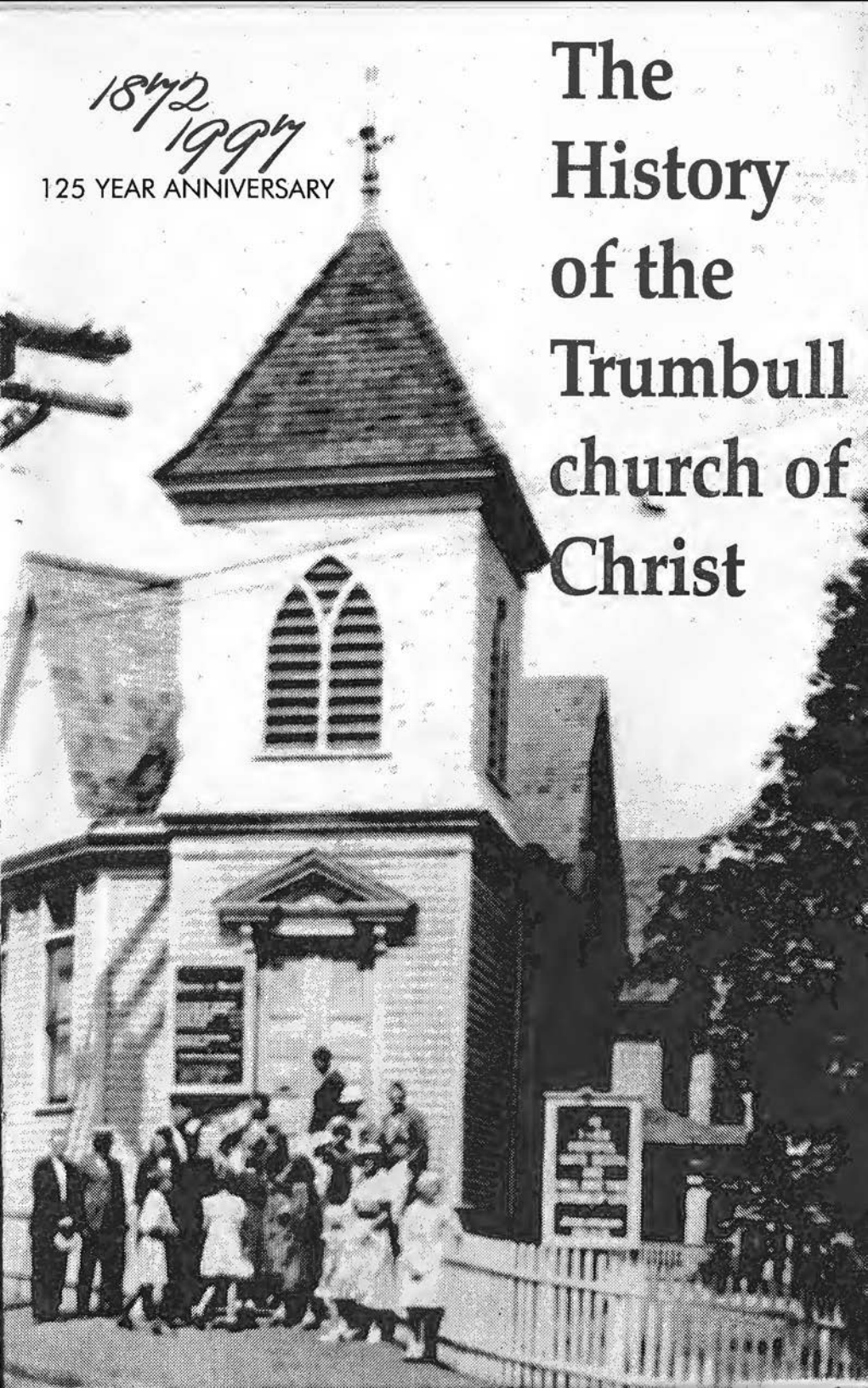


1872
1997

125 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

The History of the Trumbull church of Christ



Introduction

In an attempt to record for all future generations of the churches of Christ, I have put these historical facts about the Bridgeport/Trumbull church of Christ in writing.

People are living history books. They can relate their life's experiences for others' edification. Once those living history books breathe their last, that information is lost forever if it has not been recorded.

I have attempted to compile information from accurate records, and that which has come from the living history books of the Trumbull congregation for the edification of the Body of Christ, the church.

May God bless those who read this account with the knowledge that mankind can know what the Will of God is for the church and that man can reproduce the church that we read about in the new testament.

*Gary Babcock
Trumbull, Connecticut
November, 1997*



At this time in American History, Ulysses S. Grant was about to begin his second term as President; Elias Ward Howe had invented and patented the sewing machine; both Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison were several years away from patenting the telephone and the light bulb, and the desire of men and women to restore the church of the New Testament was flourishing. Many, seeing the weaknesses and failures of denominationalism around them, made it their aim to be simply Bible Christians. Creeds and traditions of men had divided the religious world into sects and small groups were forming determined to accept the Bible as their only guide and final authority for every religious practice. While not maintaining that they had discovered every truth contained in the Book, they believed they had discovered much of it, and were closer to the practice of the first Christians than any other group. One such congregation of the church of Christ had been in existence in Danbury, Connecticut since 1817. The church there would be a source of strength and encouragement for another group with the same convictions meeting in Bridgeport years later.

