



## **A Short History of the Rehoboth Methodist Church of Lakeville, Connecticut\***

— 225th Anniversary Year—

*By Jean McMillen*

After the American Revolution, the animus against all things British slowly came to an end, including the aversion to Methodism. The young United States of American was not especially tolerant of other religious practices, whether it be the Shakers, Unitarians, or Methodists. However records state that in July of 1770 the rock star of Methodist preachers—George Whitefield—gave an open-air sermon right here in Salisbury. (See Charles F. Sedgewick’s History of Sharon”) George was a member of the “Holy Club of Methodists” which consisted of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, his brother Charles who had written over 9,000 hymns, and was the most prolific poet in the English language, and of course, George, probably the most famous preacher in the 18th century. The term Methodist was a derogatory term used against certain students at Oxford University who came together methodically each day for Bible study and prayer. The name stuck. The Methodist-Episcopal church was formed in the United States by 1784. Its doctrine is based on the power of the Holy Spirit, the need for a personal relationship to God, simplicity of worship, and concern for the poor and underprivileged.

I’ll let John Wesley speak for himself.

Almost 17 years later at a Salisbury Town Meeting permission was given for the Methodists to organize and hear their own preachers. Thus began the history of the Lakeville Methodist Church. Rev. Samuel Talbot came from New York State and preached his first sermon in a barroom in Salisbury. From the Minutes of the Salisbury Town Meeting, December 1, 1788, permission was given to Presiding Elder Freeborn Garretson of the Columbia Circuit “to preach in the Meeting House next Sabbath.” The Columbia Circuit stretched from the Hudson River all the way east to Canaan.

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*\* This is an edited version of the church history, without a rich treasure trove of archival photographs that are in the process of being collected and scanned from various sources. They will be inserted into the history in the near future.*

**THE LAKEVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
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In 1789 the Lakeville Methodist Society was served by itinerant preachers, one of whom was John Bloodgood. Preaching sites were visited once every two to four weeks by the circuit preachers. In June When the circuit preacher was absent; classes were held once a week to ensure religious stability and progress. The first organized class using the Wesleyan system met at the home of William Traffard in Canaan, near the site of the present South Canaan Meeting House. The first quarterly meeting was held in the barn of Thomas bird on the west side of town.

Homes such as that of Mr. Eldridge on Ore Hill, or James Holmes, Nathaniel Church, Milton Bradley or Nathaniel Everts were used. The Bradley homestead pictured here still stands on Belgo Road; the "Great Elm" on the left of the picture is the tree under which the itinerant preacher would preach once every four weeks. The house was built in 1732 and was the home of Capt. Nathaniel Everts Sr. who fought in the French and Indian War. He is buried in the "Old Burial Ground" behind the Town Hall. The people in this photograph are: the man on the horse is Orville Gridley Bradley, son of Milton & Esther Everts Bradley. Milton Bradley is in the carriage behind the white horse. Esther is holding the second horse hooked to a second carriage. The young woman seated in this carriage is Susan Bradley, daughter of Milton & Phebe Everts Bradley. After Phebe died, Milton married her sister Esther. The woman in the apron is believed to be Hannah Everts, another of Esther's sisters. These three women, Phebe, Esther, and Hannah were the daughters of Capt. Samuel Moore and his wife Rachel Landon Moore. Other stops on the circuit included the hamlets of Furnace Village (Lakeville), Lime Rock, Mt. Riga, Chapinville (Taconic), and "the Centre" (Salisbury).

Being a circuit preacher had its hazards both in terrible weather conditions and in facing angry mobs. In a letter Rev. Garrettson wrote to John Wesley in 1785, he penned these words, "Once I was imprisoned, twice beaten, left on the highway speechless and senseless; once shot at; guns and pistols presented at my breast; once delivered from an armed mob in the dead of night on the highway by a surprising flash of lightening; surrounded frequently by mobs; stoned frequently; I have had to escape for my life at dead of night." There is no record of angry mobs awaiting him in Salisbury.

Samuel Church wrote in his address given Oct. 20, 1841, on the occasion of the Centennial Celebration of Salisbury, Ct., "About the year 1788 at which time Mr. Elisha Horton and his wife, Rufus Landon and his wife, Aaron Mills and his wife, and my father, Nathaniel Church, inhabitants of this town, were admitted members of the Methodist Society. The term "society" has a special meaning to followers of John Wesley. According to Jesse Lee, an early Methodist historian, "We were only a religious society and not a church; and any member of any church, who would conform to our rules and meet in a class, had liberty to continue in their own church." The first name recorded on the oldest records in the possession of the Methodist Church is that of." Mary Everts, wife of Nathaniel Everts, who joined in 1790.

