

## Highlights of Our Heritage

### Forward

The First Congregational Church of South Windsor is a branch of the universal, Christian family. We have a proud, local history spanning three hundred years. Our spiritual forebearers were English Puritans who ventured across the Atlantic to settle in New England where they could worship free from the constraints (and persecutions) of state-controlled religion. Their ranks included farmers, merchants, craftsmen, housewives, scholars, teachers, preachers, soldiers and civic leaders. While our parish has never been large in numbers, it has made significant contributions to our community, to our state, to our nation and to the world-at-large. Today, we continue the three-century tradition of service by providing opportunities for meaningful worship, spiritual growth, social impact and missionary outreach.

The following has been compiled to promote that sense of continuity with the past which endows the present with meaning and provides direction for the future. Because of the limitations of time and space, the material presented concentrates on the early days of the parish. A bibliography is included for those interested in studying the history of First Church more extensively. We offer this brief introduction to our Church Family with the prayerful hope that all who read it will be inspired with deeper regard for our heritage, and with higher resolve to enrich it in our own day and time.

### The Founding of Our Town

South Windsor was formed out of East Windsor in 1845. East Windsor had been formed out of Windsor in 1768. Windsor was first settled in September 1633, by a contingent from the Plymouth Plantation led by John Holmes. In October 1635, a party of settlers arrived from Dorchester, Massachusetts, which had been established by colonizers from the west of England led by the Reverend John White of Dorchester County. This group arrived in New England in May 1630, aboard the ship, *Mary and John*. A third group of settlers, led by Francis Stiles, also arrived in Windsor in late 1635. These three groups contested for control of the town, and the Dorchester party became dominant. Their minister, the Reverend John Warham, became the first minister in Windsor.

The Dorchester group provided most of the early roots of our parish. Agents from Dorchester purchased the land on the east side of the Connecticut River, between the Scantic and the Podunk, from the Mohegan and Podunk Indian residents in April 1635. The Indians called their settlement *Nowashe*. The Bissell family was the first to build a house

in the area (Ca. 1658). Other early residents included families named Moore, Newberry, Burnham, Ellsworth, Bancroft, Grant, Elmore, Porter, Rockwell, Fitch, Strong, King and Wolcott. By 1691, more than fifty families had established themselves east of the river, and they numbered nearly three hundred persons. This expansion of Windsor was first called Windsor Farmes, then East Windsor, and finally South Windsor.

### The Founding of the Parish

As the number of residents of "Windsor Farmes" grew, they found attendance of worship services on the west side of the river increasingly difficult. Therefore, in May 1680, they petitioned the General Assembly for permission to settle a second minister in the town, but on the east side of the river. Similar petitions were submitted in 1691 (when "Windsor Farmes" had grown to over fifty families and about three-hundred inhabitants) and 1694, when permission was finally granted. Accordingly, Timothy Edwards was called, and the first worship service was held on the east side of the river on November 14, 1694. Until the original Meeting House was completed, worship services were held in parishioners' homes and barns. The incorporation of the parish as the Second Ecclesiastical Society of Windsor was approved by the General Assembly on October 12, 1699.

As the parish stretched eight-and-one-half miles along the river, dissension arose between the south-enders and the north-enders over where the Second Meeting House should be located. Unsuccessful petitions to create a separate Ecclesiastical Society in the southern part of the parish were submitted to the General Assembly in 1715 and 1732. The establishment of the Fourth Ecclesiastical Society of Windsor (now First Church East Windsor) cleared the way for the relocation of the Meeting House to the present site. The partitioning of East Windsor as a separate town in 1735 led to recognition of our parish as the First Ecclesiastical Society in that town. The separation of South Windsor from East Windsor in 1830 changed the designation to the First Congregational Church of South Windsor.

A COURT OF ELECTIONS HELD AT HARTFORD, MAY 10, 1694...