A Restoration Movement congregation began in Bridgeport, Connecticut in November 1872 when Evangelist William Lane of Cincinnati, Ohio preached for one week at the urging and invitation of "the boy preacher" named Dodge. He had conducted a mission in a room over Liefelds Store on North Washington Avenue advocating a return to the New Testament and the doing away with Creeds and Confessions of Faith that were keeping Christians divided. After one night's preaching, Lane convinced four men of their need to obey the Gospel and to be baptized "the same hour of the night." These four men were William Cleaveland, Andrew Fancher, Sylvester Pike and Leland Rider. From this foursome of obedient believers the First church of Christ of Bridgeport would develop and grow.

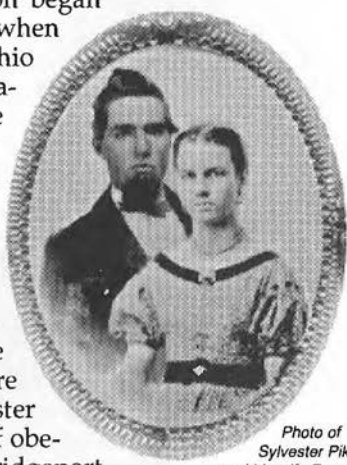


Photo of
Sylvester Pike
and his wife Fannie
as a young couple around 1871

Brother Lane returned to Bridgeport in February, 1873, and baptized eight more. One of the eight was Estella Bailey. The following is the account of her and the seven others' baptism.

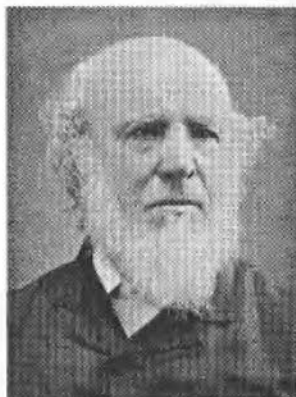
"There were eight of us baptized, it was in the month of February in Berkshire Pond, the ice was thick, but we were in earnest so they cut steps for us to go down into the water. Not any of us had any bad effects from the exposure".

It was in June, 1873, that this small group of Christians started meeting every Monday, Thursday, and Sunday on a regular basis for prayer, Bible reading, and hymn singing at the home of Sylvester Pike. Bro. Pike was already a leader among this group of disciples and would become a pillar of the church as well as one of its elders. Bro. Lane returned to Bridgeport at this time and

after preaching three "discourses" (sermons), baptized Laura Bailey, Fanny Pike (Sylvester's wife), Lizzie Rose, Charles Rowe, and William Wheeler.

In May, 1874, those who had been immersed (about 20 in number) began meeting every Lord's Day in Brother Pike's house and began observing the Lord's Supper on every Lord's Day as well. At this time, there was a close fellowship between the church in Danbury and the brethren of Bridgeport. The Danbury church sent its preacher, W. Baynard Craig, to preach here. He advised the brethren to secure the services of Bro. Belding of Troy, New York, for a 16 day Revival Meeting which was held in August. Evangelists played a major role in the growth of the Bridgeport church. In 1879, William and Fannie Boerum, and Lydia Pike were baptized into Christ, and in the early

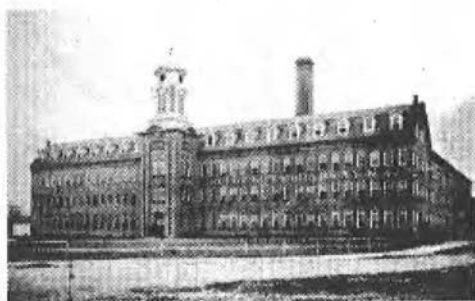
1880's, there was a month long meeting conducted by Evangelist T.D. Garvin of Ohio whereat many were baptized including several from the First Baptist Church whose baptistry had been used for the immersions.



Charles Abercrombie, from Glasgow Scotland

In the City of Bridgeport there existed the Howe Sewing Machine Co. which would prove to be the source to re-unite a family of believers in 1880. A decade earlier, Charles Abercrombie worked with the church of Christ in Morrisania, New York. Charles was a native of Scotland and had responded to his native land's call to come to preach the Gospel. He and his family returned to Scotland where his two sons, Alexander and Charles would find work at the Howe Sewing

Machine Co. in Glasgow, Scotland. Toward the close of 1878, son Alexander decided to return to America and while visiting a friend in Bridgeport noticed an advertisement in a Bridgeport newspaper stating that the church of Christ met for worship at Olivet Hall. Alexander attended the service of the church and upon presentation of his letter, was received by the church. Alexander found employment at Howe. Sewing Machine Co. and a few months later was joined in Bridgeport by his brother, Charles. Then, in May of 1880, their father Charles, their mother, and the rest of the family followed and arrived at the church in Bridgeport.



The Howe Sewing Machine Company, in Bridgeport.

Many were the expressions of thanks and gratitude that a potential shepherd had returned to the States and very soon after his arrival, Bro. Charles Abercrombie was appointed an Elder of the congregation along with Bro. Sylvester Pike. Elders Abercrombie and Pike would provide excellent shepherding to the church in Bridgeport which was having an attendance for

worship of 50 or more as well as a well-attended Sunday School. To assist the Elders with their shepherding of the growing flock, 4 deacons were selected and in January, 1886, the congregation began keeping weekly attendance records for each member. The church had secured a meeting house located on Main Street at the foot of Fulton Street where they met weekly on Tuesdays for Prayer meetings and every Lord's Day.

