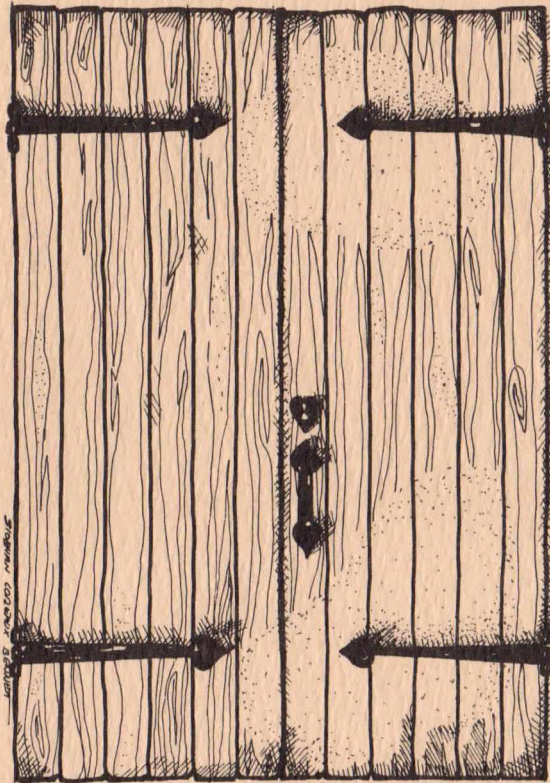
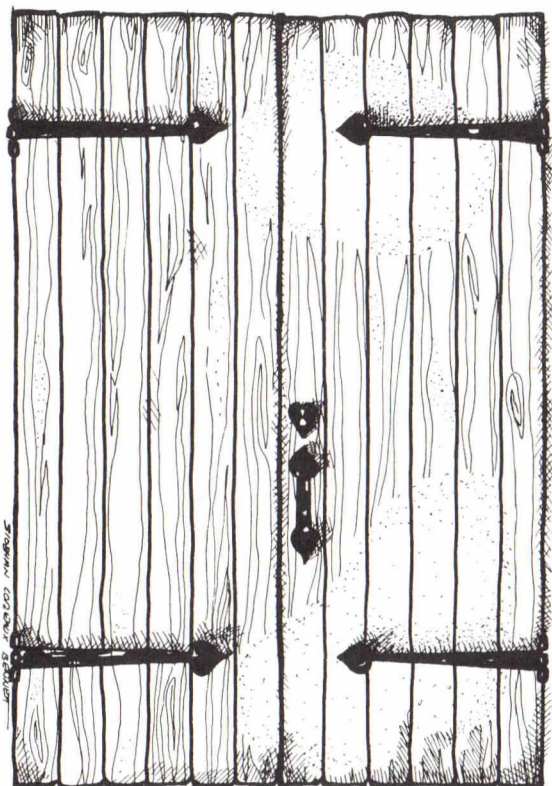


# Church At The Head Of The Delaware



by William R. Phinney

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## Foreword

This history of the Stamford United Methodist Church was begun possibly twenty years ago, but no attempt was made at that time to put it in any kind of final shape since there did not appear to be any prospect that it could be published. Subsequent to that beginning many things have happened, which have resulted in a substantial addition to the initial effort. All the known sources have been explored and this present production represents the bringing together of what have seemed to be the essentials.

Hopefully this history will be found to be readable. It does include a number of human interest elements. The appendices contain two or three items which did not seem to fit well into the main text; these have been included for what they may be worth. The critical notes have all been grouped at the end since they will be of little interest to some readers.

The author of this history wishes to pay tribute to the committee which worked with him to bring together the elements of this effort and to put the final text in such shape as seems to be most reasonable: notably, Willis B. Binkley, chairman of the committee, Mrs. Harry D. Robinson, Miss Mildred Hamilton, Mrs. Eunice Champlin, Mrs. Herman Golfetto, Mrs. Allen Goss, and the Rev. Harry D. Robinson, *ex officio*. It would be remiss to omit the names of others who assisted in the project: Herman Golfetto, whose photographic skill and his generosity have greatly assisted in the production; Mrs. Iris Hager whose artistic pencil produced three exterior views of the church; and Rollin Kelsey, who discovered among family possessions numerous rare photographs.

Following these brief words of explanation and thanks, this venture into the history of the Stamford United Methodist Church is sent forth with the hope that it may be a source of enlightenment to those who are interested.

William R. Phinney, 1980.



