

A  
HISTORY  
of the  
FIRST FREEWILL  
BAPTIST CHURCH  
of  
SMITHFIELD in  
GREENVILLE  
RHODE ISLAND

Dedicated to

THE YOUTH OF OUR CHURCH  
BY WHOSE HEARTS AND HANDS  
THE CHURCH FUTURE  
WILL BE SHAPED

Researched and written by  
Lloyd P. Stevens  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AND

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## SOURCES OF MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

### ORIGINAL CHURCH RECORDS

Baptist Society Clerk's reports 1821 - 1900  
Church Clerk's Reports - Five Volumes 1820 to date  
Church Historian's Records Mrs. Elizabeth Vaughn  
Record of Pew Rents 1864 - 1905  
Board of Trustees Minutes 1949 - 1965  
Building Committee - Fellowship Hall 1959 - 1961  
Album of the 150th Anniversary Year  
also-Free Baptist Cyclopedia\* G. W. Burgess - J. T. Ward 1899  
Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates  
History of Roger Williams  
History of the Town of Smithfield by Thomas Steere

and -Miscellaneous papers and photographs supplied by  
May B. Lamb Merilla Steere Hazel Barden  
Marion Hardman Frances Greene Grace Barber

\*Contains biographies of Rev. John Colby and Clarissa Danforth  
and of our former Pastors Joseph White to and including Rev.  
Orin D. Patch.

## PROLOGUE

Our Church, The First Freewill Baptist Church of Smithfield, R.I. in Greenville has a beautiful and interesting history going back to the early eighteen hundreds. As our Church was founded by descendants of the early settlers of Smithfield, it seems appropriate to look back to appreciate the circumstances and forces that forged the great qualities which we have been so fortunate to inherit today.

The Town of Smithfield was originally a portion of the territory of the Town of Providence which was settled by Roger Williams in 1644 and who gave to it, its social and political spirit and its distinct character.

The men who first settled Smithfield came from Providence and therefore were endowed with the characteristics of Roger Williams -- hard working, generous, firm in their conviction, honest, independent and Christian.

In 1701, Pardon Tillinghast was persuaded by Joshua Winsor II, a grandson of one of the founders of Smithfield, to travel to the "outlands" of the Town of Providence, as Smithfield was then called, to preach to the few inhabitants of Greenville who embraced the Baptist faith. Thus began a religious movement which lasted for over a hundred years.

A meeting-house was erected in 1706 on the old Woonsocket road, now known as Pleasant View Avenue, midway between the villages of Greenville and Spragueville. It was a small wooden building and although burned down twice and blown over once by a wind storm, it was rebuilt each time and reached its zenith after the great Revival in 1768.

The first settled pastor was Elder Jonathan Sprague.

At the Session of the General Assembly held at Newport in February 1730, the town of Smithfield was incorporated. The Preamble to the Act read: "Foreasmuch as the Outlands of the Town of Providence are large and replenished with inhabitants sufficient to make and erect three townships besides the Town of Providence and the Land lies convenient for the same; which will be of great ease and Benefit to the inhabitants of said Land in transacting and negotiating the prudential affairs of their town, which for some time has been very heavy and burdensom --" Smithfield, Scituate and Gloucester were divided into separate townships. The Smithfield Township was 73 square miles of land bordered by --

East -- Blackstone River	South -- by Johnston and North Providence
West -- Gloucester	North -- by the State of Massachusetts

The population was 450.

The first Town Council was composed of -  
John Arnold, President - Joseph Mowry, Thomas Steere, Samuel Aldrich,  
John Mowry and Benjamin Smith.

The first Town Clerk was Richard Sayles.

The first Town Treasurer was John Sayles.

Other early names in Smithfield's history were: Waterman, Sprague, Jencks, Winsor, Clarke, Aldrich, Mowry, Brown, Angell, Arnold, Wilkinson, Sayles, Paine, Andrews, Slater, Smith, Ballou, Cook, Olney, Tucker & Steere.

At the first meeting of the Town Council in 1730, one of the several matters attended to was "to cite several persons before the Town Council to give their reasons why they inhabit in the Town of Smithfield without admittance of the said Town Council" - some persons were ordered removed from the town. The diligence used to ascertain the fitness of the applicant for a permanent residence was both active and effective. The person cited, if recalcitrant, was forthwith put out of the town by the Sergeant. If he returned he was ordered to pay a fine within the hour or be stripped naked "from the waist upward and whipped".

However, the Town grew and prospered and Smithfield became famous as the home of inventive genius and persevering industry and skill.

In 1711, Isreal Wilkinson had built the first foundry and over the years, starting in Manville in 1812, mills for manufacturing cotton cloth and other necessary items, dotted the river banks - Blackstone - Branch and Woonasquatucket. During the Revolution, Smithfield, the second wealthiest town in Rhode Island, manufactured and supplied cannon, muskets and clothing as well as food and men to the Colonial Forces.

