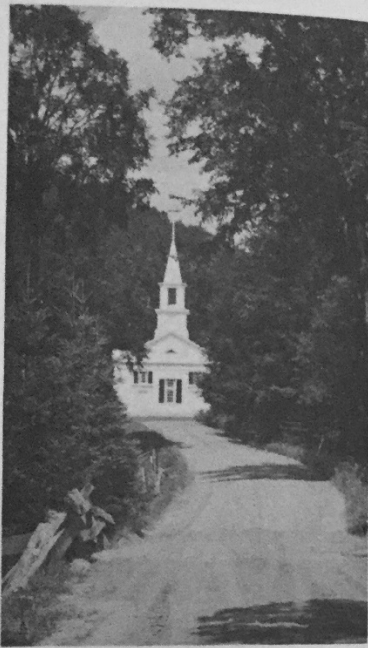


The 1972-73 Steeple and Foundation Restoration

By the spring of 1972, it became very clear that the steeple and foundation were in very bad shape. \$20,000 would be needed to be raised for the restoration. For its 12-14 members, it was a massive undertaking. The first meeting was held on June 6th where a small group of members (Alice Adams, Dobbie Jarackie, Marjorie Graves, Rick Eaton, Dot Cook and Dwight Beebe) started the gigantic process of raising the money to keep the steeple from falling. Alice Adams volunteer to be the Finance Chair. She kept a notebook which she titled "West Fairlee Ctr. Church, 1972-1973, Restoration and Progress Report" by Alice Adams. In it, she kept meticulous records of each and all donations, meeting minutes, correspondence, and newspaper articles. The following newspaper articles and accounts are from her progress report.

It was quickly realized they needed to get the word out far and wide. A letter was to be composed by Rick Eaton and Henry Graves and Rick was put in charge of keeping the newspapers informed. Everyone was to bring in names to compile a mailing list. By July 5, over 500 letters had been mailed.



THE WEST FAIRLEE CENTER

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

This historic and picturesque West Fairlee Center Church, known to many of you, must have extensive repairs if it is to survive. It has been, of necessity, neglected too long. Although, externally and internally, the building has been kept attractive in appearance, the very limited membership finds it now impossible to finance major repairs--which are now imperative.

Recent examination has shown the foundation to be seriously weakened; additionally, the steeple is unsafe to the point of imminent collapse. We feel it would be unthinkable to permit disintegration of this building which has served the community since 1855.

The West Fairlee Center Church is of particular historical significance. In its graveyard lies Nathaniel Niles, one of the two first representatives from Vermont to the Congress at Washington in 1791. Representative Niles, over a subsequent period of twelve years, ministered to the congregation.

It has been ascertained that \$20,000 (\$11,000 for the steeple, \$9,000 for the foundation) must be raised to make the church structurally sound. Thus, we are turning to friends and neighbors, near and far, for help in this massive undertaking.

Would you be willing to help us to the best of your ability? Checks (tax deductible) should be drawn to: West Fairlee Center Congregational Church and sent to Mrs. Raymond Adams, Finance Chairman, at Middle Brook Road, Ely, Vermont, 05044.

We shall be deeply grateful for your assistance and prayers.

P.S. If you'd like, we'd be glad to send you a progress report.

Dorothy J. Cook (Mrs. Cook)

CLERK

Leonard Russ

TREASURER

Our Summer Sale: July 26th 10 A.M. - 3 P.M. 1972

Sunday night services at 8 P.M.:

July 16, 7 30th

August 13 & 27

Steeple has been temporarily reinforced

Journal Opinion – July 13, 1972

The North Country JOURNAL - OPINION

July 13, 1972

West Fairlee Center Church – Revisited

The West Fairlee Center Church sits in the road like a kindly old lady with her bonnet askew. And, like most old ladies, she has a past history that would raise a few unsuspecting eyebrows. The old girl is getting on in age though, and unless someone repairs her unseemingly and straightens her bonnet soon, she may suffer a fatal fall.

