

ONE HUNDRED YEARS

AT

SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH

ASHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS



1828 - 1928

ONE HUNDRED LEAVES

IN

SAMUEL JOHNS CHURCH

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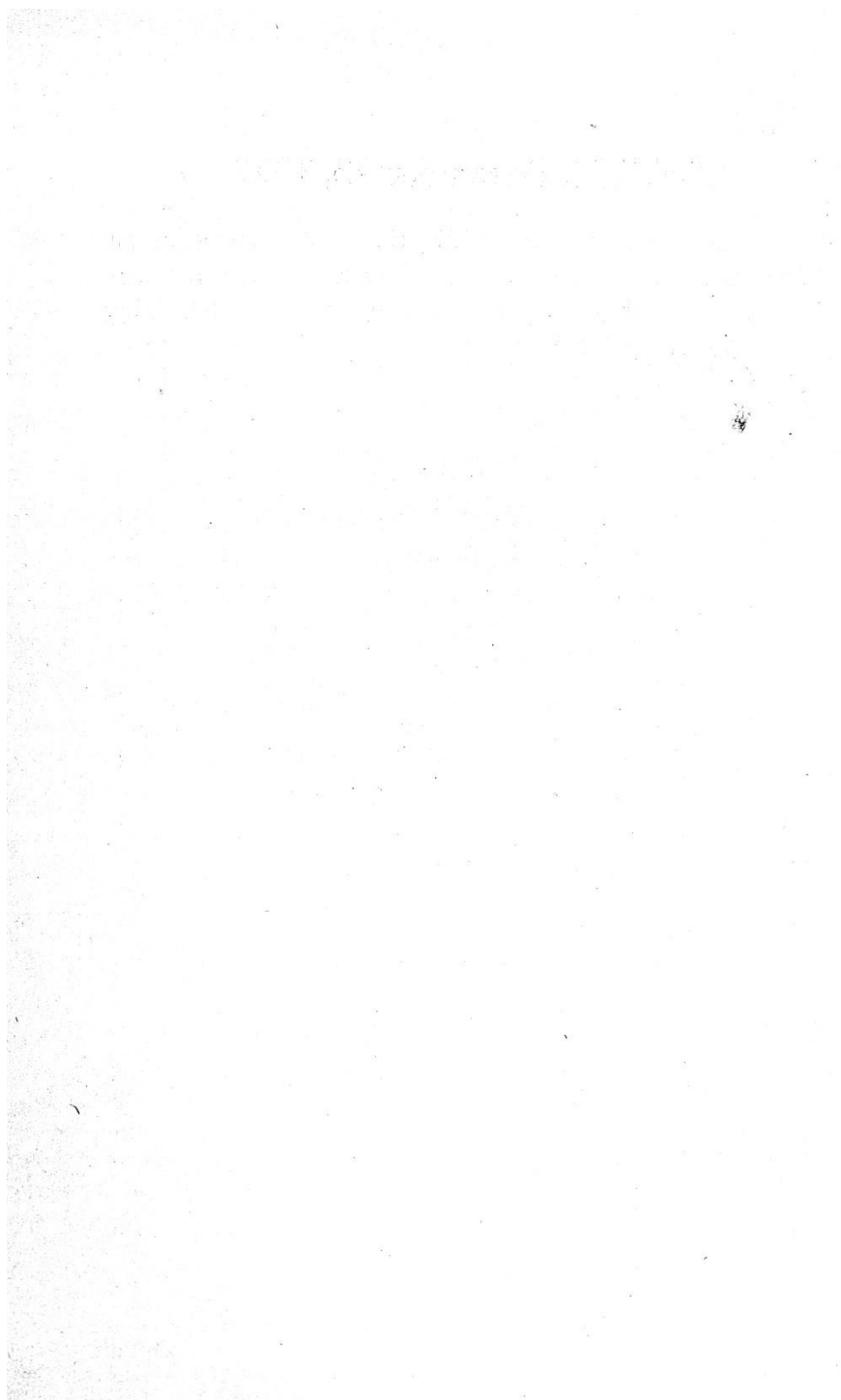
AT

SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH

ASHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS



1828 - 1928



Ashfield, December 23, 1927

On Sunday, Dec. 23, 1827, the first service in St. John's Church, Ashfield, was conducted by Aaron Humphreys, who is first mentioned in the records as baptizing a child, preaching and administering Holy Communion on May 6, 1827. He stayed here until Mar. 28, 1828, and was present at the consecration of the church in October of that year.

Our fathers came into this church 100 years ago. It was just finished and they were very happy. But to them it really meant only the satisfaction of their desires and the happy completion of a great endeavor, which is a great deal, but not what it means to us, because we had no part in their experiences. During these hundred years, for generation after generation, the church has grown into the lives of its people. It is a part of us because it has become a part of the growing experience of a century. No one here can remember when it was not standing, nor could your fathers before you. We can look upon no part of this church which does not bring remembrances to our minds of those who have worshipped here in years gone by, and are now passed on: the building is full of the glory of the saints who have worshipped and served God here. It stands for the work of our fathers for a century back, and more important still, it stands for our own life work. Everything that has happened here has made it dearer to us—this building has become a home, and the experiences lived in this place which has been consecrated and set apart for the spiritual life are increasing in value as time goes on.—Here we come to receive the Holy Communion;—in the joy of our hearts we have brought the

children to be made Christians in this church where many of us were ourselves baptized; here we have been confirmed, and our children after us, where our fathers were confirmed;—here for ourselves and for our neighbors the blessing has been pronounced upon those who have just entered into the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, and here we have brought those dear to us in the day of death.—Into this room we have come when sorrowful with great sorrow and when filled with great joy; here we have come perplexed and discouraged and, I hope, have gone from this building refreshed and quieted, comforted and strengthened.—Our fathers built this house for God and we know that God has come into it and hallowed it because we have met Him here and the spiritual strength we have received here has enabled us to meet God everywhere, in the highways and byways, in the streets and houses, in the fields and homes.—So let us keep close to it, protect it, support it, work for it, be jealous of its honor in this town, in this diocese and in the Church at large. The church is ours—a heritage bequeathed us in the nineteenth century, which we possess in the twentieth century, and will hand down to those who shall come after us in the twenty-first century.

“A century of service to mankind

And still the steeple stands beneath the sky
Thrones rise and fall and fashions drop behind
The Church is all we have that doesn't die.

One hundred years and still the Church is young

Still men keep faith and seek the finer things
Still hymns of faith and praise to God are sung
While time rusts fame, ends power and humbles
kings.

