

**Highlights of some of the talks presented sponsored by the Adult Ed Board
presented at a Summer Sermon at the Greenfield Hill Congregational Church
early service 9/8/24:**

Mike Moore- Introduction/Overview

Good morning, I'm Michael Moore, Chair of the Adult Education Board. As we currently define the mission of our board: we find speakers, host movie discussions, and plan field trips on topics we feel are of interest to our congregation. Historic events and people from this area have been a particular focus over the past several years, but current events like the war in Ukraine and modern China are also topics we have addressed.

Our church has a rich history and our goal is to make it more fully known and better understood. There are twelve links on the Adult Ed Web page of the Church website to recordings of talks given at GHCC in the past three years reviewing elements of the 300 years of *Congregationalism* in Fairfield, in Connecticut and in America. You will find a list of those speakers and talks that we have sponsored in today's program. Today we will share highlights from some of the topics our board has covered related to our 300 year history and our plans for the coming anniversary year.

The formation of the parish of Greenfield Hill was approved by the legislature of the colony of Connecticut in October, 1725. Our review today covers a little less than half of our 300 year history, we end with the Civil War period. Over the coming year we plan to offer talks on the years following the Civil War to the present.

"Pat McCullough as well as the members of our board sitting here before you--all listed in the bulletin--will be speaking today. To start us off, Pat will present some highlights of the Founding of Fairfield."

1. Pat McCullough- The Founding of Fairfield

The beginnings of Fairfield began under a dark cloud. Less than 17 years after the landing of The Mayflower, Lt. Governor Roger Ludlow accompanied the Connecticut Militia to present day Southport. 500 members of the Pequot tribe had survived an earlier massacre in Mystic and fled to Southport. Roger Ludlow had been a key planner of the initial battle, but not present in Mystic.

On a warm July morning in 1637, they concluded the massacre of the Pequot Nation in the Swamp of Southport. In perhaps the largest Genocide in world history, over 80% of the Pequot Nation was killed. After the battle, Ludlow admired the surrounding

countryside, and returned to Hartford and petitioned for a land grant for the lands of the area.

Granted in 1639, Ludlow purchased the lands of the Unquowa and Fairfield was founded. Initially encompassing all of Fairfield, Westport, Bridgeport, Easton, Weston, and Redding, early settlement was confined to 5 roads near the present day Town Hall. As the leader of Fairfield, Roger Ludlow had a combative tenure with both Hartford and local residents. After only 12 years, Ludlow left Fairfield and never returned.

As Connecticut was a church state, all founding residents of Fairfield were Congregationalists. First Congregational Church was erected on its present site in 1637, and served as church, school, and community meeting house. The current church, erected in 1892, is the sixth church built on the site. As Fairfield grew and expanded, First Congregational spawned 9 new congregations, including Greenfield Hill in 1725.

2. Mike Moore - Connecticut's Standing Order

The Pilgrims landed in the Plymouth area of Massachusetts in 1620. As Separatists they were persecuted by the church of England, initially fled to Holland and then sought freedom to practice their faith in America. In 1630 the migration of Puritans began to pour into Massachusetts in the Salem-Boston area; ten thousand would come over a 10 year period. They too were seeking religious freedom. They had remained in England because they remained Anglicans who wanted to purify that church from within. Queen Elizabeth tolerated them in England for a time but had begun to persecute them because they presented a challenge to her religious authority as head of the church.

The Congregational Way of Boston was very strict. Only property owning male church members could vote for governors and magistrates who held the power of government. Church membership was based on an individual explaining their salvation by God through Christ in a manner acceptable to the church's pastor and elders. One in ten residents of Boston were church members, although all the people were required by law to attend church. The pool of voters was very restricted. Pilgrims in Plymouth had similar guidelines but applied them more liberally.

Rev Thomas Hooker was pastor of a Puritan church in Newtown (now Cambridge, MA) and his congregation was uncomfortable with the strict Boston faith. In 1636 he took 100 of his congregation to the wilderness of Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor, Connecticut to establish new faith communities. Hooker felt that all men of property should have the right to vote with no respect to religion. Roger Ludlow, the only trained lawyer in the Connecticut group, was asked to write a Constitution establishing the power of government for them. The Fundamental Orders of 1639 through eleven

statutes and a preamble established the terms and responsibilities of Governor, magistrates, deputies and freemen that would define government in Connecticut for 169 years (till 1818). It made no mention of the King of England and established Connecticut's colonial authority free of Massachusetts making it the first self-governing colony in the new world. The Preamble established the confederation as being under the guidance of God and, thereby, that Congregationalism was the state church.

In 1662 Connecticut asked King Charles II for a charter, which he granted. Together with the Fundamental Orders these two documents provided Connecticut a stable government, independent of Massachusetts and England that earned it the nickname, "the land of steady habits".