In January 1871, after several years of consideration, it was voted to divide the Town into three parts -- The first resolution designed these parts as Lincoln, Slater and Greenville but this was amended to be Lincoln, North Smithfield and Smithfield.

The community now called Greenville had been settled in 1689 by Resolved Waterman. By 1871, it had become the largest village in Smithfield. There were three mills - 2 were woolen mills and one was called the Winsor Mill. Resolved Waterman had built a hotel in 1733.

Greenville's central location and development led an early historian to prophesy as to its future -- "one thing is certain, this will be a substantial town which will, in all that goes toward making a vigorous and aggressive community, be an honor and advantage to the State".

The Community had been named Greenville in honor of the Revolutionary General, Nathaniel Greene.

Two Smithfield men were members of the Continental Congress- Peleg Arnold and Daniel Mowry 1780 1787.

## THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH

### THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

1820                      1870

Our Church may be said to have had its beginning from the work of a woman. The story goes back to the establishment by Rev. John Colby of the Free Baptist Church in Burrillville in 1812. When Rev. Colby died in 1817, Clarissa Danforth came to be pastor at that Church.

She was near enough to Greenville to be the leader of a revival that was established in Greenville and continued for 16 months. Early in 1820, Rev. Joseph White came from Maine to associate with Miss Danforth in her work and on May 16, 1820, founded the Greenville Church which was the second Free Will Baptist Church in the State.

The new church grew rapidly. At the beginning it had 50 members and in 5 months had added 70. In October 1821, when less than 1 1/2 years old, its membership totaled 144.

Church worship meetings which had been held in various homes in the area were held in the new Meeting-house when it was completed in 1822 on the first and third Sundays of the month - in 1850 the church was used by the Baptist every Sunday.

Early business meetings were called Covenant Meetings because the reading of the Covenant was the first order of business. These meetings were held in various homes in the area as well as at Mendon, Glocester and Scituate. As the group became larger the meetings were held in the Green Academy and the Harmony School.

Many of these meetings were held on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and were opened by prayer by the Pastor or an Elder - A Moderator was chosen - usually the Pastor - testimonies of Christian experiences were given, hymns and prayers were sung and given. Then any necessary business was attended to.

"..and the people repaired to the 'waterside' where the candidates manifested their faith by going into the water and being buried with Christ"- from Church Clerk's Reports - 1820. Baptism by immersion in local bodies of water continued for 120 years to 1943. One of these bodies of water was what is now called Slack's Pond - another was Waterman's Lake.

In these early days attitudes towards morals and Christian behavior were very strict and discipline was prompt and stern. Sometimes the "business" of the meeting was considering the "waywardness" of some member. A complaint when made to the Church would be assigned to a committee to investigate and report to the next meeting. If the charge was accepted by the Church group present, the right hand of fellowship was withdrawn and the

member was "disowned" from the church. Absence from 2 or 3 meetings brought a visit by a committee for "the reasons why".

The earliest pastors were compensated by the "generosity of the members". However, in the 1838 budget \$150 was allowed to Rev. Reuben Allen for preaching 2 Sundays a month for a year.

The Church continued to grow and it established monthly Covenant meetings in Glocester and Mendon and North Scituate to accomodate the members thus spread abroad. In 1835 a number were set off and formed independent churches in these areas.

Elder White resigned the pastorate in 1827 and in 1829 Elder Reuben Allen became pastor who continued for 12 years when he then became pastor of the North Scituate Church, which had been a branch of this Church.

In 1841, the Slavery Question became so divisive that special "unity" meetings were held (no records were kept) by the Church Leaders to keep the Church together.

Elder Hosea Quinby became pastor in 1843 and in that capacity served 2 years. Since his duties as Principal of the Smithville Seminary required most of his time, he could not give his full attention to the service of the Church - yet several very valuable members were added to the Church under his ministry.

A new and fuller Covenant was formed, received and signed and the Church virtually reorganized. "This had become a very needful work for as much as there were many gone beyond the knowledge of the Church by keeping no correspondence with it and others living in its vicinity neither regarding their Covenant or the commands of the Savior". There were about 60 who adopted and signed the new Covenant and the perpetuation of the Church.

Elder Quinby was succeeded in 1846 by Elder Maxcy W. Burlingame who continued a year and six months and then removed to Waterford, Massachusetts. Rev. Martin J. Steere then served to 1851.

Then Elder David Lancaster became pastor for two years and in April 1853, Elder James A. McKenzie was chosen by the Church and the Society.