The rules of the Society were those laid down by John Wesley himself and were very strict. Clothing was to be plain, "not putting on gold or costly array." Life should also follow strict rules of behavior; no dancing, no games of chance, no theatre. If any infraction was discovered in a member, he was tried and expelled.

As the number of people in the Methodist Society grew, the desire to have a building of their own also grew. It took 27 years to achieve their goal. No one would sell land to this impudent group of worshippers. Finally land was bought through an agent—Samuel Church. A most desirable plot of land on Main Street in Furnace Village was successfully purchased by him which he in turn sold at a reasonable price to the Methodists.

The present building was completed in 1816. From an inscription on the church bell: “House of Worship built 1816: Building Committee: Rev. Thomas Thorp, Nathaniel Everts, Seneca Pettee, Lyman Bradley” (a note at the bottom of this record states that Lyman Bradley’s name should be spelled Leman, not Lyman). Many people contributed to the building of this church; among those were John Brinsmade, Eliakim Smith, Abiathar Wolcott, Josiah Woodsworth, and Nathaniel Everts. It was originally a pulpit centered church with galleries running the length of the church on both sides, and across the back toward the street. The building had no belfry or recessed area behind the pulpit. The sanctuary had no pews.

The “Rehoboth” Methodist Church was dedicated in 1816 by the Rev. Nathan Bangs, DD, Presiding Elder of the Rhinebeck District. This building was named “Rehoboth” which is Hebrew for “roominess” because they felt that “The Lord has found room for us.” This simple building began a tradition of usefulness and service to the community which had continued for 225 years.

Next in the building program came the parsonage built in 1832 under the leadership of Rev. Theodosius Clark who was then the resident pastor. Up until this time, no parsonage was necessary, as preachers were peripatetic, not permanent. The original house contained one small room for a parlor, a larger living room and a combination kitchen and dining room. An ell was added to the parsonage later, and this ell still remains a back part of the present parsonage. The man in the picture with the lawn mower is Rev. Phillips.

By 1838 the church needed work, so it was “repaired, modernized and pewed.” A quote from the old records says, “Resolved that the present slips of the Methodist-Episcopal Church of Furnace Village below the galleries shall be remodeled into slips and convenient slips with kneeling boards—each slip to have doors and that all doors be numbered and painted.” The pews were rented annually and provided needed income for church expenses. The rental of the slips or pews began in 1838 and continued until 1914. The pews were finally sold at auction after due notice. This brought in various sums in the amount of \$500 total.

By 1841 according to Samuel Church Methodist Society membership had grown to 126 people, but 2 years later several members of the Salisbury Society were expelled for being too religious. Their sin was not infractions of the rules established by John Wesley, but “Millerism,” or the expectation that the world would end immediately. (Shades of the prediction of the end of the world on of Dec. 21, 2012.)

An excerpt from Dr. Elisha Cleaveland’s diary for March 26, 1846, reads, “There was quite a stir in the Methodist Society. Meetings have been held day and night for weeks. J. O. Mitchell, Esq. is a

convert to Christianity, the most remarkable among many others, having been a prominent sinner in his day.”

The church was totally upgraded in 1869, and only the outer shell of the original building remained intact. A vestibule was added and a belfry. A new bell was purchased and installed. The total cost of this project was \$5,200. A mortgage was also acquired as a result of this expansion. Repeated efforts to pay off this debt were finally achieved in 1887, and the mortgage paper was burned in the presence of the congregation. Since then no mortgage has encumbered the church. The building committee was composed of Rev. Clark W. Wright, Lorenzo Tupper and James Van Deusen, documented by another inscription on the church bell. This time all names were correctly spelled.

In 1891 a new parsonage was built under the guiding hand of Rev. David Phillips. Remember the man with the lawn mower? The ell which had been added in 1876 was “moved back six feet and south five feet” and the Victorian structure you see in this photograph was added. Note that many of the Victorian features have been removed since this picture was taken. At this time the church had no front porch or hall.

In a picture taken between 1876 and 1891 you can see the ell attached to the original house. The ell is now used as the kitchen and upper bedrooms of the home.

In 1894 an organ was purchased and placed in the back of the church to add to the beauty of the worship service.