Whereas the inhabitants of Windsor on the east side of the Great River have petitioned this court that (they) may have liberty to procure a minister amongst them to be mayntayned by the present inhabitants and those that shall inhabit hereafter,\* this Court grants there petition that they many procure a minister to settle with them, provided that those live on the east side of the river shall be at liberty to continue and repayre to the ministry on the west side and there to pay dues and dutys, and those on the west side of the river that have estate in land or otherwise on the east their estate shall be rated to the ministry on the west side, and this order shall take no place till they of the east side have a minister settled among them and to continue no longer than they doe keep a minister there.

COLONIAL RECORDS OF CONNECTICUT, Vol, IV, page 128.

Note: The petition\* above referred to with forty-four signatures is in Ecclesiastical I, 103. This petition sets forth that on the east side were families above fifty in number, whereby it was reckoned that there were 300 persons "Capable to hear the word of God with profit." These families were sparsely settled from the Podunk to about six miles north and a few along Ketch Brook (then called Kettle Brook or Kittle Brook) toward Windsorville.

### Ecclesiastical Societies of Windsor, Connecticut

<u>Number</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Name and/or Location</u>
1 <sup>st</sup>	1633	Windsor
2 <sup>nd</sup>	1694	East Windsor (now South Windsor)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1724	Poquonock
4 <sup>th</sup>	1731	Ellington
5 <sup>th</sup>	1738	Wintonbury (now Bloomfield)
6 <sup>th</sup>	1754	Scantic (now East Windsor)
7 <sup>th</sup>	1761	Wapping
8 <sup>th</sup>	1844	Pine Meadows (now Windsor Locks)

### Our Ministers

Timothy Edwards was born in Hartford on May 14, 1669, the eldest of five children of Richard Edwards, a wealthy merchant, and Elizabeth Tuthill. He attended the Hartford Grammar School, and then studied privately for the ministry under the Reverend Pelation Glover, in Springfield. Timothy Edwards entered Harvard College in 1686 with the class of 1690, but he did not remain on campus for the entire four years. His name was added to the seven-number roster of the class of 1691, but he actually received his A.B. degree in 1694, on the same day that he was awarded an A.M. degree.

On November 6, 1694, Timothy Edwards married Esther Stoddard, daughter of the Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, where the young man had been teaching school. The newlyweds came immediately to "Windsor Farmes" where Timothy began to preach as a candidate for his and the parishes' first pastorate. Mr. Edwards' official call to the parish was issued May 3, 1697, and he was ordained on May 28, 1698. Timothy and Esther Edwards had eleven children: one son, Jonathan Edwards, the world-famous theologian and revivalist, and ten daughters. Mr. Edwards' daughters all grew to be six feet tall and were known as "The Edwards' Sixty Feet of Daughters."

Our parish had no parsonage in the early days, but Timothy Edwards' father purchased a farm, built a large house on it, and gave the property to the young couple. This house stood on the east side of Main Street, just north of Governor's Highway, until it was dismantled

in 1813. The large stone which served as its front door step was used as the Corner Stone of the Theological Institute, (which became the Hartford Seminary Foundation) and later the Corner Stone of the Ellsworth School. Behind the house was an apple orchard where Jonathan Edwards encountered some of his early spiritual experiences. Mr. Edwards devoted himself to parish duties, and his domestic and business affairs were ably managed by his wife. He supplemented his income from the parish, which was paid in cash, produce and firewood, by selling farm produce, by renting out Tom, his black slave, to do dry-work, and by selling his daughter's long hair.

Timothy Edwards served our parish longer than any of his successors. He never served another parish, but frequently occupied other New England Pulpits and preached at least once to the Connecticut General Assembly. He served briefly as a military chaplain during Queen Anne's War. Mr. Edwards was proficient in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and prepared several young men to matriculate as Divinity students. He was described as being "about five-feet ten inches tall; of fair complexion; of a strong, robust frame. He was a man of polished manners and always appeared in public in full, clerical garb." Mr. Edwards was a forceful and animated preacher and a strict disciplinarian in parish matters. As he was unwilling to retire, the members of the congregation prevailed on him to settle a new minister in the parish as a colleague in 1755.