Almost every distracting question that has agitated the public has affected this Church. Masonry and Anti-Masonry - Abolition and Anti-Abolition - Temperance by moral suasion and Temperance by legal suasion -- Millerism -- Mormonism -- Materialism and "isms" difficult to name or define, at times have beset and to a greater or lesser degree operated for awhile and then passed away. But always the strength of the roots laid down by the founders carried the strength needed to keep the Church ever

moving forward.

"Hundreds have been in the membership, many of whom have finished their Christian course in this Church, having served their generation by the Will of God, and so have departed to be with Christ. Others have laid the foundation of other churches, as those in Gloucester, Mendon, Waterford and North Scituate and not a few from these having done their work have gone home. Others have been proved to be chaff which the wind carrieth away,"

In April 1854, "It was found advisable to revise our list of members when 60 were found in unity correspondence and travel -- walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Since which time 14 have been added by baptism -- one has died in the Lord and one dismissed to the Church in Gloucester -- making our members 72."

In 1855 just after there had been the sifting process of membership the Church laid down in its Covenant that it would not admit to its communion any who made or sold ardent spirits or who used them or furnished them to others. This may seem strange in view of the fact that the leading spirit in the formation of the church in its early days had been the keeper of the village tavern. And it is stranger still that nearly 20 years later one of the oldest members took a young minister to task for speaking in favor of legislative prohibition. The old man assured the young preacher that it was one of the most striking instances of Christian forbearance that he could sit still and allow the preacher to hand out such doctrine.

Another fundamental principle laid down at that time was a resolve of the Church not to admit any to its fellowship who held slaves or who could apologize for slavery. This was an advanced position to be taken 6 years before the Civil War and when abolition doctrine was so unpopular.

Rev. McKenzie served till 1856 and was succeeded by Rev. Richard Woodworth who continued for the next 15 years to 1871. During the years 1864-1867 Rev. Woodworth also served on the School Committee of the Town. In 1870, former pastor, Rev. Burlingame became a member of the School Committee. The Church was incorporated by the January 1864 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly.

The history of the Church is closely interwoven with that of other institutions that have flourished in this part of the State. One of these was the Smithville Seminary, afterward known as the Lapham Institute in North Scituate. Another was the Smithfield Exchange Bank, now known as the Citizens Savings and Trust Company.

Among the founders of the Church were men who could remember the days of the Revolution when the town was the second richest in the State and was called upon to make extensive contributions for the sustenance of the

Colonial Forces.

In the course of the "ups and downs" which assail any church, our church has been several times reorganized, several times had occasion to scan its membership closely and at times also to sift out those who were found "to be chaff which the wind blowth away", yet there has always been a staunch remnant that has remained and stood by it.

THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH  
THE SECOND FIFTY YEARS  
1870            1920

The second Fifty Years of Church History started with the resignation of Rev. Woodworth in 1871. He was succeeded by the Rev. Charles S. Perkins for 3 years and then Rev. Arthur D. Given for 6 years to 1881.

According to the records there was a steady and continuous growth in church membership indicating that through these trying years of Reconstruction after the Civil War there had been unity of purpose and spiritual growth.

In 1877, The Women's Mission Society was organized, although there is evidence that the women of the Church had been active in mission work since the Church was founded. The records show that during the Revolutionary period the women of the community, of which many were members of our Church, provided clothing and prepared food for the military volunteers. After the War, one of the activities of our women was the teaching of negroes under the American Missionary Society. Another interest was the mission at Bengal Orissa in India and also a school for the blacks at Harper's Ferry, later known as Stowe College. Mrs. Ethelyn Winsor was President from 1950 until 1971 when the Society was dissolved.

In 1881 Rev. Orin Patch succeeded Rev. Given and he in turn was followed by Rev. Gideon Burgess who continued to 1889. Rev. Burgess was one of the Editors of The Free Baptist Cyclopedia published in 1889. This is an historical account of the rise of the Free Will Baptist movement in this country and contains biographical accounts of those religious and laymen leaders involved. Rev. George Musgrove served from 1889 to 1892 and was succeeded by Rev. Dewitt Durgin in 1893.

In 1893 The Freewill Baptist Sewing Society which had been founded in 1865 changed its name to The Greenville Charitable Society and included 7 men. In 1916 they again changed their name to the Ladies Society and the men were made honorary members. The present name of Ladies Aid Society was adopted in 1924. Through the years, this group of women have constantly devised ways and means to raise funds to support the Church as well as supplying White Cross articles for missionaries and doing Red Cross work during the war periods. Mrs. Elizabeth Vaughn has been President and Mrs. Ethelyn Winsor has been Treasurer since 1944.



THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH  
THE YEARS SINCE 1920

The Second Century of Our Spiritual Church began with the continued ministry of Rev. Henderson to 1925 followed by Rev. Frank S. Clark to 1926. Rev. Herman L. Noyes accepted the pastorate call in 1926 and continued until 1930.

