

***First Congregational
Church of
Pittston, Maine***

***200 YEAR HISTORY
1812-2012***

Dedication

To the founding fathers, ministers, members, and friends who have made this church a blessing to many people and to those who will continue its ministry in the future.

Special thanks to Susan Chilton for the cover photo and publishing this booklet.

Introduction

In the spring of 2012 it was decided to hold a commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the First Congregational Church of Pittston, Maine, a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Churches and the Maine Association of Conservative Congregational Christian Churches.

A committee of Trina Gutfinski, Cheryl Bragdon Stauffer, Barbara Shaw, Barbara Kaiser and Pastor Richard H. Freeman was appointed to plan the event and to update the history of the church that had been prepared for the 175th anniversary in 1987. The committee was responsible for contacting past ministers, members and friends about the celebration. The committee also organized the anniversary service. Most of the history presented in this booklet was gathered and written by Mrs. Dorothy Clement for the 175th anniversary booklet. These records were compiled from the old church records.

Lapses in the history presented are due to the church being inactive from 1907 to 1947. While the church was active during other years, little was recorded during some periods.

The Reverend Richard H. Freeman

History of the Pittston Church

The town of Pittston was largely settled by people from the southern part of the Colony of Massachusetts. About the time of the Revolutionary War, there was a Congregational church at Hallowell (which then included all the territory along the Kennebec from present day Gardiner/Pittston to Augusta), and the Pittston people, being Congregational because of their Puritan ancestry and tradition, made up part of this congregation.

In J. W. Hanson's History of Gardiner and Pittston we read: *"the great majority of the people of the province of Maine were of Congregational order, but the exclusive sectarianism which prevailed in Massachusetts did not pertain here. So liberal were the people that this proverb prevailed at Plymouth: 'Where a man can find no religion to his taste, let him go to Maine.'"*

In 1783 the people interested in a church began to build a meetinghouse on the land belonging to Major Colburn, the spot on which the present church building now stands, but were unable to finish it, and it was finally completed by the town. In this meetinghouse, or town house as it was called, services were held for some years.

In the record of 1797 we read of 28 pews being sold at prices ranging from \$16.00 to \$29.50, making a total income of \$658.50.

One person, Major Colburn, used to take a boat on Saturday, and going with the tide, paddle 35 miles down the river to Georgetown, attend the Congregational Church, returning home on Monday.

History does not record the length of time that the zeal of Major Colburn carried him to Georgetown, but it was at his house that an Ecclesiastical Council voted to form a Congregational Church in the West Parish of Pittston on November 17, 1812. His house, now a state historical site museum, still stands a little below this church at a bend in the river.

Ministers and lay delegates from the church of Hallowell, Newcastle, Bath, Augusta and Winthrop were present. The Reverend Mr. Gillet of Hallowell was the moderator. A Confession of Faith and Covenant was accepted by the newly formed church which was composed of eight members. Mr. Daniel Hendrick, who had license to preach, was examined by the council, ordained to the ministry, and "invited to settle with them in the Gospel ministry."

In 1832 a union meetinghouse was built and dedicated. On the old church books under the date of June 26, stands three rows of names under headings: Congregational, Methodist, and Universalist. In the Congregational row are 25 names, in the Methodist 8, and in the Universalist 8. As the Congregationalists numbered the most, a Congregational minister preached the greater number of Sundays during the year; the Methodist and Universalist preaching followed in proportion to this numbers. This meetinghouse still stands at the junction of Routes 27 and 194 and is part of Tuttle's antique shop and village of rescued historic old houses.

In the old days in this church there used to be thick planks in the bottom of the pulpit that were used to regulate the height of the minister who was preaching at the time. If he was of medium height the planks were not removed; if the minister was tall the planks were removed. But if the minister was short, the planks were placed one on top of another to bring him to the desired height to see and be seen.

Many interesting items are found in the old church record books. Under the date of January 13, 1813, we find that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was administered for the first time.

We read under the date of February 27, 1813: "*The male members of the church met to spend the evening in prayer to God for his blessings upon them and at the end of the meeting agreed to continue the meetings once a week from house to house, and have since given liberty for any persons to attend who please.*"

We also found accounts of men and women being examined for admission into the church and of children being baptized.