The Church at West Fairlee Center was organized December 11, 1809. Six persons, three of them males, entered into fellowship professing their belief in Articles of Faith drawn up by Rev. James Hobart, of Berlin, and having their actions certified to by Rev. Stephen Fuller, of Vershire. For twelve years

the church had no pastor. During this time they were frequently ministered to by the Hon. Nathaniel Niles, a pioneer of the region, who brought with him from Connecticut a colony to settle upon his lands.

Niles was a broadly educated man. A student at Harvard, a graduate of Princeton, he was a student of medicine and law and also of theology. He was a teacher in New York City, a preacher at Norwich and Torrington, Conn., inventor of the process of making wire from bar iron by water power, and a popular poet. His well-trained and versatile powers were competent to master the difficulties of every emergency.

When with several associates

he settled at Middlebrook in Fairlee, shortly after the Revolution, his abilities and various attainments at once gained him a commanding position. He was a trustee of Dartmouth College and one of the first two Representatives to the Congress in Washington from the newly-admitted State of Vermont in 1791. He also served eight terms in the State Legislature.

Services were held by Judge Niles in his own home and in the old meeting house, a barn-like structure, without spire or porch, or any of the external marks of the old houses of worship. It was erected in 1813, on a site behind the location of the present comely structure, which was built in 1856.

The first pastor, Rev. Joseph Tracy, was called to Fairlee on May 18, 1821, and preached alternate Sundays at Post Mills. In 1833, the members at Post Mills withdrew and formed a separate organization. In later years the two churches employed the same pastor, who resided in the latter place.

This connection with Post Mills was terminated during the 1920's, when the West Fairlee Center Church became associated with the churches in West Fairlee Village and Vershire, under the pastorate of the Rev. Thomas Rose, who resided in the parsonage of Vershire. Rev. Rose served as pastor for about 25 years and maintained regular services in West Fairlee Center on a year round basis. Since Rev. Rose's pastorate, services have been held only during the summer months, with an occasional service at Christmas.

The present town of West Fairlee Center belies the importance the site once had. Very few towns of its size in the state have furnished so many distinguished men. One member of Congress, N. Niles; one U. S. Governor, Stephen Thomas; four members of the Constitutional Convention; one doctor of a president and vice-president; a judge of the Supreme Court; three judges of Probate; three state senators; a speaker of the State House of Representatives; a side judge of the County Court; a General of the Civil War; and three registers of probate.

Among the assemblage of notable and unique characters

the have given luster to the formative period of Vermont history, none has exerted a more active influence in his immediate community than Nathaniel Niles.

As soon as the pioneers had provided for their families rude shelters against the inclemencies of the season, the foundation of the log church and school house was laid. The school house was a poor people few in number and poor people were for years unable to provide for a settled pastor. This deficiency was well supplied by the genius and devotion of Judge Niles.

Upon a certain occasion while preaching to his little flock upon the Sabbath in his own house, his wife approached him in the midst of his sermon. She whispered a message to him and immediately he remarked that the services would be suspended for a few minutes. He passed into an adjoining room, put on his hat and veil and passed out through the room where his congregation was seated, hived a swarm of bees, came back and resumed his discourse where he had left off.

The story of Nathaniel Niles organizing his little church amidst the solitudes of the wilderness reminds one of the apostolic work of a saint.

The gloom of the woods, the hard conditions of life, the serious aims and occupations of the people were all favorable to grave reflections and religious fervor. The people, rich and poor, gathered from near and far once the present West Fairlee Center Church was built. It was unheated by stove or furnace for the great event of the week, but they listened to the word propounded in two good long sermons from the lofty pulpit with sounding boards when the big framed church with high-backed pews had taken the place of the first log structure.

At the time the present church building was projected, a considerable controversy appears to have arisen over a proper site - some wishing it to be placed on the west side of the road - some on the east. When the vote was taken, those in favor of the west side were asked to move to the west side of the old meeting house; those in favor of the east side were to move to the east side. Twelve went west; six went east - so the church was erected in its present commanding position.