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# Section I

## Church At The Head Of The Delaware

There is no surviving record of the actual introduction of Methodism into either the Township of Stamford or, more specifically, into what is today the village of Stamford. Religious services prior to 1833 "were held in a small schoolhouse standing on the east side of Delaware Street and just south of the railroad track. Here meetings were held occasionally by the Methodists, and a little before the building of the church by the Presbyterians." (1)

"When or by whom this society was formed, there is no means within our reach to show. But as Rev. John Bangs was a member of the New York Conference for fifty-two years, and in his early Christian experience was a local preacher in Harpersfield, and as his remains were buried in the old cemetery at this place in February, 1848, it is but natural to suppose that a society was organized here as early as at Harpersfield, which was about 1800." (2) It is more likely that the first society was organized about 1823 (3), but that occasional services were held as early as 1800.

The Bangs family came from Connecticut in 1791 and settled in the town of Stamford. John Bangs was apprenticed to a blacksmith in Harpersfield and eventually owned and successfully ran his own shop. It was not until after he was converted and married and the father of a family that he felt constrained to enter the traveling ministry. He was ordained deacon by Bishop Francis Asbury and served a number of years in circuits within the New York Conference. (4)

Delaware County, where Stamford is located, was occupied by various colonies of settlers. Scotch Presbyterians came to Kortright, Davenport, and elsewhere in the vicinity. A group of Connecticut Congregationalists formed Harpersfield Center and established their church there. The Dutch brought their Reformed church to Roxbury, then called Beaverdam. The Palatine settlers came down into Schoharie County nearly to the border of Delaware County, bringing their Lutheran church. The Methodists came later; and often not as settlers but as individual traveling preachers who gathered little clusters of people to whom they preached the Christian faith as Methodists conceived it. Methodism thus came as a seed to be planted in more or less fertile ground; the other churches arrived as transplanted trees and were already firmly rooted when the Johnny Appleseeds of Methodism first ventured into the Catskills.

But Methodism had its mission to perform, and apart from its distinctive religious tenets, it had a versatility and a mobility which the other churches lacked. A Presbyterian church was possible only when a preacher could be secured and a building erected; these requirements

AUTO-BIOGRAPHY  
OF  
REV. JOHN BANGS,

OF THE NEW-YORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

A VINDICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION:  
AND REMARKS ON CHURCH MEMBERSHIP,  
DIVISION OF THE CHURCH, ETC.

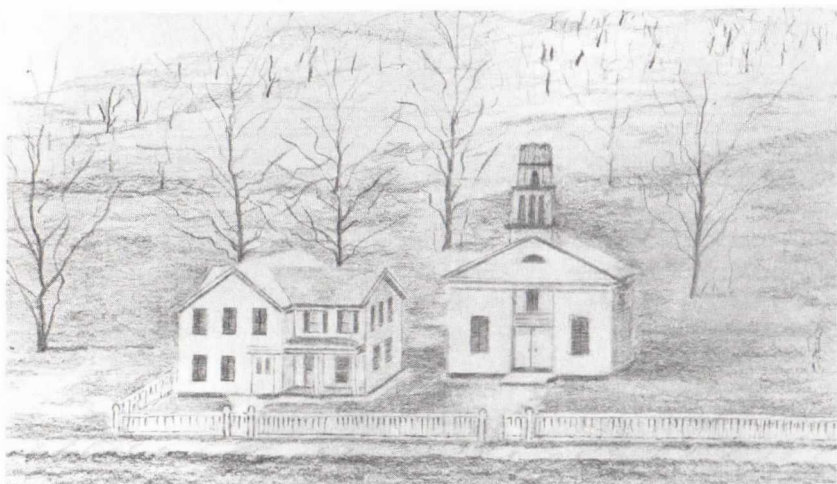
I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.—1 Corinthians x, 15.

New-York:  
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR  
1846.

*The Rev. John Bangs, "Apostle to the Catskills"*

could be met only when there were a sufficient number of communicants in a region to build a church and pay the salary of a pastor, small though the salary was in the early days. A Methodist preacher was constantly on the move. He was not the pastor of a church but a preacher on a circuit. The societies on his circuit might possess church buildings, or they might gather in school houses, or private homes. To these meetings people would come first out of curiosity and then because they "fell under conviction" and declared themselves to be on the side of Christ. In a very inconspicuous way Methodism came to Stamford, and there are today no documents giving day, month, year, place, and names.