At the turn of the century a capital fund drive was begun with a few pennies to add to the church. In 1900 under the aegis of Rev. Jesse Ackerman Fellowship Hall was built. This space was used for Sunday meetings of the Epworth League, Sunday School, and “family nights.” The Epworth League was a youth order of the Methodist-Episcopal Church founded in 1889 in Cleveland, Ohio. Its purpose was to develop young church members in their religious life and to provide training in churchmanship. It was parallel to Sunday School for the children of the church but was for the older youth. Meetings were held on Sunday nights. The name Epworth comes from the boyhood home of John Wesley. The Epworth league is still active and on-line. Bible study and men’s groups occupied the adults of the church.

Fellowship Hall became a gathering place which continues to the present day; for example the Salisbury Rotary Club were served Tuesday lunches by the ladies of the church from 1948 until 1998, the Salisbury Garden Club held its Flower Show here in 1948. Other uses included Boy and Girl Scouts meetings, AA, and senior lunches while the new Grove Building was being built, Halloween parties and community Christmas breakfasts, Church Fairs, ham dinners during the Fall Festival and many other gatherings.

Here is a picture of the Church interior in 1916. The organ which was purchased in 1894 was placed in the back of the church. The present organ was installed in the front of the church in 1922 and was purchased from the Austin Organ Co. in Hartford, Ct. an Opus 1100, 2 manual 5 octave model. The instrument was refurbished in 1980 in memory of Harry F. Jopp.

Let's add a bit of romance to our story. On a rainy April day in 1925 Rev. Charles A. Dann, his wife and 3 of his 5 children came to Lakeville. The children were Charlotte, Charles, Evelyn, Mary and Cora. Charlotte had just graduated from Oberlin College, and Charles was going to become a senior. Evelyn and Mary finished high school in their previous parish, Ellenville, New York, and came to Lakeville later. The youngest girl Cora was enrolled in school in the fall and liked her new teacher very much. Mrs. Dann wrote to a friend telling about this very nice fourth grade teacher, Miss Bessie Argall. Unfortunately Mrs. Dann became ill and died in 1930. Over time love bloomed between Charles and Bessie, and they were married in 1933. Evelyn mentions in her oral history interview that she could not imagine how her father was able to put 5 children through Oberlin College on an annual salary of \$1900 a year. Evelyn took lessons from the church organist Miss Marian Bartram and after attending Oberlin College became the church organist until she retired in 1989.

Changes were in the wind for the 20th century Methodist-Episcopal Church of Lakeville. In 1939 the Methodist-Episcopal Church North, the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church formed one entity called the United Methodist church. The North and South divisions of the Methodist-Episcopal Church had originally split over slavery. The Methodist Protestant Church was formed in 1828 with its members adhering to Wesleyan worship and doctrine but adopting a congregational or more democratic form of governance. The Lakeville church changed its name to the Lakeville United Methodist Church.

In this picture of the Sanctuary prior to 1945 the present divided chancel was installed as a gift to the church from Chester and William Barnett. These two men further enhanced the Sanctuary in 1945 by dedicating a dorsal, pulpit and lectern in memory of their parents. The hand written dedication reads, "Altar, pulpit, lectern, Dedicated to the glory of God in loving memory of Henry Lewis Barnett 1865-1938 and his wife Jennie Bartle Barnett 1865-1945. Presented to Rehoboth Methodist church by their sons Chester Henry Barnett and William Bartle Barnett. Dedicated Nov. 15, 1946 by Dr. G. Bromley Oxnam, Bishop, Rev. Ernest E. Edmond, Pastor." The pulpit and the then Communion Table were made by a local cabinet maker Michele Archangelo Matteo, according to his son Feliciano Zacchea.

The gift of a baptismal font was dedicated by the Cleaveland children in memory of their parents Mr. and Mrs. Peter F. and Annie J. Cleaveland.

Another gift bestowed on the church was in the form of a house. The property on Main Street adjacent to the parsonage belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Hodges. This land once formed part of Col. Joshua Porter's fruit orchard. A row of three houses was built in the "Connecticut Village" style originally for the workers of the Holley Manufacturing Company. In 1850 the property was broken up and house lots were sold to individuals. In 1958 Mrs. Arthur (Pauline) Hodges gave her home to be used as a Parish House. Rev. Jack Savage gratefully accepted her generous gift. A dedication of this house was celebrated on April 7, 1963.