In October, 1890, at a special meeting of the congregation, it was agreed that the church would seek to purchase a lot on which a church building would be constructed. A committee was selected to find, report on, and secure a lot. The congregation also decided to sell their meeting house at the foot of Fulton Street and did so in late October, 1891, for the grand sum of \$200.00. The church then rented a hall on Beach St. for \$125 a year beginning in November, 1891, until the new building would be completed in December, 1896.

Because the church had not been officially recognized by the State as a legal body, all property, including the newly acquired building lot, was purchased in the name(s) of an individual(s). Alexander Abercrombie held title to the land which had originally been owned by the famous circus owner, P.T. Barnum, native of Bridgeport. So, on January 18, 1892, the following "Articles of Association" were filed with the Secretary of State and the City of Bridgeport. It was the next day on January 19, 1892, that the First Church of Christ of Bridgeport officially owned their own property as a recognized association having Bros. Olmstead, Bedient, Pike, Vincent, and Abercrombie as its

ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION
THE FIRST CHURCH OF BRIDGEPORT

Rec'd for record by Geo. Watson, Town Clerk, January 18, 1892 @ 11 a.m.

The undersigned Trustees of the First church of Christ of Bridgeport by special appointment of the present church make application to be incorporated under the statutes provided for religious societies.

Article 1st

The name by which the association shall be known is the "First Church of Christ" of Bridgeport, Conn.

Article 2nd

The purpose is to maintain a congregation of the disciples of Christ after the ancient apostolic order as set forth in the New Testament scriptures being our sole rule of faith and practice.

Article 3rd

The association shall be located in the city of Bridgeport, County of Fairfield, State of Conn.

Article 4

The present officers of the church are the following named persons:

Elders - Charles Abercrombie, Sylvester Pike

Deacons - Geo. Olmstead, Stephen S. Bedient

Trustees - Geo. Olmstead, S.S. Bedient, S. Pike, J.J. Vincent, and A.V. Abercrombie

Bridgeport Town Records, Volume 4, "Articles of Associations, Joint Stock Cos.

trustees. The congregation was growing and making plans for its new meeting house to be built on the corner of William and Stillman Sts.

As is usually true with any growing organization along with progress, problems arise. Conflict within the Danbury fellowship was growing due to what was described as "new, more lenient" attitudes being accepted. The turn toward more denominational beliefs was becoming evident and this came to a head when instrumental music was introduced.

These events unfortunately lead to a split in the Danbury congregation and the Danbury church would eventually be known as the "Disciples denomination in the town of Danbury and vicinity". The Danbury church was no more, but those who desired to stay true to the New Testament doctrine began meeting in the home of the Weed family in Bethel, CT. On occasion the Weeds would travel by horse and wagon to the Bridgeport congregation for worship, and in time would become members making the 30 mile trip every Lords day. Fred Weed and Nettie Weed, cousins, would marry Ada Boerum, and Harry Wheeler, respectively, members of the Bridgeport congregation providing the next generation of those who would become members of the church of Christ. The Weeds had hoped to someday build a new meeting house in Danbury, but this would not happen in their lifetime, though in 1963 two families (the Wilsons and the Smiths) started a fellowship which would become the Danbury church of Christ we know today. The Church in Bridgeport also faced turmoil in July, 1896. As it was finalizing plans to construct the new building, two young men claiming to be members of the church arrived in Bridgeport from Iowa. These two "would-be" pastors, were successful in drawing away some twenty, mostly younger

members, to their scheme of overthrowing the eldership and taking over the congregation. However, due to the strength and wisdom of Elders Abercrombie and Pike, the coup of these two erring young men was thwarted.

They left, taking some with them, building a meeting house on Maplewood Ave. Their group soon dissolved, and they sold their building to the Jews for use as a Synagogue. This event, though discouraging and divisive, did increase the elders' and congregation's determination to move forward with the construction of the new building. In October, 1896, an agreement had been signed with Architect Albert Beers. In the agreement, the church would pay \$250 when the building was raised, \$250 when the outside was completed and the inside plastered, and \$297 when the work was complete. Total cost for the building was \$797 paid for with money borrowed from the



The Deed and Building agreement detailing the plans for the building of the church building.

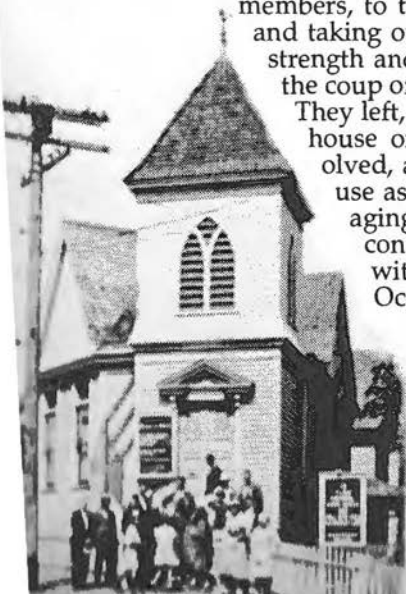


Photo of members in front of the church building in the early 1900's. The building, located on the corner of William and Stillman Streets in Bridgeport is still used as a church.

Bridgeport Savings Bank. Including the cost for the lot, the congregation had a meeting house for just under \$1,000. What a bargain! However, keep in mind that the average contribution at this time was \$30 a month. The construction completed, the First Church of Christ of Bridgeport met for worship in their newly completed building on Sunday, January 10, 1897.

