

Westford Methodists to celebrate heritage

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD - In commemoration of two centuries of Methodism, the United Methodist Church of Westford will observe a special "Heritage Weekend" this Saturday and Sunday.

A noteworthy Sunday program has been arranged by the pastor, Dr. Richard D. Pittenger, when Dr. Warren Jacobs of New

Westford

York City and a former student minister will return to give the commemorative sermon, based on the "Celebration of the Generations." There will be a special musical program.

A fellowship dinner will be served on Saturday at 6 with musical moments at dessert time. This will be followed by a display of memorial gifts and a slide-tape show depicting the history of the church from its 1867 beginnings as a Bible class and later a Sabbath School sponsored by Arthur Wright.

A century ago, the population

of the Graniteville section of the town was small. A group of local residents was anxious to form a religious society of their own, sought to become the third church in Westford.

A boost came two years later when Charles G. Sargent, head of the textile machinery manufacturing firm which still bears his name, expressed his conviction that there "ought to be regular preaching in Graniteville."

Minor H. A. Evans, a student at the Boston Theological Seminary, was invited to speak in the old school house. The date was July 4, 1869. The building was filled to overflowing with interested citizens, eager for religious representation in their neighborhood.

Initial gift

Sargent headed the subscription list, giving \$2,000 to be used to erect a suitable house of worship. He also donated a site for the edifice - perhaps the prettiest location in that area, on the banks of Mill Pond. Construction started soon there-

after.

While the church building was under construction, the group met in the school in the winter and in the pine grove at the rear of Samuel Fletcher's home in the summer.

Finally, the day came for the dedication: Nov. 20, 1870.

The style of the edifice is strictly Gothic and of such interesting design that more than a century later it was recognized as a typical New England church of this period in an article in the November 1982 issue of Smithsonian magazine.

The architect was S.S. Woodcock, and a Concord, N.H. firm erected the building for \$8,900 above the foundation. No doubt much of the foundation work was done by local quarrymen.

Like all structures of this type, the church building laid a heavy financial burden on the fledgling congregation. Sargent, the chief patron of the parish, then known as Methodist Episcopal, died in 1878. His interest in the endeavor was so deep that he had added another \$1,000 in his will. Soon thereafter, his heirs and other members of the

flock paid off the entire debt.

In addition to Wright and Fletcher, other substantial supporters of the new church at its beginnings were J.K. Proctor, Lyman A. Smith, Cyrus Hosmer and William R. Reed.

The current pastor, Dr. Pittenger, is a graduate of South Dakota State University and Drew Theological Seminary. In his 34 years in the ministry, he has served only three local churches. He is a sports enthusiast and also a devotee of the arts. With his wife, Dolores, they have six children, their daughter Crysta being a senior at Westford Academy.

Varied activities

The Methodist Church is the home for the recently formed Westford Chorus, Alcoholics Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous as well as headquarters for Cub, Girl and Boy Scouts.

Parishioners have approved plans to renovate the building to provide nine new classrooms, a new kitchen and a redesigned Fellowship area.