Stamford village, or what was to become Stamford village, was feeling the influence of at least three distinctive religious emphases:



*The Union Church "At the Head of the Delaware." Constructed 1831-32. In Methodist hands 1870. Parsonage built 1877.*

Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist, and quite probably a fourth: Episcopalianism. But no one element was strong enough to supply for itself a building. A plan was conceived to raise a sum by popular subscription and to erect a union meeting house to be used by the several religious organizations. "The original subscription paper named Thomas Reckie (Rickie), Douglas McIntyre, James Pudney (5), Nehemiah Whitney, Ralph Newell and Thomas Montgomery (6) as trustees, and specified that the house should be 'forty-six feet long and thirty-six feet wide, one floor, and arched overhead; two aisles, four rows of slips with doors, and a desk (7); a small gallery or elevated seats for singers, and a cupola or bellena.' (8) No denomination was to have a right to occupy this church more than one-fourth part of the time, unless vacant; and if at any time there should be more than four different denominations composing the society, the time for using said house



was to be equally proportioned to all." (9)

The fourth denomination, while not referred to by name, may very well have been Episcopalian, since St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Hobart, the oldest church in that village, was in existence at this period. At a considerably later date, after the Methodists came into legal possession of the Union Church, such Episcopal services were still being held in the church. (10)

"There are seventy-three names attached to the list, and the subscriptions run from fifty cents to thirty dollars, amounting in all to \$550. We find in a memorandum kept at that time by N. Whitney the following entries: 'The following sums have been received by Mr. McKenzie, which has not signed the subscription paper: From Horton Maynard, in deal, and is to be discounted to cash value, \$15.' Then other subscriptions, amounting to \$67.48. 'Sept. 10, 1834--N. W. paid to John W. Gibbs, for surveying church lot, \$2.' 'June 8, 1835.--N.W. paid A. Campbell, at the Comptroller's office in Albany, \$1. for the patent for church lot.' Two supplementary subscription papers were drawn up, dated September 9th, 1832, for the purpose of 'finishing the union meeting-house at the head of the Delaware river.' To these papers were subscribed \$276. December 25th of the same year, according to Mr. Whitney's memorandum book, a stove was procured from Catskill for the use of the house; from which it appears that the house was used for worship during the winter of 1832 and 1833. There is no record extant as to who used it, or what ministers occupied its desk; neither is there any account of its dedication. The completion, however, of the union meeting-house' must have been one of the chief causes which led to the organization of the Presbyterian church, as that was organized in 1834. It is recorded October 22nd, 1835: 'The trustees met this day with D. McKenzie, and settled all matters between them in regard to the meeting-house' Signed by Nehemiah Whitney, Thomas Reckie, Elijah Churchill, Thomas Montgomery, James Pudney and Daniel McKenzie.

"In 1834 the Presbyterian society swarmed from the old 'union' hive, and in 1864 the Baptist society built its church edifice, thus leaving the Methodists in possession of the 'union meeting-house at the head of the Delaware river.' " (11)

It is not difficult to comprehend the desire of the Presbyterians and Baptists to possess their own church buildings. Provided with the union meeting house, which of necessity they had to share with others, and possessing their own pastors, they were given the impetus to secure their own places of worship. The Methodists were more adaptable to the restricting conditions of a shared chapel, since to have a preacher each Sunday would in the early days have been impossible; and lay-conducted worship might, because of the operation of the class meeting, be managed in homes.

"The appearance of the Union Church at this time (12) was such that it was considered a disgrace to the people to suffer it to remain in such a

Name	Amount
Subscribers Names	
Samuel Judson	500.00
James Taylor	10.00
William Taylor	4.00
James Taylor	3.00
...	...
Total	527.00

*Section from the subscription list for the Union Church.*

state any longer, and a few, one of whom was not a member of either society and who knew the extent of brotherly love between them, deemed it a favorable time to give a new aspect to the old church, and soon obtained a subscription that enabled them to repair it and change its appearance without and within." (13)

The union chapel, unlike the present church, was a plain oblong building with a central door, somewhat recessed, with a tall square-topped window on the ground floor level on each side and a smaller window above the door, probably opening onto the balcony. In the front gable end was a fan window. The front peak was topped by a two-tiered octagonal tower. (14) There was no bell, however, until later; it was installed after the property had been formally deeded to the Methodists. In 1870, Samuel Judson left \$500. for a bell to the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, if the people would raise a like amount and make the purchase within a year. The necessary sum was raised by the Methodists by July, 1871 (15), and the bell was purchased.

The new bells for the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in this village, have arrived, and have been placed in their proper places. They weigh about 1,550 lbs. each, and cost about \$2,000. and are from the Menely Bell Works in Troy. (16)

While the title of the union chapel seems to have been vested in a board of trustees, there appears to have been a "Union Society of the Head of the Delaware" which, upon due notice, met to elect trustees. On 28 November 1853 a special meeting was called by the trustees for



was to be equally proportioned to all." (9)

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