But West Fairlee "has seen better days," in fact it enjoyed quite a boom for several years, beginning perhaps about 1865 and continuing during the development of the Vershire copper mines, located only one and a half miles distant. During that period the street of the little village presented a scene of bustling activity, the merchants were on the jump putting up goods for the miners, heavy wagons rumbled through the streets loaded with ore on its way to the Ely station, or returning with coke, wealthy prospectors and business men whirled through the streets in handsome turn-a-bouts, the well known tandem team appeared and "all was merry as a marriage bell."

Unfortunately, the Vershire Copper mines were eventually abandoned. Gradually the town lost its wealth and its population. The West Fairlee edition of the United Opinion, in 1895, had these words about the town:

"West Fairlee is a pleasant town, and contains many good farms, located on the intervals and slopes of the hills. The school houses, as a rule, are in good repair and well furnished, and good wages are paid teachers. The people, the farms, the stores, the mills, the schools, the churches, are all here, and when the hoped for revival of business comes, when the pumps and picks, the engines and the forges, are again set at work at Copperfield, the little town will witness a revival of her former prosperity. Remember the dying words of Commodore Lawrence, 'Don't give up the ship.'"

A visit to West Fairlee Center today would indicate that the ship must have sunk anyway. The only two buildings of great import standing today are the WFC Church and what is now known as the Elinwood Farm. Both of these buildings owe their origin largely to the ambition of Judge Niles.

The Elinwood Farm is where Niles made his home when he first came to West Fairlee Center. In this Farm, which is now partly a summer camp, the first services were held. It has been nicely restored and is in fine condition.

But up the gravel road about a mile is the other "Niles" building. It is not in such fine condition. The sills are rotting. The foundation is sinking and twisting from under the building. The steeple, the old ladies bonnet, is in danger of sliding right off the roof. The top of the chimney is lying on the ground beside the Church. The actual body of the Church seems to be sound.

Just to the left of the Church is the graveyard. There, under a unique pyramid shaped stone, lies the remains of Nathaniel Niles. He never actually saw the church itself, but the people around West Fairlee Center like to think his spirit keeps an eye on the old girl.

The estimated cost of restoring the church is \$20,000. Contributions of any amount would certainly be appreciated. Checks (tax deductible) should be drawn to West Fairlee Center Church and sent to Mrs. Raymond Adams, Finance Chairman, at Middle Brook Road, Ely, Vermont 05944.



Look closely The Steeple of the West Fairlee Center Church is visibly leaning. Unless repairs are made soon, the historical church will lose its spire altogether.

Alice noted in her progress report that donations started pouring in and that on July 28, they received an invitation to write and visit with Mr. Sincerbeaux of Woodstock, VT. The Eva Gebhard-Gourgau Foundation was interested in restoring historic buildings. Ruth Russ inquired into this and set up a date to view the church with Mr. Sincerbeaux. On August 14, the Foundation awarded a grant of \$2,000 and would match funds raised up to \$5,000. At one-point Alice wrote "Don't tell me that miracles can't happen."

Alice described a working "party" that was organized for Saturday, September 23, 1972, to work on the church foundation, cemetery fence, and some sprucing up the clubhouse. Those working on the church foundation were Maurice Eaton, Bob Adams, Ken Southworth, Buster Bates, Leonard Russ, Gary Paper, Earl Adams, and Carl Cook. Those painting the fence of the cemetery were Ginny Southworth, Alice Adams, Edith Eastman, Doris Honig, Dot Cook, Serena Young, Toni Pape, Marjorie Graves, Kay Schlichting, and Henry Graves. The sprucing up the clubhouse was done by Marjorie Graves, Henry Graves, Dot Cook, Phyllis Russ, Kay Schlichting, and Edith Eastman. Those providing food were Marion Godfrey, Norma Young, Marjorie Graves, Dobbie Jareckie, and Edith Eastman.

Journal-Opinion – September 28, 1972

Restoration Work Begins On Historic Old Church

WEST FAIRLEE CENTER— They built well, those West Fairlee Center folks of 150 years ago who put together the sturdy timbers for the Congregational Church here.