The entry for September 11, 1814, Lord's Day, reads: *"After performing most of the exercises in the house of God, an alarm was given as we were reading the last Psalm to sing, that the English were landing at Boothbay and the Militia were immediately ordered to arms and march to Wiscasset. This order being promptly obeyed produced much disorder and confusion; but the alarm proved to be false."*

The influence of this church has been carried all over the world. This parish probably sent out more sea captains who have sailed around the world than any other town of its population. Over a score have been lost or died at sea, and over a score have died in foreign parts of Japan, India, China, the Hawaiian Islands and South America.

At the time of the discovery of gold in California in 1846, nearly all the younger men who were at home were attracted to the gold fields. One deacon of this church, Deacon Cutts, upon reaching California, helped establish a church in his new home and became one of its deacons. His son, at the time of his father's death, took his place as deacon.

At the time of the building of the bridge between Pittston and Gardiner about 1853, the church people living in the part of the town now known as Randolph, found it more convenient to attend church in Gardiner and gradually left the Pittston church. The old church on the hill overlooking the Kennebec was left with a small attendance, and as most of the people lived in this end of the town, it was decided to build a hall on the site of the old meetinghouse, to hold meetings part of the time, socials and entertainment. During the time of building, plans were changed and instead of a hall, this church was built and dedicated on June 17, 1894. The Reverend Mr. Herbert McCann was the pastor during the building of the church and The Reverend Mr. Charles Thorp was the pastor when the church was dedicated.

Nearly a century later one of the deacons of this church received a letter from the Reverend Mr. William Bray of Georgetown, from which we quote the following interesting paragraphs:

"Cottage Manse, July 1854. I take a stroll in the old woods or climb the old cliffs, or sail on the old ocean, everywhere having my ears well open to hear the mighty sermons which nature is preaching, preaching, preaching to me."

"One of these days I will repeat to you what I can remember of them, though I will not promise to thrill you with the eloquence with which they are preached to me. These works and the workings of God, which we term Nature, are big preachers to the Christian ear."

A number of ministers have served this church. Among the best known may be mentioned: Reverends Kendricks, McCollum, Stratton, Gay, William Bray, Father Adams, Cushman, Lewis, Davis, Thygesore, Evans, McCram and Struthers.

Four ministers were also ordained here: Reverends Kendricks, McCollum, Davis, and Miss Isabel Phelps who was a missionary to China.

The deacons of the church have always been held in high regard. Some of the best remembered are Deacons Loud, Follensbee, Cutts, Flitner, White and Jackson.

Deacon White was especially faithful holding the church together after the Gardiner bridge was built for the church suffered great loss of membership because of it. Deacon White held Sunday night and weeknight meetings and was Superintendent of the Sunday School for many years, up to the time of his death.

South of this church, the Riverside Cemetery is the burial ground of the first settlers of this town. More than one hundred of the pioneer settlers rest there. The Colburns, Smiths, Lawrences, Agrys, Oakmans, Flitners and others.

In November 1891, a meeting was held at the school house in District 4 to see about building a chapel for evening meetings. C.W. Church was chosen to oversee the old west parish lot survey, and to locate a place for the building. A site adjacent to Mr. Richard Colburn's place was selected.

In December 1891, the fund-raising efforts began. We find many references to five cent sociables featuring food, games, etc. Also items such as a "guess cake" which went to the person guessing nearest to the number of kernels of corn in a bottle, at five cents a guess. The lucky guess "took the cake". They held oyster, bean and lobster suppers. In June 1892, they had a three day fair with entertainment, clearing \$212.00. Admission was ten cents per night or twenty five cents for a season ticket. Later that summer there were lawn parties to raise chapel money.

At a meeting in June 1892, C.W. Church reported that he and the surveyor had looked up the record of the old parish lot and put the bounds down. C. W. Church, M. J. Powers and R. H. Colburn were appointed a committee to procure plans for the new chapel. In July 1892, the plans for the building were accepted and two more members were added to the building committee: J. A. Marson and Alanzo Knight. R. H. Colburn later resigned and was replaced by H. S. McCan.

In June of 1893, C. W. Church's crew began grading for the foundation. By July it was complete and bids were being received for the construction of the building.

In August, contractor F. W. Blanchard of South Gardiner, having been awarded the contract, began work and by September work was nearly completed on the outside. Contractor Blanchard finished the interior of the chapel in March of 1894. Major J. W. Berry of Gardiner decorated the walls and ceiling.

In December of 1893, the chairman of the building committee reported the whole expenses of the chapel up to

December was about \$2,600. The whole of the receipts for the building from all sources was about \$2,400.