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Men come and go upon the stream of change
Thru new and old God keeps his place on earth
Abiding faith! Oh, is that phrase so strange
Since centuries add lustre to the worth".

Edgar Guest.

Bishop's Day Address

August 19, 1928

This church was consecrated on Friday, Oct. 3, 1828, the consecrating bishop being Rt. Rev. Alexander V. Griswold, 62 years old. At this time, he had been bishop 17 years, and continued in office for 15 years more. He was third Bishop of Massachusetts but was called Bishop of the Eastern Diocese, which included all New England, except Connecticut. We recall road conditions and methods of transportation at this time and marvel how this man could keep it up 32 years, until he was 77 years old, with never any assistant bishop; and we marvel at his coming to Ashfield for this consecration 100 years ago. Churches were started in many places during his episcopate,—including Christ Church, Springfield, and those in Greenfield, Northampton, Pittsfield, Stockbridge, and in the year of his death, All Saints, Worcester. Four mission-churches, including Ashfield, Rochdale, Van Deusenville, and Wilkinsonville were also in this diocese in his episcopate.

Bishop Griswold was a man of the plain people; he had obtained his education by the light of a pine knot. In his first parish he had maintained himself by teaching the district school in winter and working on his neighbors' farms in the summer. Just after his election to the episcopate there was a notable revival of religion in his parish at Bristol, Rhode Island. The whole town was stirred, and this experience was repeated throughout the whole diocese. He travelled in stage coaches over long roads;

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he climbed the mountains; he preached in the woods. When he became Bishop of New England he had been compelled to unite the feeble parishes into a single diocese, and even then the Church was poor and weak.

The congregations in the territory once served by Bishop Griswold made five dioceses, vigorous and self-supporting. The stories of his hardships and of his perseverance prove that he was a man of courage and faith and that he inspired all with it. Ashfield must have been influenced by the presence of this wonderful man.

The consecration service must have been rather long as the Prayer Book of that day allowed no short cuts. The text of Bishop Griswold's sermon was found in 2 Samuel 24:24,—“The king said unto Araunah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.” I don't know what he said—he probably congratulated the people on completing this work—perhaps he told of their early struggles and why it had taken them four years to build this church.—It is quite probable that this Bishop who was purchasing the people of New England for the Church at so great a personal price, spoke to our people here of what it had cost them to build this church. It was hard to raise money in those days, but everybody gave something for the church,—one man giving his shirt and Bible in lieu of money. Many had given unsparingly of their labor, felling trees, drawing logs and hewing the timbers for this building.—And the general attitude toward the Episcopal church was hostile then, taking men of courage to join the Episcopal Church and carry it on in a hill town like this. Christmas

and Lent did not come to be generally observed until 50 years later and our customs were considered heathenish, exotic, unpatriotic, irreligious and above all, papal.

And the Bishop would surely have told them about the cost of the future, which would allow no abatement of effort.

We have great admiration for our fathers and for what they did; there were giants in those days; but we are their sons, and I hope we live as their sons should live.— There is always a past generation for which we may thank God; a future generation for which we may pray and hope, but with us always is the present generation, consisting of you and me. We ought to be better Churchmen than our fathers who built this church, because we have had 100 years of experience added to theirs. They did not offer unto God of that which cost them nothing—neither do we—neither will we. We are keeping a patriotic observance, but a patriotic observance which stirs our emotions without giving them expression is valueless if not injurious. So at the beginning of this centennial, in which we remember our founders with gratitude, let us be ready to excel them in paying the cost of our sacrifice to God. They consecrated this building in 1828. We worship in it in 1928. Whether the building will last another hundred years or not we do not know, but we want them to be able to say of us as we say of our fathers, "They were ashamed to offer unto the Lord their God of that which cost them nothing." They offered at their cost, of their substance, of their labor, but, above all, of their souls. Yes, they offered their souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto God, and the anniversary

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of the consecration of this church should be to each of us a dedication of self to the God of our fathers, to the God of our children, and to the Lord our God.

Vicar's Day Address

August 26, 1928

On the evening of Friday, October 3, 1828, Rucksbee Bryant wrote in her diary:—

“October 3. I have attended the consecration of the Episcopal church this day. The sermon by Mr. Griswold, 2nd Samuel 24:24—I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.”

Rucksbee Bryant lived in Chesterfield and had taught school round about for some years. After teaching one school for about a day and a half, the school committee told her that she did not meet the requirements of a teacher's certificate. “They thought my education not answerable to the law—the new laws are strict—the law of the land,” she writes. That settled it. She must obtain more education or give up teaching. So, less than one month before the consecration of this church, she entered Sanderson Academy here in Ashfield, an institution then about 12 years old, but which had been incorporated only about seven years. Although in its infancy, the Academy had acquired quite a reputation as a school of learning. Mary Lyon was just closing her engagement as teacher here. St. John's church had been erected only a short time. Its appearance was very different from what it is now. Mr. Hall told you the other night about the interior. The exterior of the church was not painted until 16 years later. The church was built in the same style as all the Episcopal churches around here were built in at that time. The Congregational church, now used as the town hall, had been

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built near the close of what we call the Colonial period in architecture. In the 1820's another style of architecture was coming into vogue which was not as beautiful as the old style, but was probably liked better by the people. I think that we should have considered the church of 1828 very bare, but Rucksbee Bryant did not mind the bareness of it—the period of aesthetic revival had not yet arrived. The service seemed very strange to her, but it would have seemed stranger to us. It was very long. At the consecration of a church there must be Morning Prayer, there might be a celebration of the Holy Communion, and at this service there was also confirmation. I do not think Rucksbee Bryant had ever been in an Episcopal church before. There were only two anywhere around here, one in Greenfield and one in Northampton, both organized in 1826. I doubt if she ever went to an Episcopal church again, even though she lived over sixty years after this consecration. I know she never attended St. John's again, for her diary shows where she went every Sunday as long as she stayed in Ashfield. I am very sure she did not like the service of consecration, not because it was long—she was used to long services—but because it was a service connected with prelacy, and I am also sure she did not like the sermon because she always commented on sermons she did like. She has left many records of the preaching of those days for she went to church twice, sometimes three times every Sunday, generally to the Congregational Church of which she was a member. Occasionally she attended a Methodist church as a novelty, and the Methodist preaching seems to have been milder and sweeter than that of her own church.

