

Memories of Wilmot: Wilmot Flat Baptist Church

Transcript

8/26/22

Summary

In this documentary, Charles Thompson, and Liz Kirby share their memories of the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church. This interview was recorded in two segments, one on October 23, 2020, and the other on April 30, 2021, by Wilmot Historical Society board members Judy Hauck, Lindy Heim, Liz Kirby, and Fred Ögmundson. They spoke with Liz and Charles at his home on Cross Hill Road in Wilmot, New Hampshire.

Transcript

Fred: Charles, will you tell us about the church in Wilmot

Charles: Yes. There were times when there was a large congregation. Other times when there were smaller congregations, much having to do with the appeal of the minister. One particular minister from Franklin, was sort of a pied piper. A lot of people came. A lot of children. We had a big choir. A lot of activity going on, youth group and so forth. Then things changed, and it reverted back to where it is.

We found a series of four pictures that were taken from the top of the hill behind Bub Morgan's house when it was still open. And two of the pictures show the village with the church in the early part of the 1900s. And the other ones look up towards Cross Hill where we are, and it was all open. You could see the stone walls. You could see the houses up over the top of the hill. This house was there, the chicken house was there. There was an old corn crib, well the corn crib is still there. But there was a nice house over there, and the barn and so forth. That series of pictures shows the village and the old (Baptist) church, which burned in 1944.

[To raise money to rebuild] The ladies of the church, as is very true in churches around here these days, they really carried the ball. They started out by having food sales on the lawn of the church all through the summer. And the summer people would come up and they'd buy aprons, and aprons were big, and food was big. Our mother made ten loaves of bread a week, five for us and five for the for the sale. And there were pies and so forth. And then in the fall there were suppers. And these suppers would be maybe ham and beans, but they would look a little bit exotic too. Mrs. Vickre was Swedish, and she'd have a Swedish meatball supper – *Swedish smorgasbord* they called them. They even had lobsters at one time. I remember sucking on the little tentacles.

But they had a variety of different suppers and over the years, as this went on and on, they built up enough money so that they had [enough to have] the foundation poured. They started the upright structure, and there's a cornerstone there that apparently, as we understand it, has pictures of us in it along with other people. Rose Greeley was a big benefactor of the church and when they placed the cornerstone in the foundation there was a sort of a little celebration. There was some staging up, and everybody wanted to get up on the staging and have their picture taken with a cornerstone. Well, the staging collapsed, and one side of it went downhill. I remember Rose Greeley

sliding down the thing and people were holding on to each other. But they all survived nobody died or had an accident or had any injuries as I recall.

As the ladies made more money, the church kept going up. And there was an architect in Portsmouth, Maurice Whitmer. And it just went on and on and kept being built. My sister and I would come home from school and our regular stop was to swing in and see what they were doing at the church and chat with the carpenters and so forth.

We had services in the basement of the church for several years until they built up and had the rest of the structure, and they put a bell in there and picked pews from some church that was putting in new pews somewhere. So, the pews are the same ones that are there now, but they were used from some other church. And they started having services up in the upper local level, the main level, and they bought an organ.

Liz: Another one of the fundraising activities of the ladies in the church was to make sequined earrings. They made thousands of pairs of earrings using sequins attached to a piece of felt and then with the earring back on it.

Chrissy Knudson and Doris Langley were very big in the earring making business and the earrings purchased the organ that was used in that church for many, many, years. Another project was a quilt. Edith Cheney was living with Ola Morey, next to the school, and she made a signature quilt for the town and for the church. You paid a nickel to go and write your name on a piece of paper, and then she would embroider your name on the cloth in the center of the square for you for the quilt. Anybody in town you know could have their name on it. There are a number of names on it that were from people out of town, friends of hers from Massachusetts and so forth. But eventually it got finished, and it was raffled off.

As Charles mentioned, our parents did not believe in any type of gambling, including raffles. My mother desperately wanted that quilt because it was so beautiful. Our names were on it, a lot of our family members names were on it, but this was just not an option for her to have it. So, it did provide money for the church, and I don't know if she knew who won that at that time or not. But many years later, probably during the 1980s, she went to an auction in Wilmot Flat, an estate auction, and the quilt came up for sale and she bought it for twenty-five dollars. And it was a wonderful, wonderful surprise for her that she was able to do it, and she got her wish and did it within the scope of her beliefs that gambling was wrong. And fortunately, we still do have that quilt.

Charles: Right now, I think that Allen Koop has been there the longest of anyone as the minister of the church over the years. So, it's grown. They put the parking lot in. The cemetery out in the back was a long-established cemetery. I marveled at the stonework of that cemetery. If you drive up Cemetery Place and look over, there's some marvelous stonework that they terraced there. Our grandfather Benjamin Emons and his wife and other family members are buried there up near the top.