In the cornerstone of the foundation, the brethren had hollowed out a place to encapsulate a small copper box wherein they placed three newspapers from 1896, a small red Bible, and a document authored by Alexander Abercrombie. Following is the document as it read:

"In accordance with an ancient custom, and for the preservation of historic facts relating to the times in which said facts were recorded, that generation after generation might profit from the examples of their fathers, both in things pertaining to family and to the church of Christ, we write this memorial.

Be it known by whomsoever this may be read, that as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive; even this paper shall be disclosed to view resurrected.

Inspired by this grand thought and directed by the Holy Spirit as he has revealed in His word, we the brother and sister members of the Church of Christ in this city of Bridgeport this 25th day of December 1896 do commit to this sealed cornerstone our testimony of abiding faith in the promises of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ whose we are, and whom we serve - acknowledging none other than His taking for our guide, His word alone; for our example himself, his apostles, and primitive disciples, and for the time when His church was established, the day of Pentecost, anno Domine 34.

And as the primitive disciples of Christ assembled upon the First day of each week to break bread in commemoration of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in obedience to His command, and so we in harmony with, and in institution of, the early Christians-His disciples-do meet on the first day of each week to break the loaf symbolic of His broken body, that we may keep alive in our hearts the promise of His coming again.

Through trials and through years of adversity, we have maintained our individuality striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Though we are poor in this world's goods without asking or receiving help from the world, we have steadily and faithfully, contributed our mite to the course we love, holding out noneother inducement or attractions to the people of the world than Jesus Christ and Him crucified-esteeming our poverty the riches of Christ, greater than all else besides.

The experiences of years have been in many instances very discouraging and attempts to disrupt the Body of primitive Christians have been frequent and not without sad success but that success has contributed more strength to those who have been unaffected by those efforts of divisionists, and we now stand, though fewer in number, more resolved to strive for the glory of our master in the face of opposition.

In erecting this House for the worship of God and for the presentation of the simple order founded on the rock Christ Jesus, we are actuated by motives purely in keeping with His commands, that we may keep in mind his great and wonderful atonement, until he shall come again; and that the faithful may be in a position to guard against the intrigues of false brethren who may try to draw away disciples after them and if possible, to bring troubles into the church by introducing things unwarranted by the word of God and unknown to the primitive Church of the living God.

We in harmonious cooperation and in the fullest confidence that all the words of our Lord are true, and that every promise made shall be fulfilled in the experience of His faithful followers, subscribe our names to this simple statement that it may, though hidden from our view in the darkness of the sealed stone, be always remembered as a solemn reminder of the darkness of the tomb nevertheless a comforting assurance of a triumphant resurrection - knowing that as it lies hid in the stone, our lives are hid with Christ in God.

And now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy to the only wise God, our saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever and ever. Amen"

The church in Bridgeport was on its way into the Twentieth Century under the leadership of its faithful elders and deacons. Since its inception 25 years earlier, there had never been a located minister, but faithful brethren kept the preaching and teaching of the Gospel between visits from several Evangelists, some of whom were W. Lane, W.B. Craig, D. Belding, S.B. Moore, T.D. Garvin, Bro. Darsie, I.C. Mitchell, J.F. Rowe, Bro. Lockhart, Bro. Bagby, R.W. Singer, W. Monroe and W.D. Campbell. The Bridgeport church was growing with membership of 100 by 1900.

At the Sunday morning service, February 12, 1900, while occupying his place on the platform shortly before worship commenced, Elder Chas. Abercrombie was stricken with apoplexy (rupture of an artery producing a clot in the brain). He was assisted to his home where he lingered until 2:35 a.m. February 15. Shortly before his death, his son, Charles, mentioned that his pulse was strong. "Yes", he replied, "strong for Jesus". At the age of 80, Bro. Elder Charles Abercrombie gently fell asleep surrounded by his family. Now, the congregation would be led by Sylvester Pike along with Brothers Alexander and young Charles Abercrombie.



Daniel Sommer; one of many evangelists who helped in the early efforts of the Bridgeport church.

The Bridgeport church would continue in its Mutual-Edification tradition until 1974 when they would

hire their first full-time preacher, thus ending the century-old tradition. A famous evangelist, Daniel Sommer, who was not only opposed to a located preacher, but also opposed Christian colleges and a degreed "clergy", visited Bridgeport often over the next thirty five years. Sommer was in the process of holding a three

week meeting in September, 1901, when President William McKinley was shot by an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, on September 6. McKinley did not die from the wound until September 14. Theodore Roosevelt became President and declared September 19, 1901, the date of McKinley's funeral, "as a day of Mourning and Prayer and recommended that all the people assemble in their places of worship and bow in submission to the Will of Almighty God". The church complied with President Roosevelt's request and at 2:30 that afternoon Bro. Sommer delivered a lesson of which a summary appeared the next day in the Telegraph Union Newspaper (the Connecticut Post). From that evening through Sept. 25 there were six baptisms.

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Reference Made to Nation's Sorrow In Service.

The Church of Christ met yesterday afternoon in the chapel on William street to participate in the sorrow of the nation. Elder Daniel Sommers read the Scripture lessons, from Romans 13, and I Peter 2, bearing on the subject of the respect due to rulers in authority. The elder then read from Genesis 28:15, containing God's promise to Jacob, following down through the times of Moses, Daniel and Isaiah, showing how God had called each to be a leader of the people.

