

## Newsletter – Winter 2020



*Centennial Program*

### West Fairlee Center Congregational Church

PO Box 431  
Fairlee, VT 05045

[www.wfcenterchurch.org](http://www.wfcenterchurch.org)

[church.wfc@gmail.com](mailto:church.wfc@gmail.com)

#### **Members, Friends and Neighbors:**

First and foremost, a sincere thank you to all of you who have supported the Church this year and years past. It is through all of you that this much-loved shelter survives. A special thanks to Don Phoenix who keeps the grounds tidy; as well as Serenata who has provided the music for events, the Community Club, neighbors, and friends near and far who have donated time and resources. The continued generosity and support are deeply appreciated and especially to those who have donated to keep the church candles lit throughout the winter months.

#### **2019 Events**

July 14<sup>th</sup> was a busy day for the Center. It started with the Church's Annual Meeting. Then came the Community Club's Ice Cream Social and followed by the Blessing of the Animals. Lots of photos can be viewed on the website including one of the one room school classmates taken about 1958.

The final event of the year was the Service of Gratitude held on December 1. Even though miserable weather was predicted, the service was well attended. Through dedication and leadership, Cleo Kearns has made this service of insightful learning, understanding spiritual practices of many faiths, and ultimately how they all fit together in today's world, a very special tradition in which all can participate.

Weddings: August 31 - Daniel Brick & Angela Fisk  
Funerals: May 4 – Mary Jane Smith  
August 21 – Hank Sweet

The Church now has a piano thanks to the daughters of Eloise Twombly who recently passed. Eloise was the granddaughter of Harvey and Margaret Newcomer founders of Camp Wyoda and daughter of Kay and Herbert Schlichting. Kay and husband lived for many years on Middlebrook Road and managed Camp Wyoda. Kay was very active in community affairs. Eloise and her husband built a summer home on Middlebrook Road in 1980. Eloise was a piano teacher and concert celloist. With the addition of a piano, it is hoped that there will be more talent shows.

In a continuation of remembering people who have been a huge part of these valleys, Alice Adams is featured in this Newsletter and her role during the 1972 Church restoration.

#### **Alice E. Adams – 2/23/1921-3/13/2017**

Alice and her husband, Ray, moved to Middlebrook Road from Fairlee in the mid-1960s. Like her friends and neighbors, she was community spirited. She took her civic responsibilities very seriously; volunteered at the election polls, helped at the community club and was an active in the West Fairlee Center Church.

In 1972, Alice volunteered to be the Finance Chair of the Church Restoration. She kept meticulous records and the following account of this incredible endeavor was taken from her progress report and newspaper clippings she so carefully compiled.

#### **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 held at Alice's house was on June 6<sup>th</sup> where a small group of members (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. They 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.

Newspaper articles appeared in the Valley News and the Journal Opinion. The Journal Opinion July 13<sup>th</sup> article began:

***“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 underpinnings and straightens her bonnet soon, she may suffer a fatal fall.”***

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-Gourgaud 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.

Alice kept track of every donation made; large or small, for all were heartfelt. She kept letters from various donors. The following is an excerpt from a note from Charles Wolfinger:

***“I am delighted to be able to contribute to the West Church. I have some great memories of this beautiful structure. In July 1941-after I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in New York City-I came to Bear Notch Road for a visit – only to experience the joyous occasion of West Fairlee Center & Vermont Bi-Centennial Celebration. I was put to work – serving ice cream to many – including Lt. Gov. Proctor. After that great day I was ready to serve my Country and knew that there was much worth fighting for.”***

The Women's Club raised \$800 from their annual rummage sale which was donated to the fund. At one-point Alice wrote “Don't tell me that miracles can't happen.”

A working “party” was organized for Saturday, September 23, 1972 to work on the church foundation, paint the cemetery fence, and spruce up the Clubhouse. Members-neighbors-friends all came to give a helping hand. 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.”

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 and died. It certainly made everyone aware of the dangers involved.

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. Newspaper articles capturing the essence of the restoration are posted on the website.

The Church and Clubhouse are the visible structures of the heritage that people have worked so hard to preserve and pass onto future generations. The unselfish gifts that they gave of themselves are embedded in the structures.

To quote Rick Eaton in his last interview with the Valley News, October 3, 1973: ***“I'm 25 and I'm a die-hard Vermonter. I've been looking at that church all my life and I want to keep looking at it. It's part of the heritage of this town. The church has a value to the community, to the area.”***

A goal of the Church website is to link the past to the present by sharing stories, memories and photos. Each generation has made contributions to the community and it is hoped that they are not lost but preserved. To share photos and memories both past and present, email [church.wfc@gmail.com](mailto:church.wfc@gmail.com) or contact JoAnn Sanborn at 912-657-0439.