



WEST FAIRLEE CENTER CHURCH

## *West Fairlee Center church continues tradition of service*

WEST FAIRLEE—The West Fairlee Center Congregational Church began its summer vesper services on the heels of the recent flooding, the first being held July 5 and led by the Rev. Jean Jersey of South Royalton. The following service on July 12 was conducted by the Rev. Bertha Brown of Thetford Center. The remaining schedule is July 19, Cleo Kearns, West Fairlee Center; July 26, Roger Daum, West Fairlee Congregational Church; Aug. 2, Elizabeth Upton, North Thetford Federated Church; Aug. 9, the Rev. Yorke Peeler, Post Mills Congregational Church; and Aug. 16, the Rev. Gary Wait, West Newbury.

As usual, the final service will be followed by a gathering in the Community Clubhouse nearby.

The church at West Fairlee Center was organized Dec. 11, 1809 with services being held in the home of Nathaniel Niles, who was influential in settling the valley. In 1813, the first meeting house was erected.

Judge Niles, originally from <sup>RJ</sup> Connecticut, was a broadly educated man. A student at Harvard and graduate of Princeton, he was a student of medicine and law and theology, a teacher in New York City, a preacher at Norwich and Torrington, CT, inventor of the process of making wire from bar iron by water power, and a popular poet. His well trained and versatile powers were equal to every emergency which might arise in

a newly settled land. His home, the present Elmwood Farm, became and has remained a vital force in the community.

Later, Judge Niles was sent to Congress as one of the first two Vermont representatives, after which he served eight terms in the state legislature and was a trustee of Dartmouth College.

The present church building was erected in 1855, when West Fairlee Center was still a thriving community. It was about this time that the Ely Copper Mines began their operation, and soon the population center began to shift over the ridge to the west—West Fairlee Village. A second church was founded there, and the new townhouse placed beside it, named for Alvah Bean.

Now the parsonage, built just up Marsh Hill Road, has disappeared, the general store has become a private home, the little brick schoolhouse, built around 1804, has evolved into a community center, and many houses are gone. The church, however, is still a magnet for many who have roots in the community and also newcomers who love the peaceful spirit of the place. There has been no pastor since Thomas Rose retired in 1927, but the services continue in the summer with the help of guest ministers, and also in winter for weddings and funerals. The church is four miles up Middle Brook Road from Lake Fairlee, on the way to Bradford. All are welcome to join the services, which begin at 7:30 p.m.

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