On February 4, 1927, a group of 34 young women, most of them in their teens, was organized as The True Blue Chapter of the National World Wide Guild of the Northern Baptist Convention, under the counselship of Mrs. Mary Needham. In 1938, the name was changed to True Blue Circle and became affiliated with the Women's Mission Society of Rhode Island though the group is now a part of a wider and broader involvement with American Baptist Women. This group has been strong and devoted to their work with foreign and local missions including work with patients at the State Medical Center and State Hospital at Wallum Lake. Their support of the Church work and Church needs has been most important.

Rev. Walter H. White became pastor in 1930 and served 13 years - one of the longest term of service in the Church history.

The year of 1931 marked the 200th Anniversary of the Town of Smithfield. Many of our Church members took an active part in the celebration and former pastor Rev. Gideon Burgess wrote the historical sketch of the town which was a prominent part of the souvenir program.

A very interesting Special Church Service was held in May 1936. It was called a "Colonial Service" and was after the manner of the Puritans. All the folks came dressed in Puritan costumes - no automobiles were allowed on the church grounds - some came in horse and carriage and there were some Narragansett Indians with a wigwam on the church lawn. A drum in the church belfry called the congregation to worship.

According to tradition, the men sat on the right side of the sanctuary and the women sat on the left. There were two "tithing" men who with long poles (on the ends of which were tied a rabbit's foot) kept awake those who were inclined to "snooze". These two men were Andrew Winsor and Clarence Davis.

The calendar for the service included these requirements: "The people will stand until the Pastor has escorted his wife down the aisle. The men will leave the church first - the better to ward off any possible attack."

In 1937, Rev. White was honored by receiving the Rosa O. Hall Certificate from the Northern Baptist Convention.

Another community event was the First Apple Blossom Festival, held in Greenville in May 1938. Rev. Burgess - now aged 84 - was costumed as

Rev. Gilbert Cutler succeeded Rev. Durgin in 1900.

In 1904 The Society of Young Peoples Christian Endeavor was formed under the leadership and guidance of Rev. Cutler. The young people held their meetings Sunday evenings and programs consisted of worship, hymn singing and discussions of experiences.

Rev. Orin Patch who had served as pastor for 1 year - 1881-1882 was recalled in 1907 to succeed Rev. Cutler. Rev. Patch passed on in February 1911.

Rev. John Roberts was called and served until 1919 when a young minister, Rev. Albert Henderson succeeded him in 1920.

The records indicate that during these years the Sunday School had continued to grow. Classes were originally housed in the small and large vestrys -- later some classes were moved to the church house. The records are unclear however, as to when the Sunday School first began. In 1889 it is recorded that the membership was 170 - membership fluctuated but in 1909 it was still 168.

The years of World War I called 11 of our young men to service and all returned except Ernest E. Austin.

On the evening of November 30, 1918, a Thanksgiving service was held in the Church. It was the first time in 15 years and the second time in 25 years that an evening meeting had been held. Electric lights had been installed and their dedication was the reason for the meeting. (The dangerous condition of the chandelier had been the cause for not using the Church in the evenings during the past years.) The electric lights were a gift of Dr. Sarah Sweet Winsor of Boston in memory of her mother, Mrs. Sarah Sweet Winsor.

The 100th Anniversary of the Church was celebrated on Sunday, December 26, 1920. A beautiful program showing pictures of the Church building in 1866 and 1920 contained an historical sketch and each member received a copy. A quotation from this sketch .."In the hundred years that have just come to a close, the Church has passed through its periods of advance and decline but has always had a group of loyal devoted souls, persistent in the faith they held dear. The history of the organization is singularly free from strife; and doubtless, because of this harmony the Church has stood the test of one hundred years.

Today the Church has a hundred and thirty-seven members, an aggressive Sunday School and a lively Christian Endeavor Society. It has lived through a century because it has served, and continues to live, endeavoring by God's help to be all things to all men, that it might by all means save some."

"Father Time" and presided over the ceremony of crowning Miss Lois Barber, one of our Church members, as Apple Blossom Queen. The festival lasted for two days and included visitors tours of some of our apple orchards.

On November 30, 1943, The Northern Baptist Convention was held in this Church. The theme was "Our Church and Its World Parish" and Mrs. Mary Needham presided at the afternoon session. Rev. Noah E. Fehl presided at the evening session. Mr. Earl Knight was toastmaster at the dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Greene prepared and set up the exhibits.

Rev. White was called to military service in 1943 as a Navy Chaplain and Rev. Noah E. Fehl served until 1945 and was followed by Rev. Arthur B. Mercer who continued to 1951. The following eleven years were the service of Rev. Everard V. Thomson to 1962. Rev. W. Stanley Pratt came from Maine at the end of 1962 to accept the pastorate.