Occasionally when it was rainy she did not go to church; a good hard storm seemed to her a sufficient reason for staying away, but I know that her "beloved pastor", as she always called him, knew nothing about that delightful entry in her diary. If she was kept home by a slight indisposition she would write "It is very irksome to remain from the house of worship on the Sabbath day for there is nothing to do,"—an irksomeness which I felt very keenly before I went away from home to live. On the Sunday after the consecration of this church, Rucksbee Bryant enters in her diary, "On this holy day, I arise in health and strength, feeling to acknowledge gratitude to the Author of my existence for life and all its various comforts while many have the reverse of these blessings which I enjoy; the reason for this distinguished favor conferred upon one who is so stupid is the long patience of my offended Preserver. Will His patience endure forever and His justice slumber? No. Every one of His creatures which He has made and endowed with an immortal soul is answerable to the Judge of the quick and the dead for the deeds done in the body during this frail life, this short and uncertain state of existence. God has endowed man with the capacity for preparing for a never-ending eternity, but Oh how unwise and foolish am I to neglect the preparing for so glorious an estate with the redeemed to ascribe honor and praises to the Lamb that was slain. Been to worship God in His holy temple to-day. Heard Rev. Mr. Crosby of Conway preach two solemn sermons on Eph. 6:3 and Gen. 19:27-28. If I do not improve these sacred admonitions my overthrow will be like unto Sodom and Gomorrah. It will be my just desert for despising the kind in-

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vitations of the gospel." I will quote on more. This reaction of hers to the preaching of Rev. Mr. Crosby of Conway, preached on the Sunday after the consecration of this church is enough. During the six years that she kept her diary this young woman in the twenties is receiving two or three times every Lord's day and every time she goes to a funeral solemn admonitions on the shortness of life, the length of eternity, and the awfulness and certainty of punishment. She had a covenant with God which no human being could possibly keep, and if she did not keep it, she would be everlastingly punished in a horrible way. The all-seeing eye was watching her—we might say, spying on her,—trying to catch her at things, and the Recording Angel seems to have been taking grim pleasure in jotting down a misdemeanor. That was the religion of New England in that time except with the wordly Episcopalians and the thoroughly disliked Methodists. And I think the Episcopalians in Massachusetts at this time were not much different, for they were the spiritual descendants of Jonathan Edwards. He lived in Northampton, you know, and later at Stockbridge,—the greatest thinker this district ever produced. His influence was strong for a long time after his death—right up to the beginning of this present century. Many of the Episcopalians—most of those in Ashfield—had been Congregationalists, and when they came into the Church, they did not leave behind their Calvinism, with its stern condemnation of sin, its idea of the atonement as a penalty paid by an innocent one to an angry God, its strict ritualistic observance of Sabbath taboos, and its teaching regarding the certainty of dreadful punishment. Every religious society in New England

is inoculated with Puritanism. Since 1828 we have gone very far from the Puritans in our teaching regarding punishment for sin and the Protestant churches about us have gone very far from us in their estimation and doctrine of the Sacraments. The Congregationalists in 1828 held a very high doctrine of the Sacraments, and the Sabbath was the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection—at least according to Rucksbee Bryant's diary. The only difference between St. John's church and the Congregational church was that we were addicted to prelacy, used a prayer-book, and on occasions—but only on occasions—the minister wore a "rag of popery."

But attitudes were changing in New England, and reactions were not always such as to be approved by the "beloved pastors". Tom Paine had been dead 19 years, but ungodly people were reading his books and light-headed people, "sons of Belial", were quoting them: the Encyclopedists of France had had some followers here—but the ideas of Paine and the Encyclopedists had not yet touched the Church. There were, however, evident signs of religious decadence, so they thought. I think that there were signs of religious revival. Seven years after the consecration of this church Mr. Blaisdale writes to the diocesan convention that it was a period of revolution and restlessness—which sounds like 1929. When Thoreau lay dying in 1862, and his aunt said to him, "Henry, have you made your peace with God?" his answer was, "I did not know we had ever quarreled"—a shocking answer; the thoroughly worldly answer of an unredeemed man (his aunt must have thought). But then, did he not spend much of his time living in a shack by a lake, and traipsing over the country-side, and had he not

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been in jail for refusing to pay taxes? To us, his answer was that of a mystic saint. There is much more real religion in the man who has never quarreled with God than in the one who has to make his peace with Him.

Changes were coming during these next years—great religious changes. The Methodist movement was about to grow strong, the Oxford movement was almost due, Darwin, then 19 years old, had proved himself unfitted for medicine, and had commenced to study for the ministry, but in two years the Beagle set out on its cruise which revolutionized the thought of the world, especially the religious thought. Abraham Lincoln, born the same year as Darwin, made a journey this year on a flat-boat to New Orleans, going as a hired hand. Yes, the stage was all set, the great men were all here, waiting God's time to change the course of the world religiously, socially and economically. Machines were being invented which would change industrial conditions which had existed for centuries. The country people were to commence migrations to new lands afar off and to the cities which were to grow with terrific strides. Great changes in transportation had already commenced to come, and were to be accompanied by great changes in methods of communication. The world was about to be turned upside down and the turning still continues. This last century has been one of great restlessness and revolution, and, we all believe, of progress on all sides. We were just about to settle down and become conventional again, when along came the World War, and we are again whirling around. It is impossible for the children of today,—almost impossible for anyone,—to realize the changes during the last century.

There is nothing to be gained in speculating about the future. Perhaps we have reached the peak of change, perhaps we must stop and get our breath, and appraise the value of all we have gathered, retaining that which is good and discarding what is not. In our great material advance we have neglected the things of the mind. We have had great business men, great inventors,—many of them,—but only a few outstanding men in literature and art within the last twenty years. But the Victorian age, which came after 1828, produced men of letters all over the world, and I feel that there has been not only great change in our religious outlook, but change for the better, during this century, only it has been expressed in a different way. Our forefathers came into this bare church and were satisfied with it, not because they could not have it different, but because they did not want it different. Their children gradually made changes,—many of which would have seemed unfortunate, to put it mildly, to their ancestors. An organ was installed, later a pipe organ, the chancel was made and furnished—a great and radical change. You know the changes that we have made recently. Now we have a church more beautiful than it has ever been. Our preachers no longer remind us of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, nor of the wrath of God, but they remind us often of the love of God and of our love for Him—our Father with whom we have never quarreled. We have a much more Christ-like idea of God than did our ancestors of 100 years ago. We build beautiful and costly churches, expecting them to last for thousands of years, as an expression of our unshaken faith in God and the permanence of his church. We build our lives for life everlasting with