Fund raising continued all through this period, with the name of C. W. Church mentioned most often with many suppers and sociables being held at his home. The fair, more suppers and entertainments were held at the C. W. Church and M. J. Powers Kindergarten building. A lawn party was also held at the home of Mrs Samuel Flitner.

The new chapel was dedicated on June 17, 1894 by the following ministers: Rev. Edward Chase of Hallowell, Rev A. S. Struthers of South Gardiner, and Rev. James Richmond of Litchfield Corner.

Following this dedication, most of the services appear to have been held in the new chapel, though records show that some services were held in the old church from time to time.

In August 1901, the Episcopal minister of Gardiner, Rev. R. W. Plant, began to hold services in the old church. Representatives of the church went to Gardiner and met with O. B. Closon who had the old church records. He had examined them and advised the church to make out a bill for rent in the amount of \$1.00 per week for 26 weeks. They duly made out a bill for rent from August 18, 1901 to February 1902 at \$1.00 per week for the 26 weeks, equaling \$26.00. They handed this to Rev. Plant with the following note: *"Dear Sir, Enclosed find bill of rent of the First Congregational Church building of Pittston for 6 months rent, \$26.00."*

The church received the following reply: *"My dear sir, The enclosed is no concern of mine. Truly yours, R. W. Plant"*

The Pittston church followed up by having O. B. Closon send a letter to Rev. Plant stating that the church felt they must do something to maintain their ownership and control over the old church. This was the reason for the bill. They did not care if the money was paid them, or used in maintaining the church building, as long as no change was made in the interior of the church without their consent. If this could not be arranged, they would have to close the church.

The clerk to the Pittston church, E. A. Lapham, also wrote to Rev. Plant stating there would be another bill soon and Rev. Plant's committee must do something about it.

No other references in church records was found until May 1905 when R. H. Gardiner attempted to buy the old church building, offering \$400 (the church had voted to ask \$500). Agreement was made to divide the difference. However, nothing was done for a year.

In May 1906, members of the Congregational Church met at the home of E. A. Lapham, clerk, regarding the disposition of the old church. We quote from that record: *"Rev. Quimby, as moderator, first to confer with representative of the Maine Missionary Society and take such action with reference to the old church building on the bill as may seem to them wise. The committee met and after full discussion, voted to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Maine Missionary Society, as represented by its secretary and his appointed delegate, but with the advice that the Episcopal Church of Gardiner be requested to pay rent for the use of the building at such rate as the Maine Missionary Society might determine, or in case of refusal, to warn them from further trespassing in the use of the building."*

Another year passed and in June 1907, church members met at the chapel and voted to give "a deed, a quit claim to Robert H. Gardiner of all its right title and interest in and to the old Congregational church so called in Pittston, in consideration of \$450." This money was invested as permanent funds for the church, only using the interest.

From 1907 to 1918, records indicate the church was only open during the summer months. Between 1918 and 1946, this church was closed with the exception of the annual business meeting and a few services held during the summer months.

The Rev. Robert Mayhew was instrumental in arousing interest among the town citizens in reopening the church. On June 5, 1946, a meeting was held in the church vestry with twelve members present to consider the advisability of reopening the church for public services of worship.

The Rev. Ernest L. Harvey of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, Mass., who was engaged in church rehabilitation work in Maine, offered to assist the members by serving as acting pastor until the church was financially able to call a full-time minister to serve them.

It was voted to accept the offer and attempt public services for worship each Sunday morning. The first service was held June 9 with a splendid congregation attending.

Since the church reopened in 1946, the membership grew from three to eighty-seven members. In 1946 the men of the church formed a men's organization which lasted only a short time. The ladies formed a Missionary Society which was later called The Community Daughters. This name was chosen because the membership consisted of ladies of the community of different faiths working together to support the church and the community. This organization was the backbone for keeping the church open and for the many improvements both inside and outside the church building.

Since 1953, the interior of the church building was completely redecorated and remodeled, the outside of the church was painted, wall-to-wall carpeting was laid in the sanctuary, the underpinning of the church building reinforced, a stairway was made in the upper hall leading to the vestry, the floor of the vestry raised and new underpinning used, the kitchen enlarged and remodeled, a new heating system purchased and relocated at the north end of the kitchen (having previously been located in the southeast end of the vestry), and a new shed built. Before the installation of the well, Mr. Paul Plumer at the Colburn House gave permission to use the water from his well, instead of hauling it all from Cold Spring on Route 27 in ten gallon milk cans for the suppers.