During these past forty years, the Church had met and weathered the pressures of the times - World War I - the stock market crash and the depression - the hurricane of 1938 - Pearl Harbor and World War II - the Korean and the Indo-China conflicts.

The war in Asia claimed two of our boys - Ronald E. Blake and Samuel Branch.

The Church Groups - Ladies Aid, Women's Missionary Society and True Blue Circle were busy during these years with their patriotic work as well as their usual support of mission work and the Church financial needs. During these years, other groups had been formed: Candlelight Circle in 1949 to 1965; The Men's Club in 1951 to 1959; The Golden Band in 1957 to 1965; Christians All Year in 1965 to 1972; Couples Club in 1967 and still active; Baptist Youth Fellowship in 1930 and still active; The Sally Peck Guild in 1954 to 1965; The Ann Judson Guild in 1954 to 1965 (Mrs. Thomson serving as leader) and in 1946 to 1951 (Jeanette Mercer serving as leader). The records do not clearly indicate when the Choirs of the Church were formed - Adult and Youth - but there is indication that they have been active in the Worship Services on Sundays as well as on special services at Christmas and Easter. The membership of the choirs have fluctuated with the times but recently they have grown to be the largest on record. One of the choir members, Walter Greene, has been a constant member for more than 34 years and is still very much a member.

Another important organization is the Thrift Shop, organized in 1963, and operated from the Church House. It was moved to the new Educational Building until a new building was built from its own funds. The project has been very successful under the guidance of Madeleine True and Carrie Palazzi and has made substantial gifts to Youth programs such as summer camps and Greenlake, the mortgage fund, sanctuary renovation fund and recently gave the Palladium Window in the front room of the Sanctuary in "Memory of Those Who Serve."

Increasing growth and activities of the Christian Education program in expanding curriculum and teacher training skills indicated a need for a Director of Christian Education. In 1964, Rev. Myra T. Borden was appointed to that post. Rev. Borden continued until 1965 when she resigned due to her health.

During these 52 years, the Sunday Worship Services have been changed - in time of service and in number - some years two morning services were held - mid-week Prayer meetings have changed their meeting nights and now have been discontinued.

The business meetings of the Church have also changed - from the Covenant Meetings held once a month to Quarterly and Annual Meetings - devoted to action on reports and recommendations made by the Boards of Trustees, Deacons, Education and the Committees - Standing, Missionary, Temperance, Prayer Meeting, Visiting sick, Acquaintance and Religious Conversation. The Quarterly Meetings have now been discontinued for the Annual Meeting.

The first Moderator elected for a year's term was John Barden in 1944 and he was re-elected each year for a period of 15 years. Andrew Winsor succeeded him in 1959 and served 11 years until 1970 when he retired. Thomas E. Jamieson is now Moderator.

In 1967, Rev. George Daniels was called to fill the need for a Minister of Christian Education. This was a significant step to meet the increasing pastoral responsibilities in Sunday School and Youth activities. Rev. Daniels resigned in 1970 to accept the pastorate at Royal Oak Michigan.

"Commemoration and Rededication" was the theme of the 1970 year of celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Spiritual Church. The observance continued throughout the year with special events - one each month - except the Anniversary Week of May 16th when events were held on each day of that week. The attendance and participation of the people of the community indicated the spreading influence of the Church in the surrounding areas.

Near the close of 1970, the Church lost the leadership of Rev. Pratt who had accepted a call to the Baptist Church on Block Island.

Rev. Alvin D. Johnson became the interim pastor. In a few months, the compatibility of the pastor and the congregation was such that the call was made and accepted to the full pastorate.

In 1972 Rev. Fred Gilbert was appointed as Minister with Youth and his training and experience is being most helpful. Our Baptist Youth Fellowship groups are Junior, Junior High and Senior. We have been most fortunate in having such devoted and dedicated people as Counselors of these groups. Members of these young groups are in the Youth Choir - are active in raising funds for Church needs - conduct special worship services and annual ecumenical hymn sings and raise the

funds for their own projects. For example: During the year 1968-69, the Senior High BYF sponsored an exchange student from Switzerland. Up until 1969, the Church had sponsored two Senior High young people to attend a National Youth Conference. However, in 1969, the Senior High BYF group started working to send as many members completing their sophomore and junior years as possible - that year 11 young people and 2 advisors attended a group conference at Green Lake, Wisconsin.

Some of the projects these young people worked on to raise funds are: prepare and serve suppers for Church and other organizations, conduct Flea markets, sell cookies, operate snack bars at Church affairs and auctions, Christmas sales, etc., have "Slave Days" for house painting, yard cleanups, lawn mowing, car washing and they have a continuous paper salvage service.

The year of 1972 marks the 45th Anniversary of the True Blue Circle and it is a mark of strength and purpose of this group that 13 of the original group are still active.