The speaker drew a lesson from the lives of these men that God was using them to further His ends and would not let them go until His purpose had been accomplished, and applied this to the seemingly untimely death of President McKinley. Only when a man has completed his work, or has gone beyond the point to which God had intended him to go, is he removed by the divine decree. In illustration of this point, Elder Sommers cited the careers of Napoleon and Washington. They were not killed in battle. Washington was removed when his work was completed, Napoleon when he began to overstep the proper limit.

He said that three presidents of the United States had been shot down. Abraham Lincoln, he said, was removed because the negro race was beginning to exalt him to a point where they were in danger of making an idol of him. In the removal of President Garfield, he said that the danger, which threatened, of his becoming the idol of one part of the Christian church, was averted.

In the present time of sorrow, Elder Sommers said it was yet too early to determine exactly the purpose of the Almighty. In one particular, however, the purpose seemed to be plain. He referred to various passages of Scripture, and said that had our rulers made a closer study of the Bible they would have seen the danger in anarchy in these days. But what the people refuse to learn by reading they must learn by bitter experience, and thus the death of the president would rouse the people to stamp out the evil force that resulted in that calamity.

Original newspaper article summarizing special service requested in honor of President McKinley, who died of an assassin's bullet on Sept. 14, 1901

Over the next two decades, no major events occurred at the Bridgeport church. Every year two or three evangelists would come to speak and lead meetings to proclaim and study the Bible. These brethren preached the Word during the first twenty years of the Twentieth Century: Daniel Sommer, Stephen Settle, Paul Mackey, Fred Sommer, B. Huddleston, Austin Sommer, A. Joynes, C.F. Ladd and E.M. Zerr. All of the evangelists would receive room and board while they were here along with travel expenses. Most came by train, some with their families.

The nations had been dragged into the Great World War in 1917. Six young men in the Bridgeport church would serve their country. They were Leslie Abercrombie, Charles Bromley, Arthur Bullock, Herbert Murray, Chester Taylor and Wilford Wright. Armistice was achieved November 11, 1918, two days too late for Brother Charles Bromley who was reported "killed in action" on November 9, 1918. Being a soldier of the Cross having preceded his being a soldier of the United States had prepared him for Eternity. Many members purchased and donated a plaque to honor both Charles Bromley and the other young men who had served God and Country.

When the Roaring 20's arrived, the Bridgeport church had a growing, active Sunday School which was now referred to as the Bible School. Names like. Tomlinson, Weed, Wheeler, and Arthur Pike would be recognized as present day leaders of the congregation along with the Elders and Deacons.



Photo taken in 1927 of the congregation in front of church building.

In December, 1923, the meeting of the church recognized some erring members as "a body of digressives" and determined

the need to bolster their Articles of Association with some additional clauses resulting in 1925 with these proposals: "To inquire into the legal status of the church organization with a view to protecting its property for loyal disciples" and a bill incorporating such clauses "as shall protect a church organization holding particular views and beliefs as those held by the loyal churches of Christ"



Three children pictured in the front row are still faithful members today. Evelyn (Bullock) Watt, Frances (Boerum) Elizeus, and Doris (Wheeler) Brewer.

Nearly twenty years after the passing of Bro. Elder Charles Abercrombie, his son, Charles, was appointed elder in 1919. His son, along with Bro. Elder Sylvester Pike now shepherded the congregation as Pike and

the older Abercrombie had for over 20 years. However, Charles passed away in October 1921, again leaving Sylvester Pike the only shepherd. On December 2, 1926, the late Bro. Elder Charles Abercrombie's other son, Alexander, was appointed elder to serve with Bro. Elder Pike, who was now 86 years of age. These two served as shepherds to the Bridgeport church until Sylvester died on March 7, 1930.

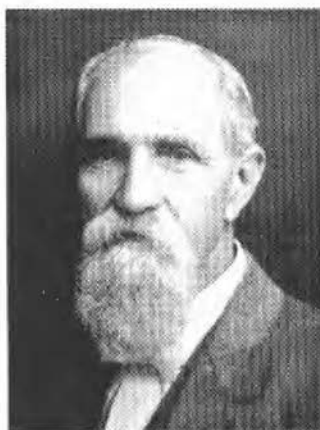


Photo of Sylvester Pike taken a few years before his death in 1930.

Evangelists H. Hinds, J. Hall, W. Burcher, E. Zerr, and E. Buttram would all visit and serve the church. The record also indicated that on Sunday, January 9, 1927 at the regular quarterly business meeting, there were female members present who participated in voting on motions made.

Singing practice and instruction was provided by two of the brethren and a sister, Bessie Bullock, in the Fall of 1927 to be followed up by "engaging" Mr. Brabner to give singing instructions in January 1928. The brethren allowed the Temperance Union to use the building for a lecture in 1929 to support Prohibition Laws.



Evangelist Buttram with his family on the steps of the church Building

In the 1930's, several of our elderly members today were children and would be raised in the Bridgeport church. All would obey the Gospel and become faithful members. Some would be married in the building.

Brother Huddleston had been working with the congregation since the Fall of 1929 and was about to move in August 1930. The congregation sought to find another "visiting" evangelist and secured the services of Bro. Edward Buttram who stayed for several years with two or three other evangelists being engaged each year with him. The congregation was evolving toward having a located preacher without calling him such.