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God, without a tremor of fear. We have learned a great deal about the Bible which we did not know 100 years ago, and which men were not then ready to accept. This new knowledge has opened to us a Book which had become closed. The Bible was regarded almost as a fetish. The Book of Common Prayer, "that despised relic of a superstitious age," has become an appreciated road for worship adopted by very many other churches, and, I often think, appreciated by them more than by us who have the honor of preserving it. But the greatest advance we have made during this last century is that we are no longer afraid of the truth. Darwin taught us that. We have begun to realize that the office of the Holy Ghost is to lead us into all truth, and to follow, unafraid, where He leads, though it be by strange and frightening roads. We know, as we have ever known, that the Faith is delivered once and for all, but we also know that the Holy Ghost, in bringing all things to our remembrance, is teaching us to discern between gold and dross.—During this century the church has steadily advanced in the knowledge of God. From time to time it has adopted new methods of worship, thought, and practice; it has discarded some out-grown customs, but has carefully retained many ancient customs which are found beneficial. The Church has slowly gained a consciousness, a comprehension and a true and holy tolerance of others' ways of thinking and acting: the word "catholic" has taken a larger meaning in the minds of each of us, not only connecting us with the past as by a cable that cannot be broken, but gathering into one, the people of many minds.

We have inherited from our forefathers a magnificent

century God the Holy Ghost has been marvellously active and He has produced a religious outlook wonderful in its comprehension of the nature of God as interpreted in the life of Christ. Being in the midst of it we may not see it, but men today are lifting their faces to God as never before, not in fear or dread, but in love and admiration. May the children of men march on led by the spirit of Christ.

An Historical Address by Charles A. Hall, Senior Warden

August 24, 1928

St. John's Episcopal Society was formed June 15, 1820. In the year 1820 the town of Ashfield had 1748 inhabitants. The population had already begun to decline. In 1810 there had been 1809 people here, which is the largest number in the town's history. About this time, according to the Reverend Thomas Shepard's history, the town had "four houses for religious worship, two hundred and fifty dwelling houses, three taverns, five stores, one academy, thirteen schoolhouses, two grist mills, nine saw mills, three clothiers' shops, and three carding machines. It also had two turning machines for turning broom handles, five blacksmith shops, and two tanneries". One lawyer, Elijah Paine, Esq., lived here for many years and died here. Sometimes there were two lawyers and there were two trial justices, Ephraim Williams, Esq.; and Philip Phillips, Esq., held the office for many years. The stores sold rum without let or hindrance. Capt. Selah Norton, who kept a store in Sam Sandy's house advertised in the Hampshire Gazette "Old Jamaica Spirits, New England rum, French brandy ect.," and John Williams who kept a store and tavern in the Ranney block had a plenty more. I have an old account book of his which has 17 charges for rum on one page. He got \$1.67 to \$1.83 a gallon for rum and for gin \$1.08 a gallon, 1½ pint wine 20 cents, one glass of sling 6 cents, 1 mug of sling 20 cents, 1 glass of bitters 17

cents, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of spirits 20 cents. Cotton Mather, who worked around the tavern, had a special drink called a "blue devil" which cost 8 cents; one blue devil in the morning, little one, 6 cents, one demi-devil, 4 cents, but 1 double devil sweetened cost 10 cents. I have a lot of papers which belonged to one of the trial justices and the effect of all this drinking is seen in a great many cases of assault and battery. One old chaisemaker who, like his son and grandson, was a notable drunkard was arrested and fined many times for assault and often had other people arrested for assaulting him, but I do not find that anyone was fined just for being drunk unless he got into a fight. The people had endless law suits, mostly to collect small bills, sometimes suing for as small an amount as \$1.25. In one case where a blacksmith was trying to collect a bill, the constable attached a barrel of soft soap when he served the writ.

Some of the law suits were supposed to be in the interest of morality and religion. In 1821 a Mr. Avery of Conway complained to Esq. Paine that a Mr. Flagg of Conway, "laborer, on the 21st day of January, 1821, the same being Sabbath or the Lord's Day between the sun rising and the sun setting of the same day, with force of arms, at Conway in the County aforesaid, being a traveller, did travel and drive his horse, with a sleigh, on the highway leading through the said town of Conway, the same travelling being not from necessity or charity, an evil example to all others in like case offending against the form of the statutes in such case made and provided and against the peace and dignity of said Common-wealth." Esq. Paine had the man brought before Ephraim Williams

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Esq., who found him guilty and fined him four dollars and costs, in all \$7.79. The lot of a Sunday joy rider in 1821 was not a pleasant one.

"On complaint of Samuel Bement, tything man, Elliot Gray of Ashfield in the County aforesaid, yeoman, on the fifth day of May, the same being the Lord's day, within the walls of a house of public worship of God, did behave with force and arms, rudely and indecently, and other enormities then and there the said Elliot did, against the peace and dignity of this Commonwealth and the statute in such cases made and provided." Elliot repeated his offense on May 19 and on June 2. He was found guilty and fined ten shillings and sheriff's fees of \$1.44 in addition, which was good enough for him. This offense seems to have been quite common, as many people were fined for "uttering one prophane oath" for which they generally had to pay one dollar and costs.

When the plantation of Hunts Town, as Ashfield was then called, was granted to Capt. Ephraim Hunt and his company of soldiers, who served in the Canada Expedition in 1690, one of the duties which the Great General Court of the Province of Massachusetts Bay laid upon the proprietors was that they should build a meeting house and settle and support a learned Orthodox clergyman. For this all the proprietors had to pay. The Baptists, coming first, formed the first society in July, 1761—but as time passed, the majority of the new settlers coming in were Congregationalists and after a bitter fight their society came into power. All the church business was done in the proprietors' meetings and the Baptists were compelled to help build the Congregational meeting house and sup-

port the Congregational minister. This was a burden laid on all the proprietors by the original grant, but the Baptists naturally did not like to be "taxed to support a minister and a church which we are not of", as one of their old documents says. Under the leadership of Chileab Smith, a very able and determined man of the most persistent courage, the Baptists fought vigorously against this tax, but for a long time they fought a losing fight. The old Baptist records say under the date February 1763; "The people of another persuasion settled a minister in town and obliged the Baptists to pay their proportion of his settlement and salary till 1768. Then the church sent Chileab Smith to the General Court at Boston with a petition for help but got none."

"In April 1770 the other society sold 400 acres of the Baptist lands for the supporting of their minister and meeting house."