As the year 1972 was in its closing weeks, "A Unique Tribute to a Great Craftsman" was given in honor of Hilaire Guindon. Mr. Guindon, now 82, was the designer and supervisor of the Sanctuary renovation in 1967. He also is a hand-crafter of beautiful musical instruments. Five members of the R. I. Philharmonic Orchestra performed on Mr. Guindon's instruments - two violins, cello, bass and viola. The music from these beautiful instruments was reflected from the beams on high in the ceiling - hand carved by Mr. Guindon, as was the choir stall, the balcony, the pulpit and the lectern. This concert was held Sunday evening, November 19th and 15<sup>4</sup> joined in the reception which followed.

## THE CHURCH STRUCTURE

"April 7, 1821 - At a meeting of the inhabitants of Smithfield and the adjacent towns held at Col Richard Smith's in Smithfield for the purpose of building a meeting-house and transacting such other business as they might think necessary relative to the same, Daniel Winsor, Esq. was called to the Chair and Nicholas L. Winsor was chosen Clerk.

Voted - That Col. Richard Smith and Emer Olney be a committee to ascertain the expense of a meeting-house to be built fifty feet by forty feet and report at our next meeting.

Voted - That Duty Winsor, Esq., Daniel Winsor, Esq. and Deacon James Olney be a committee to view and stake out the ground given to the Society by Major Nathan B. Sprague to erect said meeting-house on."

(Taken from Original Clerk's Report - Baptist Society 1821)

This was the formation of the Baptist Society of Smithfield. This Society built the meeting-house and maintained it for many years. The Society was the "owner" of the meeting-house and the land on which it stood. The Society was incorporated by the R.I. Assembly in 1822.

It was specified that the building should be 50 feet long, 40 feet wide and 24 feet high. It was also to have a tower not less than 90 feet high and to be modeled after one designed by Mr. Carter for the Chepachet Church. It was stipulated that the new building should have galleries on both sides and at the back and that it should be "handsomely furnished." The cost was limited to \$2,000.

The land for the meeting-house was a portion given to the Society by Major Nathan B. Sprague, augmented by a tract given by Joanna Waterman in exchange for a pew. This amount of land was much larger than the needs of the building itself so there is a liberal church yard and a triangular piece that juts out between the village streets, making an attractive green.

The erection of the new meeting-house was entrusted to Mr. Clark Sayles of Pawtucket and was completed February 19, 1822.

On Thursday, April 4, 1822 it was dedicated with the following exercises: Introductory Prayer by Elder White; Sermon by Elder Tobey; The Charge by Elder Wescott and Conclusion by Elder Reuben Allen.

The meeting-house had 50 pews which were auctioned off to the highest bidder, as was the custom in those days. No person was allowed to have more than 2 pews. The original cost of the building was \$2,000 paid by the original subscribers through the sale of the pews. The maintenance of the property was by assessing each pew owner for the expense money as needed. At first, the pew assessments were a percentage - 2 or 3 - of the value of the

pew - later the expenses were apportioned among the number of pews.

Only pew owners had a vote in the business of the Society and if more than one person owned a pew, only one vote was allowed for that pew. Pews being "property", they were transferred to another for a "price" and a written, notarized agreement of transfer was recorded by the Society Clerk.

The Society set the rules for the use of the meeting-house as well as approving the pastors chosen by the Church.

At first the Meeting-House was used as a community house and the Baptists used it on the first and third Sundays of the month. The Methodist Society occupied it on the second and fourth Sundays. When a month had five Sundays, the Six Principle Baptists used the building on that Sunday. In 1850 the Baptists used it on all Sundays except the fifth and soon after used it every Sunday.

Horse and carriage or buggy (in winter, sleigh) was the only means of transportation in those days. The Pastors used this transportation in making their calls on the members. Behind the Meeting-House building were a succession of sheds to shelter the horses and carriages of those attending services. Along the side fence was a series of granite hitching posts for visitors to tether their horses.

The organ and choir loft was at the rear of the sanctuary. The organ was a single manual with pipes and various stops and an octave of foot pedals and was pumped by hand.

In May 1851 after 30 years, the Society met the need for extensive repairs to the roof and belfry.

In 1855 the insurance on the Structure was increased to \$3,000.

Between 1862 and 1864 the Structure was enlarged on the west side and 26 pews were added. In 1866 the building was raised and the vestry or basement built underneath - this giving two auditoriums of nearly equal size - the lower one being used for Sunday School purposes. In 1884 the side galleries were removed and the upper and lower windows joined into long continuous windows as they now appear.

In 1887, The Baptist Society transferred ownership of the pews to the Church Trustees.