Mr. Edwards died on January 27, 1768. Esther Edwards died on January 19, 1770, at the age of ninety-nine. Both are interred in the Old Burying Ground. Mr. Edwards' grave is marked by a table stone bearing the following inscription:

In memory of the Revd. Mr. Timothy Edwards, Pastor of the 2d Society of Windsor (whose singular gifts and piety rendered him an excellent, and in the judgment of charity, a successful minister of the gospel), who died January 27, A.D. 1768, in the 89 year of his age, and the 64<sup>th</sup> of his ministry. And his remains buried under this stone.

An Epitaph

The Man of God, who nobly pled,  
His Master's Cause, alas! is dead.  
His Voice no more! but awful Urn,  
Still speaks to Men their great Concern.  
His Praise, On Souls by Heaven Impress't,  
This mouldering Stone will long outlast.  
When Grace completes the Work begun,  
Bright Saints will shine his living Crown.

## Subsequent Pastors

2. 1755-1783 Joseph Perry, born in 1731, in Sherborn, Massachusetts. Mr. Perry received a B.A. degree from Harvard in 1752, and a M.A. in 1755. He married Sarah Lawrence of Groton, Massachusetts, in 1755, and they had seven children. She died in 1785. Mr. Perry married Naomi Ridgeley Gedney Verstelle, of Hartford in 1780. He served as a chaplain during the Revolutionary War. He died in 1783, and is buried in the old cemetery (God's Acre).

3. 1786-1820 David McClure, born in 1748, in New Port, Rhode Island. He received a B.A. degree from Dartmouth College in 1769, and a D.D. in 1800. He was a missionary to the Delaware Indians near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, then served as pastor in North Hampton, New Hampshire, before being called to First Church. Mr. McClure married Hannah Pomeroy. He died in 1820 and is buried in the new cemetery between the present Meeting House and the Wolcott building.

4. 1808-1827 Thomas Robbins, born in Norfolk, Connecticut, in 1778. He graduated from both Williams and Yale Colleges in 1796. Before coming to First Church, Mr. Robbins supplied pulpits in both Connecticut and Vermont churches, and taught in an academy in Danbury. He also served as a missionary to the new settlements in the Western reserve (Ohio).

After leaving First Church, Mr. Robbins served in parishes in Stratford, Connecticut, and Rochester (now Mattapoisett, Massachusetts). For years of his active life, he served as a librarian of the Connecticut Historical Society, where his personal library and desk are housed. Mr. Robbins never married. He died in Colebrook, Connecticut, in 1854. His extensive diary is among the reference books at the South Windsor Public Library.

5.	1828-1830	Samuel W. Whelpley	21.	1910-1915	Oren D. Fisher
6.	1832-1836	Chauncey G. Lee	22.	1915-1917	Victor L. Greenwood
7.	1840-1849	Levi Smith	23.	1918-1926	Norman MacLeod
8.	1849-1856	Edward W. Hooker	24.	1926-1929	William W. Malcolm
9.	1856-1863	Judson B. Stoddard	25.	1929-1939	Harry S. Martin
10.	1864-1866	Philander O. Powers	26.	1939-1942	Randall C. Mason
11.	1866-1879	George A. Bowman	27.	1943-1945	George E. Millard
12.	1881-1882	Newton Q. Jones	28.	1945-1954	Fraser Metzger
13.	1882-1883	Pleasant Hunter	29.	1954-1960	R. Winthrop Nelson

14.	1883-1888	Frederic E. Snow	30.	1960-1964	William Lorimer
15.	1889-1895	Frederick Alvord	31.	1964-1972	W. Lloyd Williams
16.	1897-1898	Wilbur G. Searles	32.	1974-2000	Arthur H. Dunham
17.	1898-1899	Lewis W. Hicks	33.	2002-2009	David L. Snyder
18.	1899-1901	George J. Newton			
19.	1902-1908	Charles A. Jaquith			
20.	1908-1910	Robert J. Kyle			