But time and water can bring down mountains—and churches. In 1972, the huge long timbers were rotting and the granite blocks that formed the

foundation were tilting dangerously.

They were. Now, thanks to a community fund-raising project and some volunteer helpers, the old church building is well on its way to being restored.

Last week workmen began the restoration by starting at the bottom. Over the years,

leaking water had damaged the original timbers to the point where the entire building and steeple could collapse. And to make matters worse the massive granite blocks under the outside walls were shifting and tilting in the ground.

Workmen replaced the damaged framework, added concrete blocks and columns. The foundation is being reinforced so that only the original granite blocks will be visible from the outside.

Church members in a meeting Monday night decided to continue the restoration right up to the steeple—although this work may not be done this year. The steeple, which had been in danger of toppling, has been temporarily reinforced and workers are confident that it can weather at least one more Vermont winter.

Church goers began the restoration effort last spring with a fund drive. Richard Eaton, publicity chairman for the drive, said one half of the \$20,000 goal has been reached. This enabled the group to hire contractor Raymond Adams of West Fairlee to do the heavy reconstruction work.

Volunteers from the community are also helping. Recently about 30 people turned out to help on the church project. They also spruced up the nearby Community Clubhouse, cleared away brush and debris from the old cemetery nearby and painted the fence which rings the cemetery.

"Community people built this church in 1854," Eaton said. "I guess that community people can fix it."

The church has only about 15 members left, Eaton said, but it is used—only during the summer—by many area residents who are not official members.

Funds are still being sought to aid in the project. Donations may be mailed to Mrs. Raymond Adams, RFD Ely.

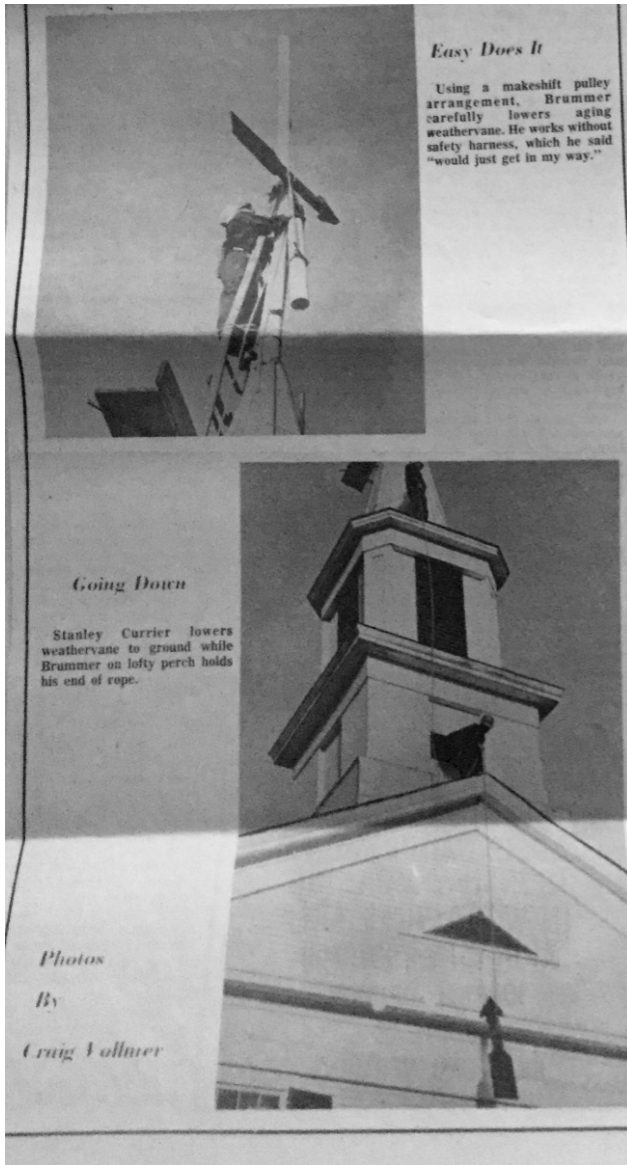


From The Ground Up

Richard Eaton examines reconstruction work underneath old West Fairlee Center Congregational Church. Timbers that had supported the building for 150 years were replaced.

