken soon after, another was got which proved so faulty in tone that it was carried back and the one that we have now got in place of it. The first one was said to be the finest toned one in the country. It was heard as far away as Putney.

Windham, Vermont

Original written in pen and ink on 11 pages  
and read at the 100th, Anniversary of the raising  
of the church, by Asahel Upham August 14, 1902

(numbered)

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A gifted Scotch writer of our day, in one of his works, in what he calls the foreword of the book, has these words: "But it is necessary that ere the memory quite die out, some one of us who saw these things should write them down".

Substitute "heard these memories" for saw, and you have one of the most patent reasons for our gathering today and for the words that are to be spoken.

I am asked to tell of events I have heard from old people, that we received them from the first settlers of this town, who were the builders of this house, whose hundredth anniversary we have met to celebrate.

For what I am to tell you, I am indebted to my father, Jonathan Upham Jr., his brother Gardener, Dea. Hart Balch Abbott, Mr. James Gould and quite largely to a historical paper, written by James H. Upham, (son of Gardener Upham), and read by him in this house Feb. 14, 1853.

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James Upham got much that he recorded from his grandfather, Squire Amos Emery, who was one of the leading men in the work. Squire Emery gave one of the large beams and sold his yoke of oxen to pay his contribution in money. I think that there were others that prepared and gave timber in the same way. It is related of one poor man who had hard work to support his family, that he signed \$15.00 and made salts, by boiling ashes in the woods, carrying them to Townshend and selling them to pay his contribution.

The frame of this house was raised July 8, 1802. Its dimensions are length 55 ft., width 45 ft., height of posts ft., the ceiling overhead is arched, the beams which cross overhead are hewed arching. I do not believe there is a tree in town now that would make one of them. The roof has a double set of rafters. The name of the carpenter who began the work was Blodgett. I have been unable to learn any thing

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farther about this man only that he got muddled and that Thomas Burnap, father of Dea. Harvey Burnap and Grandfather of Mrs. H.M. Prentiss took up the work and carried it to completion.

There were a hundred picked men summoned to the raising, gathered from five towns; Londonderry, Peru, Weston, Andover, and of course Windham - one score from each. A barrel of rum was provided and Dea. John Burnap was appointed to deal it out. We know that there was enough, for the Peru delegation returned after starting home and took another drink.

I wish we had the names of all of the hundred - Col Daniel Cobb, Samuel Woodburn, John Gould, and Joseph Persons are known to have been of the Windham contingent.

After the men were gathered on the ground, the minister - I am sorry that I cannot give you his name - while all stood with uncovered heads

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and uplifted hands asked the Heavenly Father to grant His blessing on the undertaking, and earnestly prayed that this might be the house of the living God where He would delight to dwell. It is said that the whole company wept.

Such a gathering of stalwart men could not get together without trial of strength and athletic feats.