Since the 150th anniversary in 1962, some of the highlights are:

- 1963 ... concrete kitchen floor laid and chimney rebuilt
- 1964-65 ... purchased land for a parking lot and bought an oil furnace
- 1965 ... new hymnals purchased
- 1966 ... well drilled
- 1967 ... Community Daughters had a new rest room built (in shed)
- 1969 ... purchased new electric organ and voted to keep the old organ
- 1970 ... sanctuary and hallway painted
- 1971 ... Community Daughters purchased dishwasher
- 1972 ... exterior of church building painted
- 1973 ... new tables and chairs for vestry. Community Daughters purchased a commercial-size gas stove for kitchen
- 1976 ... repair of shed foundation and new gutters
- 1978 ... Mrs. Marie Moulton resigned as treasurer after 29 years of service
- 1979 ... shed converted into Sunday School room. Mrs. Christina MacDonald resigned after 18 years as Sunday School superintendent
- 1980 ... Alcoholics Anonymous began to hold regular meetings in the vestry. The church called its first full-time minister, Rev. John Pokrifka, in September
- 1981 ... new pew racks for hymn books and communion glasses were installed in memory of Stanley Parmenter. Community Daughters had the vestry walls and ceiling insulated. The First Congregational Church of Pittston, Maine was incorporated under the laws of the State of Maine.

1982 ... When dissatisfaction was felt with the United Church of Christ, the Church researched the two other Congregational Fellowships and decided to seek membership in the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference

1983 ... The Church's application for membership was accepted by the CCC and the Church withdrew from the UCC and its Kennebec Valley Association of Churches and Ministers and joined the Maine Association of Conservative Congregational Christian Churches and Ministers at its October meeting.

1984 ... The old organ was rededicated after repairs and has remained in the church for over 100 years. It was built in Boston, Mass. in the late 1800s and transported up the coast from a church in Washington D.C. In 1956 Frank Colburn electrified the organ, using a washing machine transmission and a quarter horse power motor.

1986 ... A new piano was purchased for the sanctuary

1987 ... Bathroom and entryway redecorated, vinyl siding and insulation were added to the back of the church building and the steeple. The 175th anniversary of the church was celebrated on November 15, 1987.

1988 ... sanctuary storm windows installed

1989 ... sanctuary and entryway remodeled; handmade wooden cross donated by Joseph Atkinson and hung at front of the sanctuary; choir robes purchased

1990 ... kitchen and nursery areas dedicated to Ruth and Lorenzo (Bob) Bragdon in recognition of their 46 years of service; emergency lighting installed throughout the building; vestry hardwood floors refinished

1991 ... vinyl siding on high eaves, inside and out on the belfry and front scallop areas; front entrance and belfry repaired; steeple painted; new church sign installed, no smoking policy within the church voted in; new carpet and stair runners installed in hallway; nursery painted and floor refinished, nursery roof re-shingled; additional heat to nursery installed; furnace over-hauled

1992 ... vestry painted; handmade small cross donated by Carl Schroeder and hung in sanctuary

1993 ... new water filter system installed; new kitchen floor; bathroom remodeled

1994 ... church joined Chrysalis Place Food Bank of Gardiner, ME; three pulpit chair seats re-covered

1995 ... church septic system fixed; outside motion detection lights installed; walkway paved; new door to the nursery installed

1996 ... newer piano and electric organ donated from the estate of Willis (Bill) Davis

1997 ... new kitchen refrigerator purchased; vestry painted; church bell and furnace were repaired; hot water heater replaced

1998 ... deed to church property donated by Mrs. Clifton (Frances) Moody

1999 ... belfry tower repaired; memorial table made by Carl Schroeder and placed at back of church

2000 ... church roof re-shingled and weathervane re-installed on cupola

2001 ... new sound system installed; two new windows put in nursery; nursery roof re-shingled; aluminum siding put on outside of nursery; new sink and vanity installed in bathroom

2002 ... Rev. John F. Pokrifka resigned after 22 years; deacons, guest clergy and church lay people performed the pastoral duties

2003 ... Reverend Mr. Richard H. Freeman began his ministry in January; new fuel tank installed; new electric breaker box installed; new fabric placed on vestry shutters; new safety wall around the furnace installed; new vestry thermostat; front steps painted; new furnace purchased