In 1963 Rev. Gerard Pollock came to Lakeville with his family. He remained as pastor here for 21 years. Both he and his wife Emma were great assets to the church and the community. Jerry joined the Fire Department and Rotary; Emma single handedly planned and cooked Tuesday Rotary lunch, taught

junior and senior choir and pitched in where ever needed. I am sure some of the children hoped that the fire siren would go off during church so they could see the Rev. quickly leave the pulpit to go to the fire. It never happened while I was there. My husband loved Emma's meatloaf, so I asked her daughter Nancy for the recipe. "No," said Nancy, "you don't want it. She can only make meat loaf for 50." Jerry's ministry to the elderly of the community was strong. He presided over a period of growth and expansion of the church family. One example of this was in 1973 during "Key '73" 1,200 New Testaments were distributed and a series of successful evangelical services called "Four Nights for God" were conducted by Dr. R.L. Francis. However all was not smooth sailing for the minister. He had a severe problem, not with the congregation, but with birds. They persisted in roosting in the open belfry. He and Bill Chilcoat waged continuing war upon the birds. Almost weekly the men would cover the open slots in the belfry, and weekly the birds would find a way in. In the end I think the birds won, but it did keep both men agile and nimble climbing into the belfry to combat the birds.

In 1974 a new kitchen was added to Fellowship Hall, perhaps because of the ongoing Rotary lunch preparation?

A new battle arose during 1975. It seems that at one time that the Easton, Ct. Society established by Jesse Lee was declared by the State of Connecticut to be the oldest worshipping congregation in the state. Not so! It was later discovered that four northwestern congregations had been overlooked as they were part of the Poughkeepsie District of the New York Conference and had been omitted from the Lee research. Rev. Pollack with the able assistance of retired Rev. Charles A. Dann provided documentation and defended the position that the Furnace Village congregation was in truth the oldest continuously worshipping congregation in Connecticut. In October of 1975 the Commission of Archives and History of the New York conference of the United Methodist Church agreed. This meant that our congregation is also the oldest continuously worshipping congregation in New England. Perhaps this battle was easier to win than that of the roosting birds.

Time and pastors move on. Herb Miller came to the church in 1986. During his tenure he reaffirmed our doctrine and refreshed our understanding of the liturgy. He raised our self-esteem and encouraged us to raise enough money to complete a major renovation to the church's aging structure. Tragedy struck in the evening of December 9, 1988. A fire began smoldering in the roof of Fellowship Hall, but with the able assistance of quick thinking State Trooper Mo, the Lakeville Hose Co. and passersby, all the valuable items were removed from danger, and the fire was quickly extinguished. Renovation continued in time to be finished for the celebration of the church's Bicentennial in 1989. During this period two long time church members retired; Evelyn Dann, the church organist, and George Silvernail, the church sexton. Both had given many years of dedicated service.

Rev. Dale Azevedo and his wife Elizabeth came to us straight out of Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado in June of 1995 and spent four years dragging us, kicking and screaming, into the world of technology. Pastor Dale made the church part of the internet system by designing a home page for the church which debuted in April 14, 1996. We were the first church in town to go global and have an e-mail address. Elizabeth was a major force behind all the arts and crafts projects the Methodist ladies produced which were sold at the Fall Festival each October.

The clear glass in the Rose Window was replaced with stained glass in June of 1997. When illuminated at night, it casts a warm glow into the darkness.

In 2000 in recognition of the church's 200th anniversary, Sue and Dick Vreeland gave the church a modern Communion Table made of cherry by Robert Green then of Falls Village, another gifted craftsman.

The belfry was completely rebuilt in 2002; the lead coated copper roof was redone, the electric wiring was upgraded, all the bird/bat guano was removed (Jerry Pollack & Bill Chilcoat were never successful in keeping out all the birds!) and the attic floor was insulated.

In 2003 we were blessed with an Interim pastor Rev. William Barnes. The conference gave him the assignment for one year, but he stayed with us for five, commuting from Avon three days a week to attend to his congregation's needs. With his genial demeanor and sonorous cello, the pews filled up and Sunday school expanded. One of his more unusual sermons included a Thanksgiving series of E-mails between the Pilgrim Fathers and a modern US citizen. When July 4<sup>th</sup> fell on a Sunday, the congregation read in antiphonal fashion the Declaration of Independence. We also marked our 220th year of service to God and our community with the motto "Open hearts, Open minds, Open doors."

In June of 2006 an apple tree was planted with a wooden bench near-by to honor two ladies who were long time church members who gave countless hours of their time to the church—May Parmalee and Pauline Silvernale.

Despite the changes in pastors, their strengths and visions for the future, the focus of the Rehoboth Methodist Church of Lakeville remains the same: the power of the Holy Spirit, a personal relationship with God, simplicity of worship and concern for the poor and underprivileged.

I would like to end this presentation with a bit of doggerel I learned in England. "Every time I pass a church, I pay a little visit. So when at last I'm ta'en in, the Lord won't say, 'Who is it?'"