"Under our oppression we sent eight times to the General Court at Boston for help but got none—" At last Chileab Smith managed by the help of influential English Baptists to bring their case before King George the Third and on July 31, 1771, the Privy Council advised the King to disallow the Ashfield Act, which had been passed by the legislature and took away from the Ashfield Baptists some slight benefits which had been granted to Baptists and Quakers in other plantations. This case of the Ashfield Baptists is a very famous one in the fight for religious liberty in this Commonwealth and reports of it are printed at great length in the old Province Laws, which are reprinted by the State and given to every town. After this any man who could show a certificate that he belonged

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to another church did not have to pay to support the Congregational church, but if he did not have such a certificate he was still taxed to support it. This is a copy of such a certificate: "To whom it may concern: This may certify that Joseph Wright of Ashfield is a member of the Methodist Episcopal Society in Buckland.

ELIPHAZ WOODWARD	}	Com. of Buckland
LEVI SPRAGUE		

Buckland, Sept. 8th, 1832"

When Simeon Phillips, one of the first members of St. John's Church refused to pay his tax for the support of the Congregational Church and his goods were sold at public auction to pay the tax, he turned over to the sheriff his Bible and his shirt and they were sold.

After the town was incorporated on June 21, 1765, the proprietors and the citizens of the town together ran the church business. The act of incorporation says that "said inhabitants and proprietors of said town proceed by the same rules in laying and collecting said taxes as proprietors in new plantations are obliged by law to observe". So all the people in town meeting had their say about church affairs, which was right for they paid the bills, but they were not always harmonious as the following extracts from Mr. F. G. Howe's history of Ashfield will show. "It seems that it was originally contemplated to put the first Congregational meeting house on the North end of lot No. 47, first division, which is south of where Claude Church now lives, but in May, 1743 it was voted that when built it should be on the southern end of lot No. 1. This

was on Bellows Hill, east of Harry Eldridge's. Then on April 4, 1744, "voted that as there is great expectation of a war with France ye building of a meeting house be suspended at present. Nine years after, November 12, 1753, voted to raise 50 pounds to build a meeting house under charge of the former com. Nothing more was done until May 20, 1761, eight years, when it was voted that the committee chosen to expend the money for building the meeting house and to pitch a place where to set it still be the committee for the same."

On December 9 of the same year they voted that they "will, as soon as convenience will admit, proceed to build a meeting house and a committee of five was chosen to carry on the affair to the best advantage of the proprietors and complete the same so far as to set it up and cover it, glass it, and lay the floor. The dimensions of the house to be 35 feet in length and 45 feet in breadth. Also voted that the former place of setting the meeting house be revoked and that the meeting house that is to be set up in Hunts Town be set up on the 13th lot on the north end as near the highway as convenience will admit." This was a few rods south of the former location. On October 27, 1762, the proprietors voted that the dimensions of the meeting house be 48 feet in length and 36 feet in breadth. In 1764, June 22, "voted to raise 20 pounds for roads, if needed, the remainder for materials for meeting house."

On December 11, 1765, a town meeting was held at the inn of Joseph Mitchell on the east side of Bellows Hill. This is where the first town meeting was held and marks the entrance into church affairs of the town of Ashfield. Before this all the business had been done by the proprie-

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tors of Hunts Town. At this meeting it was "voted to raise 60 pounds in order to go forward with building a meeting house next spring and set it up as soon as it conveniently can be".

July 13, 1766, "voted not to revoke the vote to set the meeting house on the northerly end of lot No. 13, and not to choose a new committee". During the summer of 1767 the frame of the house was set up on Bellows Hill, but there was evidently opposition to the location. New settlers were already locating in the village and to the south and west, and the town on August 10, 1767, "voted not to concur with the proprietors' vote to cover the meeting house where it stands". November 4, 1767, a town meeting at Joseph Mitchell's Tavern adjourned till "8 o'clock tomorrow morning at the house of Samuel Lillie"—near the Plain Cemetery—at which they adjourned back again to the inn of Joseph Mitchell, where it was voted that "the proprietors and many of the inhabitants being apprehensive it does not stand in a suitable place to accommodate the town". It was voted that they will "move the meeting house frame to ye northerly end of lot no. 18, first division, viz., about 40 rods from ye north end thereof, where we have this day set up stakes in front of ye house fronting ye road that leads to Captain Fuller's".

On November 12, 1767, an article "to see if the town will choose a committee and impower them to put a stop to these proceedings in pulling down the meeting house frame till further order of the town" was beaten and after more than 28 years of discussion and dissension the first Congregational meeting house was set up and covered and glassed and floored in what is now the Plain Cemetery,

the front of the building being near the burial lot of Mrs. Henry C. Hall. It was first used for religious services January 1771. It was used until 1814, when the present town hall was finished. This house stood in the cemetery on the hill about opposite Mrs. May Vincent's house. This meeting house was located by taking a map of Ashfield and drawing circles on it till the exact center of the town was found. This is in Walter Shaw's gravel bank and as that was not a good place to set a meeting house, it was put in the nearest good place, which was opposite Mrs. Vincent's.

On February 28, 1812, a committee of 16 men was chosen to draw a plan of the meeting house, appraise the pews and report at a future meeting. They were also to superintend the building of the house. It will interest us to know that of these 16 men, four—Captain Bethuel Lilly, Levi Cook, Esq., Joseph Hall, and Simeon Phillips—were soon to be active members of the new Episcopal Society of St. John's Church. The new meeting house was finished in the summer of 1814. The Reverend Nehemiah Porter and the Reverend Alvin Sanderson,—for whom Sanderson Academy is named, as he was its founder and first benefactor—were the Congregational ministers at the time, Mr. Sanderson being Mr. Porter's assistant. Mr. Porter died February 28, 1820, being 99 years and 11 months old. Mr. Sanderson was in feeble health, having weak lungs. When the town hall was built it was one high room with a gallery on three sides and with a high cone-shaped fluted pulpit at the west end, with a beautiful and curious window back of it. Reverend Mr. Shepard in his history of Ashfield says of Mr. Sanderson that "the burden of the duties

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he took upon himself impaired his health and the fatal blow was struck by an attempt to fill with his voice the illy-constructed house of worship recently erected by his congregation. The effort to be heard in its high pulpit and from beneath its elevated ceiling produced a hemorrhage of the lungs and brought on a gradual decline. In the meridian of his life his sun went down. The academy which bears his name was originated and endowed in his earnest desire to do all in his power to improve the minds and hearts of the rising generation in learning and piety. He fell asleep in Jesus June 22, 1817, in the 37th year of his age". In 1840 the meeting house was divided into two rooms—upper and lower. In 1815 the combined town and society called the Reverend Sylvester Woodbridge to be its minister, but the council convened to settle him found such a determined opposition that they decided not to do so. Much feeling was aroused, two parties were formed and a second attempt was made to settle him with the same result. The deacons and a former pastor who still remained in town opposed vehemently. The council said they found no fault either with his morals or doctrine but they did not settle him. After Mr. Sanderson's resignation there was no Congregational minister for three years. This quarrel gave an opportunity for the formation of our church. It was the first of many furious ones which rent the Congregational society for many years after the second meeting house was built, and which were not healed till the meeting house was sold to the town for a town hall.