2004 ... location of four church property deeds located by Barbara Shaw, church clerk, and now kept with church clerk's records; new church sign purchased

2005 ... new nursery ceiling installed; file cabinet purchased to store choir music; monthly communion services replaced bi-monthly services

2006 ... new well pump and well cap replaced; Sunday School mission project, Operation Christmas Child by Samaritans Purse, was adopted as a church mission

2007 ... Mother's Day Church Pew Fund raiser to honor mothers past and present headed by Cheryl Stauffer; dishwasher and two safes were removed; gas stove sold

2008 ... Father's Day Church Pew Fund raiser to honor fathers past and present headed by Cheryl Stauffer; trustee job description completed; bathroom roof repaired; crack in basement wall repaired and waterproofed; theatre style chairs in sanctuary sold; sanctuary painted. Trina Gutfinski wrote and requested grant money for the pews and the church was awarded the grants from various resources.

2009 ... new carpeting installed in sanctuary; new pews and choir chairs installed and dedicated; plaques commemorating mothers and fathers past and present mounted on four pews

2010 ... The Pittston Community Daughters separated from the church after a 61 year affiliation. As a church mission project, a used trailer was purchased for a parishioner and volunteers set it up, cleaned the inside, and added a roof. Local businesses volunteered or gave discounts to help with the project as well as the church holding many fund raisers. A second mission project provided a parishioner with leveling the gravel pad and winterizing his trailer.

2011 ... Through church mission projects, some people were assisted with heating fuel and dental work. The church hosted Rev. Richard Cook and his wife Charlotte, from the 4C's Redevelopment Ministry, to hold a one-day workshop on the 4C's Life Flow process and the diaconate is now leading the church through a Christian leadership program. The 4C's vision statement was adopted by the church and a mission statement was written by the diaconate.

2012 ... A rotten sill under the church steeple was replaced; new hymnals donated by family and friends in memory of Ruth and Lorenzo (Bob) Bragdon; assistance with heating fuel and dental work to some area people; other mission donations included Disciples International Church, Salvation Army, Vacation Bible School, Food for Thought School Project in area schools, a man battling cancer, and 4C's Cornerstone Project. The 200th Anniversary was planned and celebrated.

Registry of Ministers

Rev. Ernest L. Harvey.....June 9, 1946 - Nov 28, 1948
 Rev. George Edward Millard.....March 20, 1949 - June 25, 1950
 Rev. William C. Osgood.....July 2, 1950 - May 7, 1955
 William Fash (supply).....May 14, 1955 - June 24, 1956
 Rev. Richard Vickman.....Sept. 2, 1956 - Dec. 2, 1956
 Rev. Robert Cumler.....Dec. 2, 1956 - May 31, 1959
 Rev. George Whittier.....Sept. 20, 1959 - Sept. 25, 1962
 Mrs. George Whittier.....Oct. 7, 1962 - Nov. 13, 1962
 Rev. Chester Pinkham (supply).....Nov. 30, 1962 - May 30, 1963
 Rev. George Whittier.....June 2, 1963 - Jan. 1, 1965
 Mrs. George Whittier (co-pastor).....June 2, 1963 - Jan. 1, 1965
 Mrs. George Whittier.....Jan. 10, 1965 - Sept. 1969
 Rev. David Day.....Oct. 3, 1969 - June 1970
 Mr. William Pitts (lay minister).....Jan. 3, 1971 - May 1971
 Mr. Melvin R. Young (lay minister).....Sept. 26, 1971 - Apr. 23, 1973
 Rev. Robert Gunn.....June 1973 - Jan. 27, 1974
 Rev. David Laney.....Feb. 3, 1974 - Sept. 29, 1974
 Mr. Peter Willard (lay minister).....Oct. 13, 1974 - Nov. 2, 1975
 Rev. Ernest Sjoberg.....Nov. 9, 1975 - July 2, 1978
 Rev. Paul Heath.....July 9, 1978 - Dec. 3, 1979
 Mr. Roger Sproul (interim).....Jan. 13, 1980 - Aug. 31, 1980
 Rev. John Pokrifka
 (1st full-time minister).....Sept. 7, 1980 - Mar. 7, 2002
 Rev. Richard H. Freeman.....Jan. 5, 2003

Tim Clever2015-2021

Shawn Hoyle2021-Present