Alice reported, "There was help all around the place. Putting timbers in place, digging around the church, and knocking and breaking out the cement steps and landing. There was great excitement when the children found snake eggs and watched them hatch right then and there."

Journal-Opinion – November 12, 1972



By the beginning of 1973, they had the money needed to complete the restoration. In January, they received the sad news that the steeple contractor had fallen 40 feet off a church he had been working on in Franconia, NY, and died. It certainly made everyone aware of the dangers involved. Raymond Morse of Littleton, NH was selected to finish the steeple and roof job.

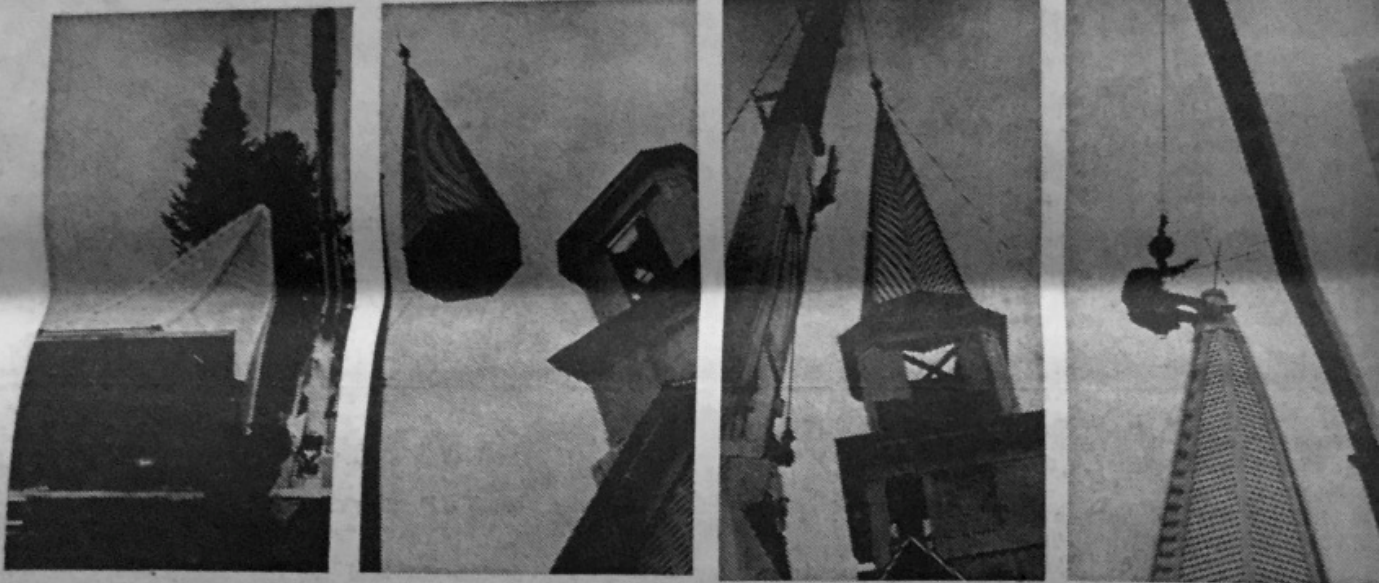
Reroofing of the Church was completed by May 20, 1973. On October 2, 1973, the great day arrived when the new steeple was transported from Littleton, NH on a flatbed truck and the crane lifted it into place. The new steeple was installed completing the restoration work.

Journal-Opinion – October 4, 1973



...unquestionably rejected the proposal. view, is too dear a price to pay so efficiently."