This is a good place to say that I have never found in any of the old records, nor have I heard anyone say that there was ever any ill feeling between the Congregation-

alists and Episcopalians. I think they have always been on very good terms.

On the 15th of June, 1820, 14 of the men of Ashfield put their names to a declaration to the effect that being attached to the doctrines, discipline and worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church and in exercise of their constitutional privileges, which secure to every person the right of worshipping God according to the dictates of his own conscience, they formed themselves into a society by the name of "The Parish of St. John's Church in The Town of Ashfield". I will say here that our official title is "The Corporation of the Protestant Episcopal Parish of St. John's Church in Ashfield".

Of the names attached to this document the first is that of Jesse Edson who was the first senior warden and who has been justly termed the father of the parish. He was a churchman before he came to Ashfield. He was called a Tory at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, and when the eight Tories were shut up in Captain Samuel Bartlett's house, which was near Lee Bronson's red spring house in the Belding mowing "the confinement of Jesse Edson was suspended for the present on account of sickness in his family, he giving up his firearms and ammunition". After Jesse Edson follow the names of Bethuel Lilly, Joseph Hall, Lemuel and Simeon Phillips, who were successively wardens during the next twenty or thirty years and the name of Jonathan Lilly who for twenty-five years was parish clerk. Simeon Phillips preceded him as first parish clerk. The other names are David Williams, James Phillips, Howard Edson, Albinus Lilly, Bethuel Lilly, Jr., Philip M. Phillips, Austin Lilly, and Chipman

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Lilly. As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, the course of those who did not wish to be taxed to support the Congregational church was to join some religious society already established. Early in 1820, therefore, these men, who afterwards organized the parish, united themselves with St. James' parish, Greenfield, under Reverend Dr. Titus Strong, who was then the rector there. Our town records contain copies of the separate certificates of each of these men signed by the clerk of the Greenfield parish.

In June of the same year this parish of St. John's was organized and after this date we find the certificates of others who united with the newly formed parish. Among those are the familiar names of Levi Cook, Levi Cook, Jr., Seth Hall, Captain Lot Hall, Joel Lilly, Joseph Hall, Jr., Nathan Howes, and Captain Kimball Howes. The first sign I have seen of any one pulling away from the Congregational Society is an old deed dated July 12, 1817, by which Captain Kimball Howes deeded to "Eliakim Lilly his heirs and assigns forever, a pew in the Congregational meeting house, being number three, south of the pulpit, on the wall, bid off by me at the vendue, one half said pew". The price paid was \$44. Later Captain Kimball Howes joined our church. The descendants or relatives of Jesse Edson, Simeon Phillips, Levi Cook, Joseph Hall, Jonathan Lilly, David Williams, Nathan Howes, and Kimball Howes are still supporters of this parish and attendants at this church. Joseph Hall, David Williams, and Kimball Howes were each of them great-great-grandfather to Addison and Richard Hall. Mrs. Ella Guilford is a descendant of Jesse Edson, Hamilton Howes, George Cook, and Edith

Owen Field of Levi Cook and Alvah Phillips, and Gertrude Pollen of Simeon Phillips.

The parish was organized June 15, 1820. The meeting was held at the house of Austin Lilly, which is the house now owned by Willis M. Turner, near the cemetery on the hill. Simeon Phillips was chosen clerk of the parish, Jesse Edson senior warden, Lemuel Phillips, junior warden, Bethuel Lilly, Simeon Phillips, and Joseph Hall, vestry men, and committee to give certificates. Descendants or relatives of all these men are now members of this parish. Reverend Titus Strong was chosen for the time being rector of the society and was present aiding and assisting in the organization of the same. Titus Strong was the rector of St. James' Church, Greenfield, and was a very able man. He was a great help to the new parish. Mr. Huntington says: "Dr. Strong for the first ten years was the virtual and for some years the actual rector of the parish, giving by express agreement one third of his time to it. His memory should always be cherished here and the example of his piety, his zeal, and his untiring devotion be copied by us". He was for 41 years the rector at Greenfield, his only parish. He was a Free-Mason. Titus Strong started Morning Sun lodge of Masons in Ashfield in 1826. It was given up about a year later at the time of the Morgan excitement. Later the Conway lodge of the same name was established under the old charter. The Titus Strong Commandery at Greenfield was named for him. His picture which hangs in the porch was given to this church by his daughter, Mrs. Jane Bird.

"On July 2, 1821, Bishop Griswold visited this parish and held services in the old Town Hall, which was in John

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Williams' tavern, now the "Ranney block". Nineteen persons were confirmed. Among these were Lemuel and Simeon Phillips, Levi Cook, Howard Edson, Joseph Hall, and his son Joseph, and their wives. At a meeting held at the Steady-Lane schoolhouse September 2, 1823, the vestry was unanimously instructed to wait upon the Reverend Lott Jones and inform him of the wish of the Society for him "to supply them with preaching for twelve Sabbaths". I do not know where Lott Jones came from. He was a very young man when he was here. I have heard that he afterwards had a church in New York City. I have a small book called "A Short and Plain Introduction to a Better Understanding of the Lord's Supper" in which is written "From L. Jones to his esteemed friend Mrs. N. Cook". It was printed in 1822. Mrs. Nancy Cook was the second wife of Levi Cook, Esq.

"November 13, 1823, agreeable to notice, the Protestant Episcopal Society met at the school house when the Reverend Lott Jones was called to the chair to preside over said meeting. On motion it was voted unanimously to take measures for the building of a church. On second motion it was resolved to submit the location of said church to a committee of three from sister churches. The following gentlemen were accordingly chosen, viz. Captain Cornish of Lanesborough; the Senior Warden, Guilford, Vermont; David Willard, Esq., Greenfield, to be requested to meet in this place on the 9th of December next". Bethuel Lilly, Simeon Phillips, and Andrew Butler were chosen a committee to visit every member in the society for them to signify in writing the place where they wish the church to be built, which is to be presented to the locating committee.