In June, 1938, the following Article would be adopted as an amendment to the church's Articles of Association. "Be it resolved that the following Article be adopted as an amendment to the Articles of Association of this Corporation in lieu of Article 1 now in force and as a provision relative to the government of the affairs of the Church:

Article 1 (a) In the conduct of the affairs of this church corporation, the name shall henceforth be the First Church of Christ of Bridgeport in order to conform to Articles of Association are filed in the office of the Town Clerk of the Town of Bridgeport, January 18, 1892.

(b) On and after date, the officers of the church who are Elders and Deacons and while holding said office, shall be and are the Trustees of the Corporation, and the said Trustees shall hold legal title to the church building or buildings and land, and to any other real property belonging to the church.

(c) If at any time there are less than three officers of the congregation living and qualified to ask, the congregation may elect other members of the congregation to be Trustees, to bring the number of Trustees up to three.

(d) All members of legal age (21) shall be entitled to vote for Trustees, on occasions of necessity as prescribed above, provided that they shall have attended the regular Lord's Day services and communion at least four times during the twelve months preceding and these four times shall consist of at least once in each of the quarterly periods of said twelve months.

Dated at Bridgeport, this 20th day of July, 1938."

Several evangelists including Brothers Burcher, Roady, Harrington, Buttram, Sommer, Hastings, Reedy, Cox, Wallace, Settle, Bales, Joynes and Shasteen would serve the congregation throughout the thirties. Doris Wheeler (Brewer) and Frances Boerum (Elizeus) who had been raised in the congregation would both become baptized believers during this decade. In 1937 a "colored" sister moved into the Bridgeport area and placed membership. Beatrice Curtis would be the first Black member of the congregation. Sister Curtis would remain faithfully involved until her passing in the early 90's.



*Photo of some of the men at a church gathering around 1940.
(Top row, l to r.) Arthur Pike, Robert Cherry, & Watson Tomlinson.
(Bottom row) Fred Boerum, Arthur Bullock, Bro. Burcher and Wilford Wright.*

At the end of the thirties, most of Europe was engaged in what we now recognize as World War II. Bro. Elder Alexander Abercrombie would pass into Eternity in 1939 becoming the last man to serve the Bridgeport church as an Elder to the present.

The church would enter the Forties under the leadership of men like Arthur Pike, Fred Weed, Harry Wheeler, and Wilford Wright. Fanny Pike, daughter of Arthur Pike and granddaughter of Brother Elder Sylvester Pike would be baptized by Evangelist Burcher in July 1940. Louise Robinson would move to Bridgeport from Grafton, W.V. in 1940, placing membership. Louise would marry Russell Kensler in 1940 and together they would

serve the congregation faithfully. The early Forties would bring Evangelists MacNeil, Wickham and Freeman to work with the congregation. Due to the United States becoming involved in World War II, several young men would be locating in Bridgeport along with many sisters in Christ who would accompany their husbands who were stationed in the area. These men were here as employees of the U.S. Government in the Defense factories. One of these young men, Alton Brewer, would marry Doris Wheeler in 1945. Evangelist Robert Brumback would marry them. The Brewer's have been faithful dedicated members here to the present day.

In July 1943, both Evelyn and Carolyn Bullock would be baptized by Bro. Brumback. Also, their father, Arthur Bullock would place his membership with the Bridgeport church and become an active, servant of the congregation until his death shortly before his 98th birthday in 1991. Evelyn Bullock would marry Richard (Dick) Watt in 1954. Evelyn and Dick are faithful members here in Trumbull today, along with their children and grand children.



The Bullock family in 1954, Evelyn, Carolyn(back row), Arthur and Elizabeth (seated).

Frances Boerum, another lifelong member would marry Paul Elizeus in November of 1956. Active throughout the years this family would also bring their children, and grand children to this body of believers.



The Boerum family in 1939. Frances, Bertha, Fred, and Jacqueline. The Boerum lineage spans 5 generations from William W. Boerum in the late 1800's to the present, with Frances & Jacqueline's children, & grand children.

One of the sisters who would find herself in Bridgeport with her husband because of World War II was Ann Wheeler who in 1943 was received into the Bridgeport fellowship from Georgia. Ann and her husband Wiley still worship with the congregation today. It is and always has been encouraging to know that members of the church of Christ seek out the church wherever they relocate. Another sister, Estelle O'Connell would find herself in Bridgeport in 1946. Estelle would teach Bible classes for children for many years. One of her three sons, David, would become a Gospel preacher. David would preach for the Farmington church from 1978 through 1995. Estelle lives in Florida now and David is presently in Rome, GA.

Brother Robert Brumback would lead the congregation from 1942 through 1946 as its preacher. The mutual edification attitude

seemed to be waning, but after 1946, several more Evangelists would serve the Bridgeport church. Some were Bros. Roberts, Uland, Weems, Hensley, Boren, Duncan, Woffard, Crum and Higginbotham.

In the late 40's there was a push among the brethren to increase attendance at Bible classes. Improvements to the basement classroom area was accomplished and an advertising campaign began. Signs were posted in grocery stores, at gas stations, in area hotels, and at both the YMCA and YWCA. Also, small chairs and a table for younger children were requested. At this time, the practice of all members being invited to participate in the Business Meetings of the church continued.



Evangelist Robert Brumback served the congregation in the 1940's. He also authored a book "The History of the Church".

