

CHURCHES OF BURRILLVILLE

by Shirley Greene

As early as the year 1783, the Society of Friends held meetings in the corner of the town of Glocester, now known as Mapleville. During the early years, the meetings were held at the Jesse Battey home. In 1791 a lot was obtained near Cooper's Mills (now Mapleville), and a meeting house was built. The house was a plain two story structure with unpainted seats, no ornaments in the interior, and only a modest brown coat on the exterior. Among the early members were Benjamin Battey, his wife and seven children, Mary and Smith Battey, Shadrock Steere and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Buffum Chase, and Philip and Mary Walden. The building is still standing and is now a private home.

Though the efforts of Elder Colby, the first Freewill Baptist Church in the state was established in Pascoag in the year 1812. From all the historical documents I could find, this Elder Colby was a very remarkable man. He was a native of New Hampshire and travelled and preached around the states for nine years before coming here. Keache's History of Burrillville states that his zeal knew no bounds. His first visit to the town was in October, 1812. He preached on his first night in town although he travelled from Providence over the rough roads, a distance of around 25 miles. The first Quarterly Meeting of the Freewill Society in this state was held on March 12th, 1814. The first meetings were held in the old Burrillville Meeting House. The first deacons to serve this church were Duty Salisbury and Andrew Ballard. A new building was erected in 1839 and is still being used today. It is located on Church Street in Pascoag. The second preacher to come to this church was Elder Charles Bowles, a colored man from New Hampshire. He was considered a man of talent.

About this time, one Elder Britt was attracting followers in various parts of the town and in Douglas, Massachusetts, just over the line of Burrillville. This led to the establishment of the Methodist in the town. A church was formed in 1847 and was called the "Methodist Episcopal Church of Laurel Hill". The dedication sermon was preached by Reverend Charles Macready of the New England Conference. This church was replaced in 1890 by a newer edifice and was used until blown down by a hurricane. Across the street was a hill known as "Methodist Hill" and many a child has slid down the hill on the old wooden sleds of yesteryear.

Later, a Primitive Methodist Church was located on South Main Street in Pascoag. The building was erected in 1890 and is still being used.

In 1851, the Reverend J. H. Eames commenced preaching in Mapleville according to the rites of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Following the impressive and solemn service of the Church of England, these meetings lasted for two years and were well attended. Reverend Eames took a two year tour of the Holy Land and when he returned, he started services in Harrisville. As near as can be ascertained by my diligent research, an Episcopal Church was built in 1857 in Harrisville. The building was burned in the big Harrisville fire of 1898 and stood where the present Harrisville fire station now stands.

A group of people used a church building on the upper portion of Church Street in Bridgeton. They were the Second Adventists, and they disbanded and sold their church building to the Episcopalians. The church was built in 1894 and was later moved down the street nearer to Pascoag. It is located at the corners of Broad and Church Streets and is still being used.

A group of nine people formed and held meetings and formed the Berean Baptist Church. They built a church on Chapel Street

in Harrisville in 1874. It grew from a Sabbath-School which was started in 1867, and it was the first organized by the original nine members. Reverend William Fitz was one of the more prominent preachers of the church. Much of the credit for organizing the church goes to Miss Ida Steere. This young lady was a native of Harrisville and was found of gay society. She was possessed of a lively nature and a genial disposition and had an admirable trait of character. She lived in Putnam, Connecticut and there became "awakened to a sense of Christian Duty" and was converted. Returning to Harrisville, she entered the profession of teaching. By the earnest way, she conducted prayer meetings. Other people soon attended and soon a Sabbath-School was formed. With this young lady and her endeavors the present Berean Church was founded.

In 1908 a small Methodist Episcopal Church was built in Mapleville and is still in use. Later a still smaller church was built in the village of Glendale, and this Methodist church is still in use.

In 1886, a Universalist Church was erected in Harrisville. This cost \$12,000.00. One of the earliest Universalists in Burrillville was Rev. Mr. Fish who came from Hopedale. Today the church is a flourishing church and sees faithful followers each Sunday.

A Catholic Priest, Father Thomas Quinn had come to administer the Sacraments to Pascoag Catholics as early as 1850. There were a very few Catholics in the village until the opening of the satin and woolen mills. Father Quinn often came and said Mass in the old Pascoag Inn and sometimes in the home of a Mr. Kilbride, whose grave and headstone may still be seen in the first Catholic Cemetery in Pascoag. This plot of land comprising three-fourths of an acre seems to be the first sod of land owned by a Catholic in the entire town. It is of a certain humorous interest to note in the book written by Rev. T. E. Ryan, that a Mr. John O'Conner, purchased a lot of land from Jason Emerson, who had bought it from one Andrew Harris, who gave his name to the village. It is said that the purpose for which the land was to be used had to be concealed because of a bigoted neighbor. The church they built was a plain wooden structure, on the outskirts of Harrisville. People came from all of the surrounding villages to this church as there were no other Catholic Churches in the area. The deed is dated April 9, 1856. It is of note that the first child baptized was called Catherine Degan. This church was lost in the 1938 Hurricane. They purchased land across the street and the present St. Patrick's Church is an imposit brick structure.

On March 14, 1880 a cornerstone was laid to start a Catholic Church in Pascoag. This was St. Joseph's Church and was the first church of the faith in Pascoag. A special train was chartered to bring a contingent of persons from Providence, the most notable being Bishop Hendricken who conducted the ceremonies. This church was destroyed by fire around 1910. A newer stone structure was built and is being used today. This is located on Sayles Avenue in Pascoag.

In May of 1906 a new church was built in Mapleville. It was an outgrowth of the Harrisville Church. It was known as "Our Lady of Good Help" and was mostly made up of French-Canadians. This church is still in use today.

In Glendale there is a small parish church that used to be a schoolhouse.

A last church was built in 1923. It is called St. Theresa, "The Little Flower". This place is located on a hill that overlooks the village of Mohegan. This is constructed of brick and terra-cotta and makes a handsome building.

A small group of Seventh Day Adventists meet in the Stillwater House in Harrisville.

This comprises a small sketch of the churches and their growth in Burrillville. Space will not permit longer discourse.