In 1889, the home and office building of Dr. Raymond Eddy at 641 Putnam Pike was acquired as "The Parsonage". Rev. George Musgrove and his family were the first to occupy it.

The Baptist Society continued to about 1900 when the Church Officers took

full responsibility for the Church property.

In the spring of 1914, places for the choir were built on each side of the pulpit and the organ was moved from the rear to the front of the sanctuary. A guest parlor was fitted up near the entrance - stained glass windows took the place of the plainer ones and the interior was handsomely painted by expert decorators. A new asbestos roof was put on in 1917 and electric lights were installed a year later.

In 1938, the Church was completely renovated and in 1951, the Church front and vestibule was remodeled. Steel re-enforced beams were put in place under the floor of the Sanctuary.

The organ, which was hand pumped all these years, was equipped with an electric motor about 1943. Some of the stalwart young men who pumped the organ were George Leach, Dave Schlemmer, Elwood Kelly, Sanford Barden and Gordon Goff.

For many years, the Fourth of July Clambake was an important annual event in the social life of the Church. A financial memorandum dated 7/4/84 indicates that they were held that long ago. However, due to restrictions of World War II, they were discontinued and were never resumed.

In 1955, a new pipe organ was installed - Moeller Artists Model. Also in 1955, the Dr. Sarah Sweet Winsor house next to the Church was purchased to house the overflow of the Sunday School.

After much careful planning, work was begun in 1960 on a large new Educational building on the west side of the Church, to take care of the rapidly growing needs of the Sunday School and the Church programs, due to the increased building of new homes and development in the Greenville area.

Ground breaking ceremonies took place in September 1960 and the cornerstone was laid on May 7th 1961 in a colorful ceremony conducted by Temple Lodge No. 18 F & A M. The ceremony was an ancient one dating back long before George Washington. Thomas A. Jamieson, one of our members, was the Worshipful Master of the Temple at the time. The cornerstone was the gift of Earl Knight - the inscription was the gift of Herbert Coupe and the Lead Canister was the gift of Frederick Potter.

The items placed in the Canister are: Aerial photos of Church and surrounding area; Poems by Rev. Thomson; Membership List; List of Masons attending ceremony; The Observer; The Providence Journal; The Baptist Magazine; A new one dollar bill; Block of postage stamps dated and Historical sketch of the Church.

A new parsonage on Appletown Road was acquired on November 12, 1962.



On February 11, 1963 the "Old Parsonage" on Putnam Pike was sold and the new owner moved it to its present location - behind the Professional building at 647 Putnam Pike. Rev. and Mrs. Thomson were the last to occupy it.

In 1967, the Sanctuary was again completely redesigned, renovated and refurbished with new stained glass windows - beautiful Colonial woodwork - new rugs and new pew upholstery. A Memorial Baptistry - the first the Church has had - was installed in the Chancel. A Memorial Room was also built above the church office area, joining the Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall. Mr. Hilaire Guindon designed and supervised the entire project of renovation. The stained glass windows were designed and executed by Mr. John McGrillies.

Early in 1971 the Appletown Road parsonage was sold.

In the Spring of 1972, it was discovered that a supporting beam of the roof had deteriorated and a full scale inspection of the entire structure indicated that extensive repairs needed to be made. During the summer this work was completed and included in addition to new roof and supporting beams - repairs to the belfry - new siding and insulation and complete repainting of the outside of the building.

Fortunately, the situation had been discovered early and no damage was incurred to spoil the Sanctuary's recent renovation.

It can be noticed throughout the history of the Church Structure that there has always been a deep pride and love for this Edifice, as all through the generations the Church members have been alert to care for and protect this structure, and have met every challenge to the fullest.

The Church Structure is, of course, only wood - stone - metal and glass but it does its

Praise of God when it Inspires those who occupy it to  
LIFT THEIR EYES TO THE HEAVENS AND PRAISE THE LORD.

#### E P I L O G U E

Today, OUR SPIRITUAL CHURCH in its 152nd year, has the largest active membership in its history.

Today, OUR CHURCH STRUCTURE now 150 years old, is as strong if not stronger than the original building.

Today, THE CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE of OUR CHURCH is more wide spread than ever before, extending way beyond the center of Greenville.

These statements of fact can be made today because --

each generation of Church members have followed these precepts:

Each generation has through Faith - Integrity - Persistence - built the Spiritual and Structural strength of the Churches for their FUTURE GENERATIONS.

And today, we, the present generation, are building for OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

We are blest with a generation of youth developing these heritages. And as they reach for and grasp the "torch" - they too will by the strength of their and our heritage, face and meet the challenges to build for THEIR FUTURE GENERATIONS. WE COULD NOT LEAVE OUR CHURCH IN BETTER HANDS.

OUR CHURCH SPIRE WILL EVER REACH SKYWARD TO GOD.