"Agreeable to notice the committee to whom was referred the spot on which to erect a church, met at the house of John Williams on Thursday the eleventh of December and after viewing the several places and hearing the arguments on both sides made the following report: 'Ashfield, December 11th, 1823. The subscribers, a committee appointed to fix upon a suitable place for erecting a church in said town, met at the house of J. Williams on the 11th day of December and having viewed the several places shown to us by the committee of said parish and heard the statements and arguments made by them in favor of particular places for locating said church, have concluded that it would most conduce to the interest of the parish, all circumstances being considered, that the same be located on the Plain, so called, on a lot owned by Levi Cook, Esq., the particular spot being designated by a stake.

DAVID HYDE
DAVID WILLARD' "

Captain Cornish of Lanesborough evidently did not come.

At an adjourned meeting at the school house December 21 it was voted to accept the report; in favor of accepting, six against five. It appears that the people who voted against accepting wanted to build on the hill near the meeting house. This was the only church on the plain for 35 years after it was built. Levi Cook gave just enough land for the church to stand on. Moses Cook gave the land on which the chancel was later built and four feet west of it, and a good many years later Mrs. George Wm. Curtis gave us a strip of land four feet wide between her

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land and the south side of the original church lot. So this lot was given to us at three different times and by three different persons. Levi Cook's deed provided that if the church was ever closed for three years continuously the land should revert to his heirs. When George Huntington was our rector he had Frederick L. Greene, Esq., look up all the titles to the church property very carefully and I have the original deed from Levi Cook on which Titus Strong's signature appears; the deed from Moses Cook and the deed from Mrs. Curtis, also the deed to the rectory property—which the society bought July 7th, 1852, of Thomas Miller for eight hundred and fifty dollars—Miller bought it of Iadok Putney. He also deeded us a right to pump water from a well on the place across the street now owned by Clarence B. Guilford. Later Moses Cook deeded us the right to take water for the rectory from a spring in his pasture. Other people also have rights in this spring. Mr. Cook later sold this pasture to Charles Eliot Norton.

While Mr. Huntington was rector, \$1224.30 was spent in remodelling and repairing the rectory. In 1896 the title to the church and the rectory property was vested in the Trustees of Donations of the old Diocese. When the Diocese was divided they transferred it to the Trustees of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts. Several years later Miss Elizabeth B. Colles, who had rented the rectory for a term of years, made extensive repairs on the buildings.

At this same meeting where the location of the church lot was accepted, Lott Jones, Bethuel Lilly and Levi Cook were chosen a committee to petition the Legislature for an

act of incorporation and it was voted to hire the Reverend Lott Jones for one year. Even before the deed for the land was made, they began to cut the timber for the frame of the church which came from a lot owned by Joseph Hall in the Bear Swamp. He cut the first tree almost down and Lott Jones struck the few last blows which made it fall. My grandfather, Seth Hall, told me that all the people helped and that he worked a long time drawing the timbers for the frame and helping to hew them. Levi Cook, who was the first postmaster in Ashfield and was also a county commissioner, was chosen by the parish to visit New York to solicit funds to help build the church and he raised a large part of the money spent in building it. He also visited Lanesborough. Simeon Phillips went to Greenfield and Guilford, Vermont, while Captain Israel Williams went to Boston, Rhode Island, and New York on the same errand. The Ashfield people gave freely of lumber and work. Jonathan Lilly, the parish clerk, was the master carpenter.

There were many delays in building the church. April 19, 1824: "It was voted to request the Bishop to lay the corner stone of the church", but for some unknown reason it was not laid until the next year for April 4th, 1825, they "voted to request Mr. Withington to deliver an address at the laying of the corner stone of St. John's Church". On May 7th, 1827, Austin Lilly, Bethuel Lilly, and Joseph Hall, Jr., were appointed to assess the estates and polls of the parish for the purpose of raising \$100, and on June 25th a plan for finishing the inside of the church was presented by J. Lilly, Jr., and accepted. It was also voted to proceed to the finishing of the house and that it be set up

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at vendue to the lowest bidder. "Resolved that one half be paid when the house is completed and the other half in one year. Bid by Jno. Lilly, Jr., at one hundred and eighty-four dollars accepted. Committee for accepting the work, Simeon Phillips and Samuel P. Fuller. St. John's Church completed and first met in the same for worship December 23rd, 1827."

"At a meeting of the parish holden at St. John's Church on Monday, the 27th of April, 1829, it was resolved to raise the sum of \$200 to pay the remaining expense of building, by an average on the polls and estates of the members and that the vestry make out the average"—so the church was paid for soon after it was finished. Mr. Huntington's history says "If we would picture the church as it appeared and the services as they were conducted we must imagine this building with the west wall perfectly straight without the present chancel, fitted with high-back pews which could be securely closed with doors".

Directly in front of the congregation where the chancel arch now is was the pulpit raised much higher than at present. Above this was the tablet of the creed commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Below and strange to say in front of the pulpit was the altar with no cloth and a painted wooden top. Directly to the left of this stood the prayer desk. To the right stood afterwards the chancel chair, the gift of the Reverend Silas Blaisdale who also gave the marble altar top. Mr. Blaisdale's two young children are buried under the church porch. Reverend Thomas Brinton Flower and his little daughter Mary are buried in front of the chancel, also his son Frisbie. This altar is now used as the credence table. The clergyman

officiated in his everyday dress excepting when the Bishop came and then even he wore not the surplice but a black gown.

I cannot find out where the tablet with the commandments came from, nor the triangular window in the chancel, though I believe that St. James' Parish, Greenfield, gave it to us, as they had torn down their old church before our chancel was built and the seal of St. James' parish is the same as this window. The chancel was built while the Reverend Charles Cleveland was rector about 1855. The money for the chancel was largely raised and given by the Reverend Samuel Haskins, brother-in-law of Mr. Cleveland.