27th Anniversary



UP, UP AND AWAY — A group of West Fairlee Center residents spent much of Tuesday craning their necks as a new steeple was hoisted into position on their church. It took awhile and the job encountered a few hitches, but then Rome wasn't built in a day. The effort caps a long restoration program. (News photos — Tom Ahern)

W. Fairlee Center Church Gets New Spire

By TOM AHERN

WEST FAIRLEE CENTER — A group of people who were determined to preserve the West Fairlee Center Church saw more than a year's work capped off Tuesday afternoon.

With a small crowd of on-lookers exclaiming by the minute, "Isn't it beautiful," a new steeple was hoisted into place atop the church's belfry by a 30-ton crane.

The church, built in 1855, needed roofing and foundation work along with a new spire. More than a year ago, members of the tiny village which seemingly is at the end of a country road launched a drive to collect about \$19,000 for all the necessary repairs.

Aided by grants and private contributions, as well as civic fund-raising events, the goal which at one time seemed unattainable was reached.

New Weathervane

The moment everyone waited for Tuesday afternoon was when

Raymond Moore, who made the steeple, slipped into a makeshift bosun's chair, was handed the steeple weathervane and was lifted more than 80 feet into the air by the crane to set the vane into place.

The weathervane, church publicity director Richard Eaton admitted, was not original. When the old one was taken down, it was full of bullet holes it could not be reused. Eaton said a local craftsman made the new weathervane and a beautiful arrow ball and set of compass directions, all in gold leaf, attested to the man's ability.

It can't be said the "liftoff" went without a hitch. The 24-foot steeple, hauled in from Moore's Bethlehem, N.H., shop, arrived a good two hours after the crane made its way from Windsor. But when the steeple arrived on a trailer behind Moore's truck, most of West Fairlee Center was right in back of it, in a procession of sorts.

Getting the steeple in position for the crane and off its trailer was probably the trickiest part of the day. But a couple of sidewalk foremen, who obviously enjoyed the chance to slip out of the West Fairlee woods with their hardhats on, got a chance to show some of the younger men a thing or two about construction.

Easy Part

The easiest part turned out to be setting the steeple on its belfry. With a flip of the lever, the boom of the crane telescoped up and cable was wound in. Moore, who is one of few men who earns his living building new steeples (as well as repairing old ones), was ready up above and declared the steeple in perfect position minutes after it was raised.

It was all Moore when it came time to sit in the bosun's chair and be pulled aloft. While a number of people said, "You'd never get me up there in one of those things," Moore seemed

perfectly calm and at ease — even sitting astride the tip of the steeple.

With Eaton and his father, Maurice standing by with a compass, Moore was ready to align the giant golden "N" with magnetic north.

As can be imagined, Moore's job is dangerous, no matter the precautions. Until a year ago, Moore worked with another man but took over the while business when his partner fell from a church roof in Franconia and died several days later.

Second Steeple

This is the second new steeple Moore, who works with his wife, has made this year. Their first was in Hopkinton, made of lead and copper. The steeple for the West Fairlee Church, though, was made of aluminum.

It won't rot or fade, the younger Eaton noted happily. Some work still has to be done to the church but he clearly felt

(Continued on Page 12)

— CHURCH

Church -

(Continued from Page 1)

they were over the hump. When the stone lower side walls were put back in place and the foundation repaired, much of the plaster and wall paper cracked, Eaton said, explaining this project is still ahead.

"All in all it was quite a job. If we hadn't done something it would have faded away, he added, noting the roof was leaking and the old steeple was due to blow off any time.

The church, of course, has its own special history. The congregation was founded by Nathaniel Niles around 1800. Niles, who was elected to the state legislature, served the congregation as pastor and used his home for services. He is now buried next to the church under a huge pyramid-shaped marker.

And it is said that a man, when asked one time why he never went to church, declared it would fall in if he ever entered. Sure enough, the day he was brought inside in his casket the floor gave way.

To Eaton and the rest of West Fairlee Center, the church has meaning. As he said, "I'm 25 and I'm a die-hard Vermonter. I've just about been looking at that church all my life and I want to keep looking at it. It's part of the heritage of the town. The church has a value to the community, to the area."

Alice's final notation in her records: "Hope you enjoy browsing into our endeavors. We enjoyed every minute."