APPENDIX

PASTORS

Joseph White	1820 - 1827	Reuben Allen	1829 - 1839
Hosea Quimby	1844 - 1845	Marcy W. Burlingame	1848 - 1849
Martin J. Steere	1850 - 1851	David Lancaster	1852 - 1854
James A. McKenzie	1854 - 1855	Richard Woodworth	1856 - 1871
Charles S. Perkins	1872 - 1875	Arthur Given	1875 - 1881
Orin D. Patch	1881 - 1882	Gideon A. Burgess	1883 - 1889
George N. Musgrove	1889 - 1892	Dewitt C. Durgin	1893 - 1900
Gilbert B. Cutler	1900 - 1907	Orin D. Patch	1907 - 1911
John H. Roberts	1911 - 1919	Albert G. Henderson	1920 - 1925
Frank S. Clark	1925 - 1926	Herman L. Noyes	1926 - 1930
Walter H. White	1930 - 1943	Noah E. Fehl	1943 - 1945
Arthur B. Mercer	1946 - 1951	Everard V. Thomson	1951 - 1962
W. Stanley Pratt	1962 - 1970		
		Alvin D. Johnson	1971 - 1976
		David M. Kilpatrick	1976 - 1984
		Roger H. Francis	1985 -

### TITLE TO CHURCH PROPERTY

Our Church structure was originally built on land received from Nathan B. Sprague and Joanna Waterman by The Baptist Society of Smithfield - a group of Greenville citizens of several denominations, and incorporated in 1822.

The Society controlled and maintained the property until about 1900 when it appears that the Church officers took full responsibility. (No records have been found regarding the Society after 1900)

Excerpt from P. & I. Committee of R.I. Baptist State Convention 12/27/60.

"Excerpts from a letter from Judge John M. Booth, counsel for the Greenville church were read, stating that in searching title to the church property in connection with a proposed mortgage of \$150,000 to finance building construction, the Title Guarantee Company has found no record and the church appears to have obtained title by adverse possession. It is their suggestion that before commencing equity proceedings to clear the title that there be a deed on record to the church and that it be accomplished by the church giving a deed to the Convention and that the Convention by quit-claim deed reconvey the property to the church. The rights of the Convention under a contingent mortgage will be fully protected."

This action was taken January 16th 1961.

### MEMORIAL ROOM - PLACE FOR A FIREPLACE IN THE FUTURE.

From a letter to the History Research Committee from former pastor, Rev. W. Stanley Pratt dated March 17, 1973.

"Another thing that I would like to mention, for it can be forgotten as time goes by:-

On the Putnam Ave. side of the Memorial "Upper Room" when it was being constructed by the carpenters, I had them frame up -- behind the paneling between the two windows of that wall -- a location for a possible future fireplace in the framework of the building, if the Church ever decided that it would like to have a fireplace in that beautiful room. It is right behind

the lighted picture of the "Good Shepherd".(if it is still on that wall).

It seems to me that this information should be in the Church records somewhere, in case they ever wanted to do something about it. (When it was in the construction stage and being framed up, it wasn't any extra to make that framing and it would save both time and money later if the Church wanted to do something about it.) So I pass it on to you for whatever you wish to do with this information."

#### GREENE ACADEMY

February 12, 1812 - Duty Winsor, Daniel Winsor, Anson Mowry, Elijah Day, Emer Olney, Nathan B. Sprague, Augustus Winsor, Jr., Ziba Smith, Abraham Smith and Asa Winsor incorporated as Trustees of the Greene Academy: were allowed to hold property to the amount of \$5000.; and granted the right to hold a lottery to raise \$2200. (From History of Smithfield) The Academy was located on Smith Avenue (as now known) opposite number 3, on the land now occupied by the parking lot of George's Restaurant. Our Church held some of their meetings in the Academy from 1820 until some years later.

#### BAPTISMAL SERVICES

"and the people repaired to the waterside where the candidates manifested their faith by going into the water and being buried with Christ" - from Church Clerk's Reports 1820.

".. and Baptism was at the lake on June 7th" from Church records of 1942.

For more than 120 years, Baptism took place in various bodies of water in this area. The place most used - "the waterside" was the northwest shore of what is now called Slack's Pond. The path to the waterside was from Smith Ave. opposite Church St. across the field past the Appleby Homestead to the gatehouse.

The "lake" referred to was Waterman's. Baptismals were held at the eastern end on the property of Miss May Lamb after the area about Slack's Pond became build up, until 1943.

From 1943 to 1967, when our Baptistry was installed in the sanctuary, Baptismal Services were held in churches in North Scituate, Georgiaville, Roger Williams on Veazie Street and the 4th Baptist Church in Providence.

Rev. W. Stanley Pratt's first Baptismal Service was for 62 candidates at the Roger Williams Church in Providence.