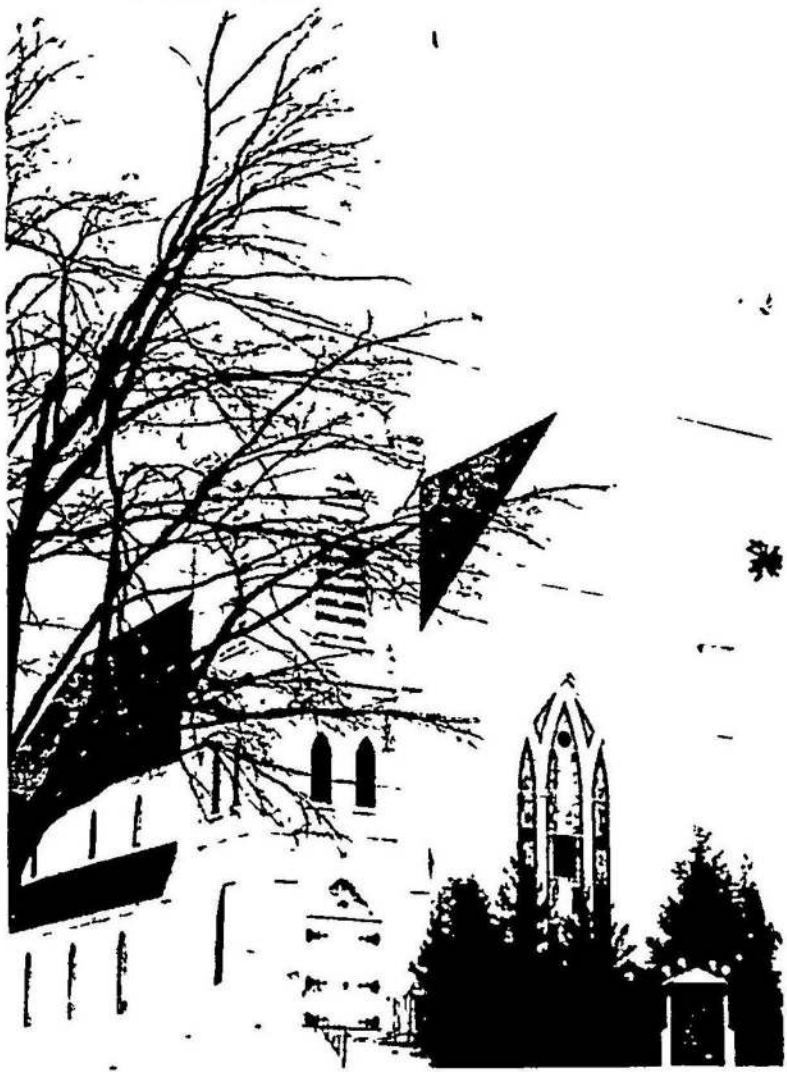


# Westford Recollections



**Graniteville United Methodist Church**

By Mrs Charles S Kennedy

Graniteville Methodist Church

As late as the 1850's there were scarcely half a dozen families in the village of Graniteville. In 1880 the census reports 105 families containing 540 persons. In March of 1851 Graniteville was called School District No. 10. A small wooden schoolhouse was built soon after, and at the first annual meeting of the district, March 9, 1852 it was voted "to have the schoolhouse opened for public worship." From this date till March, 1856, there was regular preaching, mostly by Methodists, and early in the summer of 1856 a subscription paper was opened, and Rev John Naylor, of West Chelmsford, was employed, and he held services until the commencement of cold weather. These were the first regular services held in the house. Ill health obliged him to stop preaching there in 1857. A Sabbath-school was formed about this time but ceased during the winter season. A full year of preaching was then followed by a year with no religious services. In 1861 Rev L. Luce, Pastor of the Congregational Church in Westford Center, conducted worship in the school-house during the warm months. He reorganized and superintended the Sabbath-school 1861 again found no religious services.

In 1863 Rev Howarth, a Methodist preacher from Lowell was secured. For several years services were off and on. Bible classes were formed. In 1866-67 much religious interest was manifested so that finally by 1869 Mr Charles G Sargent expressed his conviction that there ought to be regular preaching in Graniteville, and offered to contribute liberally for its support. His opinion was reported to the Methodist Churches of Lowell, who, by their pastors, and especially through the active agency of Mr Charles S. Graves, for many years the conductor on the Stony Brook Railroad, took measures to secure the establishment of a Methodist Episcopal Society in that village. Mr Minor H A Evans, a student at Boston Theological Seminary was sent to preach to an overflowing audience at the school-house on July 4, 1869 and on the following day drew up a subscription paper for funds to build a church edifice. Mr Charles G Sargent headed the list with \$2000 and site. Another \$1000 in smaller sums was added during the day. July 12th, Mr Evans was appointed preacher in charge by the Presiding Elder. July 18th, the congregation being unusually large, a platform was erected and seats arranged in the grove in the rear of Mr Samuel Fletcher's house, and there the services were held for the remainder of the summer. Classes and conferences were attended immediately. A Board of Trustees was organized. The building committee was elected, consisting of Messrs Sargent, Wright and Smith, who were duly authorized to build a church. Soon after, the site given by Mr Sargent was conveyed by deed, a design by S. S. Woodcock, architect, was

adopted, and the contract for the building was made with Messrs Mead, Mason & Co., of Concord, New Hampshire, to build the edifice, above the foundation for \$8900.

The Society continued worshipping in the school during the winter. Work upon the church building steadily progressed and Nov 20, 1870 the society entered the vestry for the first time. The whole building was finished early in the following spring. March 22, 1871, was the day chosen for the dedication. Rev J M Buckley of Stanford Connecticut, preached the dedication sermon.

The building was of wood, in Gothic style, one hundred feet long and 43' wide, with sittings for 342. The lecture room was 42' long and 29' wide, in the rear of the audience room. Above the lecture room was the ladies' chapel 29' long by 23' wide. The pulpit was of black walnut and over the arched recess is the inscription "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosies."

Rev Nathaniel B Fiske, the second pastor, received his appointment in April, 1871 and remained 3 years. During his ministry a bell was procured for the church. 1874-76 found Rev James F Mears as pastor followed by the second pastorate of Rev Minor H A Evans for 3 years. The financial crisis proved trying to the church. Mr Charles Sargent chief financial patron of the church and chairman of the Board of Trustees, died in 1878, having contributed about \$5000 and the site of the church, and left a further pledge of \$1000. Society helped to pay for the building, but the final installment of \$2400 was paid by Mr Sargent's heirs. A medallion of Mr Sargent was placed in the church by Rev M H A Evans, the first pastor.

Rev Alfred Wood, a native of St Johns, Newfoundland, served the church from 1879-1882.

Mrs Alice Day, Librarian at the J V Fletcher Library and member of the Graniteville Methodist Church, related the following items of interest concerning changes at the Church. The Abbot Worsted Co. stored machinery in the basement of the Church but had to remove it when the basement was converted into a kitchen and Church School rooms.

The upstairs room which was known as the ladies' chapel was used by the Masons and traces of their symbols can be seen on the walls. In the late 1940's the upstairs sanctuary was redecorated and the altar rearranged. The old pipe organ was dismantled and replaced with a Hammond Electric organ. Carpeting and pew cushions were new additions.

Out in the back of the Church were located the horsesheds. There are two church parsonages on Church St., the newer one beside the Church is the home of the present minister, Rev Warren Jacobs, the older parsonage next to the new one is used for Church School. The setting of the Graniteville Methodist Church is one of quiet reflection and serenity as it faces the still waters of the Mill Pond.