In December, 1948, the Bridgeport church would begin a mission work in Meriden, CT. The group would send Bros. Crum, Pike, and Wright over the next fourteen months to meet with some members in the YWCA in that city. It appears that on Feb. 5, 1950, that effort ceased to be supported and promoted. The congregation was also involved with purchasing, repairing, and maintaining typewriters and duplicating machines to produce the bulletin. Building repairs and maintenance continued on and usually occupied many minutes and sometimes hours of discussion at the "Congregational" Business meetings. Some things never change!

The congregation closed out the decade of the Forties "in the red" financially as their contributions were less than their expenses. However, because of previous years' excesses, the work went on into the 1950's.

As the church stepped into the second half of the 20th Century, it was still using the visiting evangelist method. Names like Bullock, Weed, Brewer, and Wright were leading the congregation between the evangelists whose services would cost the church \$2,597.24 for 1950-51. The records indicate that a "caretaker" of the building was receiving an annual stipend. Advertising costs for the church began to receive a much larger portion of the annual budget. A very unique quality of the Bridgeport church from its very inception to the present hour is that it has always been self-supporting. Evangelism and Benevolence have also been a part of its personality. Records show that in 1954, the brethren assisted the New Haven work financially.

By this time, the building, being over half a century old, had had two new roofs and two new furnaces. With the church growing and having no room to really expand, the congregation considered looking to relocate in the city. In October, 1958, when the Christian Scientist building on Maplewood Ave. came up for sale, the Bridgeport church set out to purchase it. The build-



The building purchased on Maplewood Ave, Bridgeport in 1959.

ing was bought in March, 1959 for \$31,000. The old building on William Street was sold for \$15,000 and \$7,500 was borrowed from Connecticut National Bank. The church had the balance of the purchase price in its treasury. The new location promised opportunity for growth and outreach to the community. Classrooms were constructed in the basement of the building and other alterations and maintenance was done to the building at a cost of just under \$3,100.

With a new building, a new location, and a renewed desire to grow and evangelize, the Bridgeport church entered the decade of the 60's. The congregation was spending several thousand dollars annually in mission work as well as supporting its own evangelists, and Vacation Bible School was an annual event.

Local brothers continued to share the work of preaching every Lord's Day morning and evening with Evangelists Benham, Bolin, and Scott.

In the early sixties, there was much discussion about appointing elders. Bible study on the topic ensued and some men were suggested but never did these efforts evolve into any appointments.

At this time in the congregation's history, these surnames appear in most records of the Business Meetings of the church: Bailey, Brainard, Brewer, Bullock, Cole, Curtis, Elizeus, Jones, Kensler, Lichac, MacNeil, Metz, Murphy, Perkins, Sturrock, Watt, Weed, Wheeler and Wright.

The congregation had grown into the 70's with an attendance of nearly 100. The congregation had done much work in the community. The outreach included using the basement of the building to give place for area youth to get together and socialize. Also, the ladies had done much to provide hand-made toys and puppets to children who were in the hospital. Then, nearly 100 years after the congregation's inception, tragedy struck. On the evening of January 14, 1972, fire destroyed the church

BRIDGEPORT

BRIDGEPORT, CONN., SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 1972.

Arson Blamed in Maplewood Ave. Church Fire



Source followed over the Church of Christ, 816 Maplewood Avenue at Howard Avenue, as fire of incendiary origin swept the interior of the church last night at 8:10 o'clock. Firefighters battled the blaze an hour and 15 minutes.

CYCLING CURB PEDALS DOWN
Council Unit Opposes Bar on Side-walk Riding, Especially in Parks

Fire 'Set' in Basement Of West Side Church
By FRANK W. D...

building. The official cause of the blaze was listed as arson. Many local church groups reached out to help the brethren in Bridgeport by offering the use of their meeting places. The fire and loss of the building would place the brethren into a rented facility, the Odd Fellows Hall in Stratford, until 1978. The church received several thousand dollars from the sale of the Maplewood lot, and from the insurance on the building. Financially, things looked good, but without a building and no full-time leader, the congregation diminished numerically. Then in 1973, the brethren contacted a man in Melrose, Massachusetts. Bill Hance was asked if he would be interested in moving to Bridgeport to help the now struggling congregation. At first, Bill declined the offer, but, after a few hours, called back to say he would be interested.

In February, 1974, Bill and Mary Frances Hance moved to Connecticut and Bill became the first "located" minister. The church purchased a property at 90 Williams Road, Trumbull, a house where Bill and Mary Frances would live. The purchase price was \$42,900.



Bill Hance with his wife Mary Frances

Being an excellent role model and a good leader, Bill was able to restore growth and to give direction to the congregation. Bill's abilities brought many unto obedience to the Lord. In 1976, the congregation had about 60 attending and asked the Town of Trumbull for a variance in order to use the basement of the house on Williams Road on Sunday and Wednesday evenings for meetings. The request was overwhelmingly denied. However, "all things work together for good to those that love the Lord and are called according to His purpose" because days later, the property the present building occupies came up for sale. The property has 1.05 acres with a split level house on it. The Trustees for the church submitted a sealed bid to the State (as it was state-owned property) in April for \$50,250 which was eventually accepted in November when the transaction took place.



Current building on 2 Drew Circle in Trumbull.

The church was on its way to Trumbull after being orphaned from its own meeting place for nearly 5 years. The Williams Road residence would be sold, the Hances would move into the house on 54 Valley Road (renamed Drew Circle) and plans would begin to construct a church building on the southern end of the lot.