### Ministers Raised in the Parish

Jonathan Edwards*	Elias C. Hooker
Matthew Rockwell	Charles Bissell
Isaac Stiles	Edward T. Hooker
John Ellsworth	James T. Ford*
Joel West	Amasa Loomis
George S. Pelton*	Julus A. Reed
William P. Thompson	Samuel Wolcott

\* Served as a missionary in addition to being a pastor.

### The Meeting Houses

1. Ca. 1694  
The First Meeting House in the parish was a small, frame structure that stood in a knoll at the northeast corner of the Old Burial Ground (opened in 1708), near the site of the present Evergreen Masonic Lodge. While it faced Main Street, it was in view of the Palisado and meeting house across the river so that signals could be easily exchanged in case of emergencies. Apparently, this edifice was not used for worship until 1696 or 1697 and was never fully completed. Its disposition was placed in the hands of a committee in 1714 when the Second Meeting House was built.
2. 1714  
The erection of a Second Meeting House, 40 feet square, was approved in December 1710. Samuel Bancroft, John Ellsworth, Thomas Stoughton and Henry Wolcott composed the building committee. Construction was delayed by a dispute over the location, but the building was finally completed near the site of its predecessor. Originally, it had a gallery at both the north and south sides. The gallery was extended to east and west sides in 1742. In November, 1761, after the Third Meeting House

was occupied, the building committee was "impoverished to dispose of ye Olde Meeting House in ye best manner that they can."

### 3. 1761

The congregation decided to erect a new Meeting House in 1752, but deferred the project in 1753 because of disagreements about its location, the settling of a new minister, Joseph Perry, and a heavy assessment for creating a new society in the north part of the parish. The effort was revived in 1757 and a structure 45 x 60 feet was begun at the site of the present building, but projecting out on Main Street. This edifice, first used for worship on October 15, 1761, had a "Great Door" opening into the street, and smaller doors at both north and south ends.

Aisles from the three doors converged at the center. A high pulpit, reached by narrow stairs, stood against the west wall opposite the main door. A sounding board was suspended above it by an iron rod attached to the ceiling. Below the pulpit were the deacons' seats, and square pews with seats on three sides and doors opening into one of the aisles.

A gallery was located above the main door, accessed by the stairways at the northeast and southeast corners of the sanctuary. In the extreme corners of the gallery were pews reserved for black people, some of whom were owned as slaves by both pastors and parishioners. The front seats in the gallery, which extended along the north and sides of the building, were reserved for the "singers," who received their starting notes from a pitch-pipe as the early Meeting House had no organ. In the main section of the gallery was a row of square pews.

This Meeting House was the only one in town to have a steeple, to which a bell was added in 1765, and a clock in 1810. In 1816, the Meeting House was moved westward, out of the street, to the exact site of the present building, for the erection of which it was taken down in 1845. Its materials were used in constructing its successor.

Seating in the Third Meeting House was assigned by specially designated officers. The system of selling or leasing pews was adopted in 1821. Isaac Watts' Psalms and Hymns were used for singing. Communion services were held quarterly (bi-monthly from 1852). The Westminster Confession was accepted as a Statement of Faith.

4. 1846

The present Meeting House was completed. It was extended in 1957 with an addition at the rear to house offices, classrooms, and the Metzger Chapel, and to expand the fellowship hall and the kitchen on the lower level. A dedication service took place on February 9, 1958.

From 1845, the Meeting House had a tower, but no steeple (see 1928 picture). A steeple, added in the 60s, was blown down on Christmas Eve, 1971, and was replaced by the present steeple in 1973.