The tablet with the Commandments was put in the back of the chancel and a very small space behind it was used as a robing room. The present organ was bought about 1860 at a cost of \$800. The money was raised in the parish, Moses Cook and George G. Hall, uncle of our present vestry man, giving largely. It was put in the loft behind the gallery where the first organ had stood. The choir sat in the gallery and we turned and faced them when they sang. Later the pews where the organ and pulpit now stand were taken out. They ran at right angles to the others, and the organ was moved down. A new robing room was made in the opposite corner. The next great change was when Mrs. Henry A. Field gave the beautiful memorial window in memory of her mother, Mrs. Anne Combe Owen, who was a descendant of Levi Cook, Esq. This window is our special joy and pride. This was in 1921. In 1923 Miss Jean M. Wylie gave us a very generous gift in memory of Miss Elizabeth B. Colles which

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made it possible to renew the plastering on the sides of the church, paint them, and also the interior wood work. Other generous gifts from Miss Helen Trotter and Mrs. George G. Hall enabled us to buy carpets and to paint the outside of the church. Our summer friends have been very generous to us and we appreciate the help they have given us, without which the church could not have gone on.

I want to put in writing the names of the givers of some of the things in the church for fear that without it they may sometime be forgotten. The altar was given by St. Stephen's Church, Pittsfield; the two chairs with high backs in the chancel by Mrs. Henry C. Hall. Mr. Loyall Farragut had them refinished and put in fine condition. Mrs. Farragut gave the font. She said that the old font which was broken "looked like a hitching post". She also gave the furnace. The prayer desk and lectern are the gifts of W. B. de Las Casas of Malden. I believe the present pulpit is the one first used in the church.

The two banners were given by Miss Helen Trotter, one in memory of Florence Trotter Dixon, and the other in memory of Carol Murray. The chandelier was given by Mr. Chester Sanderson, a Congregationalist who later became a member of this parish, who at first put it in the Congregational church but afterwards told our people to go up and get it and put it in our church, which Moses Cook and Allen Phillips did. The book racks in the pews were made by Mr. Chester Flower after he was 80 years old. He married Lucretia, daughter of Levi Cook. They came back to Ashfield in their old age and died here. The bell was bought by the "Young Helpers", a society of

young people formed by Reverend George P. Huntington when he was rector here. By hard work they earned the money, about \$350. It was bought and hung in 1887, Joshua Hall, A. G. Hall, and A. D. Flower being appointed to buy the bell and hang it. The silver communion chalice was given by Mrs. Fannie F. Brega, of Chicago, Illinois, in memory of her husband, Charles Wilson Brega. The cruets of the communion set and the paten were given by Miss Adele T. Low; the cross on the altar by Charles Wilder in memory of his mother. Miss Trotter gave the brass vases on the altar in memory of Miss Sally Norton, who was a good friend of this parish, and Mrs. Francis W. Murray the candlesticks in memory of her daughter, Carol.

The prayer book rest was given by the Guild in memory of Mrs. Rebecca T. Flower; the prayer book itself by Bishop Davies. The alms basins were given by Mrs. Hamilton Howes. Mrs. Florence Sheldon Parsons gave the altar cloth and also the alms box in the porch. Mrs. Amy Guilford gave the two fine chairs for the pulpit and prayer desk, Miss Jean Wylie the pewter bowl in the font and flagon. Mrs. George Huntington gave the pair of silver vases and Mr. Farragut the pair of tall glass ones. The prayer book and hymnal for the reading desk were given by Miss Grace Clarkson of Philadelphia in memory of her mother.

Reverend Joseph A. Ticknor worked for many days with his own hands in enlarging the cellar and putting the foundations and furnaces in good shape, which was a labor of love on his part. The tablet in memory of the Reverend Lewis Greene was set up by the congregation,

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while Mr. Huntington was here; the one in memory of Elizabeth B. Colles by Miss Jean Wylie, and the Mosaic cross in memory of Frances W. Hall was made and given by Miss Mary G. Stone and Miss Julia P. Wickham. The electric lights were given by the Guild. The Henry Taylor Fund was started by a gift of \$200 by Mr. Henry Taylor, a Congregationalist who lived in town all his life and in his will left money to several Ashfield institutions. It now amounts to a little over \$500.

About 1835, this church like all others in this vicinity began to lose members who moved to the West. Bethuel Lilly was the first to go. He was elected Senior Warden for the last time in 1835. I think he went to Ohio as several of the Lillys did. He lived in a house at New Boston, east of the farm now owned by Fred Lilly, at the top of the hill near the Dodge Brook. He was a brother of Jonathan, Jr., who built the church. Their father Jonathan, a soldier in the French and Indian Wars, lived up the hill above Miss Low's house in what is now Allison Howe's pasture. He made fun of the prayer book, which was not well thought of by the Congregationalist, who did not like written prayers. He said that "Thuel made paltry work of praying when the candle went out". Another man whose daughter joined our church said "he thought the prayer book was a mighty slim thing". Jonathan Lilly, the carpenter, lived just above the Sullivan house at Little Switzerland and Joseph Hall, Jr., at the lower Sullivan house; Simeon Phillips, where Harry Stroheker lives, in the hollow between the state road and the old road to Shelburne Falls, north of Charles Richmond's. His son Simeon was for many years Senior Warden at Greenfield.

Austin Lilly, in whose house this parish was organized, went to Ohio some time between 1840 and 1845. At that time the doctrine called Millerism had something of a hold here and several people, expecting the end of the world to come at once, had Ascension robes made. There was a good deal of discussion about the proper cut and style of these garments which were later made over into something more useful. Two little boys of Austin Lilly's who heard all this talk said they did not care if the world did come to an end for they were going to "The Hio" in less than two weeks. The Lillys were a great loss to the parish, for they were strong churchmen; but they helped to build new churches in the west. The church has always been small but it has lived for more than one hundred years and I cannot think that the original members of the parish, as they look down upon it, are sorry that they started it.

I will bring this paper to an end by copying the words which Jonathan Lilly wrote in the parish clerk's book when the first service was held in the church Dec. 23, 1827. They are as follows: "On the opening of this church for the worship of Almighty God, for the first time, many were the sensations that rushed upon the mind when reflecting upon the few individuals which commenced so great an undertaking, the limitations of their means and the difficulties and opposition they had to encounter, and now to see it completed—they could not but exclaim, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' Long may it stand. May peace ever be within its walls and plenteousness within her palaces. May it ever hold fast in uninterrupted integrity the faith which was once delivered to the saints, and for ages yet to come, may faithful and devout Chris-

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tians, Churchmen of the school of the Apostles, looking back with grateful joy on the noble works done for them by the God of their fathers, confess and say with fervent adoration and gratitude. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us' ”.

This booklet is a reproduction of *One Hundred Years at Saint John's Church Ashfield, Massachusetts 1828-1928*, originally printed by E. A. Hall & CO. Greenfield, Mass. 1932.

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