Construction of the church building began in December, 1977 under the watchful eye of Bill Hance. On Sunday morning, December 17, 1978 the First Church of Christ of Bridgeport began meeting for all Bible classes and Worship in the newly completed building that would seat about 150. New life was breathed into the congregation by the sound, faithful leadership of Bro. Bill Hance. On December 5, 1979, the congregation would change its legal name to church of Christ, Trumbull. The congregation continued to grow in spirit and in number. Thus we close the decade of the 70's having grown back to nearly the number we had been at its beginning before the fire.



John Cooper with his wife Holly and their children.

The 80's enter with Bro. Bill entertaining retirement within a few years. So, in 1981, the congregation invited and employed Bro. John Cooper who, with his wife Holly and their two children Deborah and Stephen came to work with the older, experienced preacher, Bill Hance. John, who came from a family whose father and brother were also preachers had been the preacher for a congregation in Guam. Bill, though not an Elder had the qualities

that served the congregation in that capacity, and John was instrumental in bringing new ideas that would result in Bible School attendance like was never seen in the history of this congregation. Holly Cooper, who was expecting their third child when they moved to Trumbull, gave birth to a son, David that same year.

Gospel meetings, youth rallies, and a solid educational program for the church resulted in growth and harmony. Vacation Bible School was a yearly event and often attracted over 100 children. These ministries resulted in many from diverse backgrounds being added to the Lord's church. The wonderful combination of John's youth and Bill's experience caused sufficient growth to require plans for an addition to the building in 1984. The addition would increase the auditorium to accomodate 225 and provide seven new classrooms and a large multi-windowed office. The parking lot was also enlarged. On April 13, 1984, the congregation changed its legal name to Church of Christ, Trumbull, Inc.

In 1985, Bro. Bill and Sis. Mary Frances Hance left Connecticut, and moved to Oklahoma City, OK. They would be greatly missed but the congregation had been developed to the point that under a new generation of leaders, it would continue to grow. Our beloved Bro. Bill Hance passed away Saturday morning, July 24, 1993 in Fort Worth Texas. Mary Frances continues to reside in Texas.

During John Cooper's tenure as preacher and spiritual leader, the church in Trumbull would reach a regular attendance of 140. Years later, John would become very involved in mission work in Russia (formerly the Soviet Union). The Trumbull church supported John and others on many trips to Russia to preach to a people hungry for the Gospel of Christ. These trips resulted in many baptisms and the formation of regular meetings of Russian believers. John and his family would continue to mature and grow the congregation and after 12 years of service in Trumbull moved to Grand Junction, Colorado in September, 1993. As their predecessors, the Hances were missed, so too the

Cooper family. "Paul planted, Appolos watered, but God gives the increase." Just as had been the truth in Corinth nineteen centuries earlier, so now in Trumbull.

The congregation would seek out a brother to work with them. In February, 1994, Brother Mark Gage and his wife, Donna, would come to labor with the Trumbull church. The Gages had a son, Jeffery born to them in the Fall of 1995. Their tenure would be brief, but because of Mark's training in counseling, many were strengthened and encouraged. The Gage Family left Trumbull in October, 1996 and moved to Tennessee.



Mark and Donna Gage in 1995

In October 1996, the church in Trumbull was 100 years beyond the building of its first meeting house on William and Stillman Streets in Bridgeport with no located preacher. A committee of men would poll the congregation, determine its goals and direction and seek out a leader who would help them grow and mature into the 21st Century. The brethren invited Gary Babcock to consider the work here in November 1996. Gary, with his wife, Suzanne, arrived in Trumbull on April 12, 1997. Together they would continue the work with the remnant of the Bridgeport church and all the new brothers and sisters who have been brought to Jesus since it has been in Trumbull.



Gary Babcock, 1997

To God be the Glory!!!



Acknowledgements

To the entire Trumbull church of Christ for giving me the opportunity to record its history, my thanks.

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An extra measure of special appreciation goes to Bruce and Paula Pancoast who opened their home for our committee meetings every Thursday evening for many weeks, who prepared and printed all of our Anniversary invitations, who spent hours preparing the historical video script and who prepared our visual History display boxes and to Bruce for printing this History Book.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION

- * The congregation served the fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper in two chalices from 1874 - 1930's.
- * "Oh Happy Day" was the hymn sung after each baptism.
- * The church went from congregational to men's, to congregational, to men's to congregational, and back to men's business meetings during its first 120 years.
- * The congregation had an eldership from 1880 - 1939.
- * The hymn writer, Fanny Crosby is buried in the grave exactly in front of Bro. Elder Sylvester Pike in Mountain Grove Cemetery.
- * This congregation is the longest continuing congregation in New England second only to Unity, Maine (1859).
- * Sister Nettie Wheeler (Doris Brewer's mother) was in charge of sending flowers to ill members. Doris serves in that capacity today.
- * The church had picnics and parties at Beardsley Park very often.
- * The church provided room, board, and clothing for an aged brother for nearly 10 years.
- * A new furnace with an automatic coal stoker was installed in March 1928.
- * Before the church could sell their building on Stillman and Willam Streets, they had to remove the clause "No Mechanical instuments of music shall be brought into this meeting house."
- * All minutes prior to the 1980's were carefully and accurately written by hand.
- * Bill Hance and Frank Farr (preacher from Rochester, N.H.) drove to Texas to purchase church pews for the building in Trumbull. They drove a rental truck home and stored the pews in the Hances garage until the building was completed.