Our early history records many spirited discussions on the subject of "music" in the church. The use of a "pitch-pipe" was voted down in 1780, twice within 30 days. "Singing" was accepted, with strict guidelines, from 1727, and with gathering dissension, through 1791, when it was voted to "raise a sum...of lawful money to hire a singing master to teach...the art or rule of singing psalmody". Our present organ, a Hook and Hastings Tracker Organ built in 1904, came to us in the 1930s. Time did not allow research on its predecessors. Extensive rebuilding and rededication occurred in 1983-1984.

Stained glass windows in the sanctuary replaced clear lites of glass in the early 1900s, and were dedicated to the memory of former pastors and members. Of special interest is the Thomas Robbins window on the north side of the sanctuary. Lexan outer windows were installed in 1976 to protect the stained glass windows which were restored in the same year.

5. 1886

The Wolcott Memorial Chapel was erected with a \$2000 gift from Col. Samuel Tudor Wolcott. It was furnished by the women of the parish. In 1962, this building was completely renovated, a basement room added, and re-dedicated on November 4, 1962. It is used today for Christian Education purposes.

#### ACT OF RE-DEDICATION

Minister: In the Name of the father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we re-dedicate this building to the worship of God.

People: We re-dedicate this building to the purpose of Christian Education: to the work of the church school, to the study of the Scriptures, and to the development of Christian character.

Minister: Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.

Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

People: We re-dedicate this building to the broadening of mental horizons and the deepening of knowledge, that young and old may be awakened and informed.

Minister: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

People: We re-dedicate this building to Christian fellowship and to the recreation of mind and body.

Minister: Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

People: We re-dedicate this building to those tasks and aims in which the Christian serves his place and time: to the cause of missions, of Christian citizenship, and the broad field of social relations.

Minister: The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Minister and People:

We re-dedicate the Wolcott Chapel in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(From the service of Re-dedication,  
W. Lorimer, Minister)

## Church Covenant as of 1790

The Covenant that those have owned that are under church watch in ye Second Church of Christ in Windsor.

You do know sollemly in the presence of ye most Great and dreadful God, the Holy Angells, and this assembly, avouch the Eternall Jehovah, one God in three persons, ye Father, ye Son, and ye Holy Ghost, to be your God; and, you Own him to be the living and the true God, and desire to Choose him to be, and promise that by his grace you will Serve him as your God, by seeking of, and waiting upon him for his grace in Ordinances, and in the constant and diligent Improvement of all his appointed means, and by faithfully and conscientiously endeavoring to avoid all Sin, and yield Obedience to all his Commandments. And you also acknowledge that you are by nature children of Wrath, being born into the World in a State of Sin and misery, and that there is no way to obtain Mercy, and Salvation, but Only by faith in the Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Eternall Son of God, and the alone Savior of Sinners, in whom you desire to trust for eternal life and salvation and promise that by his grace you wil above all earthly things Labour to make Sure of an interest in his Righteousness, and that he may be your Lord, and Saviour, that so you may be found in him, at the great day, and not promise and bind yourselves to Submit to his government, In this church, and by God's help to walk with his People therein in all things according to the rules of the Gospell.

## OUR COVENANT

Recognizing God's claims on us as our Creator and Redeemer; answering the call to enter the Church of God's Son, Jesus Christ; and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit; we give ourselves in mutual dependence to understanding and pursuing The Way of Life.

Accordingly, we seek:

To celebrate God's presence in our daily experiences:

To value ourselves and each other for the image of God in which all of us are formed:

To develop our potentials for fruitful and joyous living:

To nourish the sense of closeness we feel within our Church Family.

To share the burdens, concerns and triumphs of others; and

To receive all God's gifts with faith, thanksgiving and responsible stewardship.

With eager hearts and open minds we welcome all who desire a peaceful spirit and a warm fellowship.

To these ends, we look to God for guidance and blessing and to each other for support and encouragement.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
United Church of Christ  
South Windsor, Connecticut  
January 20, 1979

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