Liz: Good afternoon today is April 30th, 2021, I'm Liz Kirby with the Wilmot Historical Society, and I'm visiting with Charles Thompson at his home on Cross Hill Road in Wilmot. We're asking Charles to tell us some of his memories of the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church. Good afternoon, Charles, can you tell us about what you recall?

Charles: Good afternoon. Yes, before I start, I'd just like to reference this pamphlet, this document, that I have in front of me which is an historic compilation prepared by Dr. Bloc, b-l-o-c, who was the pastor at the Wilmot Baptist Church up until the late 1930s early, early 1940s. It is really quite a document. It starts way back when the church was first formed in 1837 and continued on through the construction of the church in 1839. And includes a lot of significant history about churches in Wilmot in general. and the different societies and the different organizations that existed at that time and that we don't know much about today

So, in that respect this document is a really very valuable, forty-three pages that he put together here, and he, in many instances, gave tribute to the people who were most instrumental in keeping things going. Like many churches today and throughout time, their sizes come and go, the character of the churches change. They have good times and not-so good times, and he related those instances here in this document.

So, I'm not going to go back and dwell on all of that because it's all here and it will be in a place of safe keeping that can be relied upon by someone. But it is very interesting reading, and it's very personalized from the standpoint of Dr. Bloc and the people who were here at the time.

Dr. Bloc was drafted in 1941 as a chaplain in the United States Army. And this is the last writing we have from him. And he refers to the time leading up to that as a gloomy period, and he makes enough reference to the growing war, if you will, in Europe, and its impact upon civilization in general and how it's sort of impacting the outlook and so forth of people here. And true enough he went into the army as a chaplain and in early 1941.

The 1939 references here are the proceedings of the centennial of the church building since it was it was constructed in 1839. But following that time, in 1944, there was a fire before this, and they rebuilt the church, and in 1944 there was a second fire that destroyed the church and the people of the church set about shortly thereafter in raising money to rebuild the church, and it was done through food sales, and suppers, and donations, contributions, and a lot of hard work.

And I remember the day sitting in the in the church when in part of the service they just stopped momentarily and had a brief ceremony of burning the mortgage, and it was a tissue paper as opposed to today's closing documents it was just three or four pages of tissue paper they crumpled up put a little bowl, touched a match to it, to signify the fact that the church had paid off its mortgage it was free and clear. But even after that they went on having some fundraisers to help support the church.

Liz: After the church was burned and before they could start meeting in the new one, what arrangements did they make to have for services and who were the pastors at that time?

Charles: Initially right after the fire, services were held in the GAR/Grange Hall, on the opposite side of Village Road from where the church is today, where the Community Association now stands. When the construction [of the new church] started, it clearly started with an excavation, and a foundation. Services were held in the lower level, the vestry they're now called, for a few years. As the upper structure was being put together, services were held there.

Mr. Bishop was the pastor when the services were held in the grange hall and when the services moved into the vestry, the downstairs basement area, the Reverend Rye became the pastor, and he was there through 1952 when the church was dedicated. The new church, that would be the third church building on that site, the first two lost to fire.

Reverend Rye was there for some period of time, and he was followed by Mr. Nelson and then by Reverend Mudge...Mr. Mudge...and then he became ordained while he was here. Following Reverend Mudge there was a pastor whose name I do not remember, but he was followed by Reverend Miller who was here for a period of time probably up until about 1988.

There were times when there was a big Sunday school, a big choir. And other times when the choir really consisted of my sister and me singing duets there with Ola Morey playing at the organ. At this present time in 2021, there is no choir, but there is occasionally music provided by some of the members of the church.

Dr. Allen Koop is the current pastor, and he has been there for 20-25 years. He's been a wonderful pastor of the church. The church has remained strong throughout the years. He has mentioned that several times, he thought very highly of our mother who really kind of guided him into the structure and formats of formal church services. He was the pastor at my mother's funeral. He was very taken by our mother.

The church has put on some additions. There have been changes of course, as the church always has. There was a baptistery in the back of the church where Elizabeth and I and Pat Gunden were the first baptized. A big tank that the ministers would go into as we the candidates would, and instantly remark about how cold the water was. But it worked fine, and I think that the baptisms now since then are conducted in Pleasant Lake, and they don't use that baptismal tank the way it was. But as I said, the baptisms were taken and were carried in Pleasant Lake, as is true with a lot of churches have their baptisms in a lake. So, the church has gone well is well cared for. It's been a very strong presence in the town of Wilmot and there's every indication that they'll continue to do so.

Liz: Thank you very much that's quite comprehensive, and I'm so glad that we do have that history that you mentioned.

Charles: It's remarkable. It is really a remarkable assembly of dates times places and things that were going on in the world at the time and in the general Christian community. That's good.

CREDITS

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Photos

Wilmot Historical Society

Music

There is Romance by Kevin MacLeod

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