The famous theologian, Jonathan Edwards, was a champion of the Fundamental Orders (1740) as was his grandson, Timothy Dwight, fourth pastor of Greenfield Hill Church. Dwight was an uncompromising advocate who died in 1817, one year before the Fundamental Orders were ended by a new Connecticut constitution that declared separation of church and state, 29 years after the US Bill of Rights had made such a separation Federal law.

3. Sandy Timermann - Putting History into Context

History does tend to be His-story – those white males who held almost all of the power in Europe and the new America. Their wealth, conquests, discoveries, and wars fill the pages of the early history that they wrote.

Our board wanted to put this history into a larger context and bring out the voices that are often forgotten--- the native people who lived here for 12,000 years before our immigrant ancestors arrived. The African slaves who were captured and brought here. And not to be forgotten, the other HALF of the human population – the WOMEN who came to America to help build a new life.

We invited three historians to be part of our lecture series so we could better understand the circumstances and role of the indigenous people, enslaved persons, and women. You'll hear some highlights today from other board membersand the presentations are on the church website, Women were truly the unsung heroes as they held their families together and contributed to their fledgling communities and to the success of the new nation. They were also an integral part of the survival, mission and work of our church, and this continues to the present day.

In fact, did you know that Dr. Alida Ward is our first woman minister ---and the longest serving pastor of our church.?

While women played a positive role in CT history, it seems that the darker moments were often the ones that made the headlines back in Revolutionary times. The most notable were the New England Witch Trials.

Did you know that there were three Witch trials in Fairfield? Fairfield had a “dunking pond” on the village green to determine if a woman (always a woman) was a witch—and you can still see the footprint of the pond on the Village Green. Pat tells me that there was also a dunking pond on Warner Hill.

What did people look for to determine who was a witch? Women were tried for witchcraft if their behavior was unusual or they were involved in land disputes. One man behind it was Puritan clergyman Cotton Mather who believed that New England was on a godly mission, and deviant or defiant behavior was the antithesis of that mission. The witchcraft trials were most unjust, because the defendants were denied basic rights such as legal representation or the ability to confront or subpoena witnesses.

How did they determine guilt? The women were dunked into the pond. If they floated, they were determined to be a witch. If they sank, they were not a witch. Men used poles to push the suspected witches under the water. Goody Knapp was convicted and went to the Gallows. Mary Staples was accused but escaped that fate—her husband was influential. The third trial of two women did not lead to convictions. The witch trials were discontinued after that. They were one of the reasons that Roger Ludlowe, who was magistrate at the time and one of the instigators, left CT and eventually returned to Europe.

Fortunately, this is only one small piece of women’s history in our state. I’ll turn the mic over to Justine Hawley for a more complete story.

4. Justine Hawley - Dr Katherine Hermes

Dr. Katherine Hermes’s talk is titled “The Dual Empire: Women’s Private and Public Spheres in Connecticut.” As a professor who has spent years doing research on Hartford’s Ancient Burying Ground, she provided some interesting facts about Connecticut women. English colonial women had limited political and economic rights, but they participated in both the private sphere (“hearth and home”) and the public one (political, economic, and ecclesiastical areas). In addition to their private roles, colonial goodwives could become full members in the Congregational Church—which required both baptism and entering communion in order to own the covenant. As church members, they presented their servants (whether white, African, or Native) for baptism. They also made and sold household goods, as well as such crops as onions. Upon becoming a widow, a woman received one-third of her husband’s estate, with the rest being divided among their children.

Most African women in colonial Connecticut were enslaved persons with no rights or property and often victims of extreme cruelty. However, there were exceptions. Ruth Moore, who was a free woman of color, and her husband, Philip, lived like white colonists of the times by becoming members of the Congregational Church and by keeping livestock on land that they owned. They both left wills, and Ruth's 1696 one is the oldest probated estate in Connecticut.

Native peoples' division of labor differed from that of English and African women. Native women built houses, farmed land, tanned hides, made clothing, and cooked food, while the men were hunters, political and military leaders, and medicine men.

Sarah Onepenny the Elder, a Native American, was a prominent woman in the Middletown area. After a war between the colonists and the Indigenous peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands, she was imprisoned. In 1676 she was freed after agreeing to live like an English colonist and to become a servant in the household of Englishman William Whiting. She raised his daughter and two sons. Connecticut women's participation in private spheres led to their increased involvement outside the home: first, as contributors to the 19th century United Workers' and Women's Exchange and, later, as workers in the 20th century Colt factory in Hartford and as welders in the Landers, Fray, and Clark factory in New Britain. They also participated in the abolition, temperance, anti-capital punishment, and other movements.

In Fairfield, both Margaret Rudkin, who founded Pepperidge Farm in 1937, and Ruth Bigelow, who started Bigelow Tea Company in 1945, are examples of Connecticut women with leadership roles in the workplace. Cindi Bigelow, Ruth's granddaughter, is the current CEO of the latter company.

5. Julie Johnson - Native Americans and Congregationalism

As Pat mentioned, the indigenous population, particularly the Pequot Indians were very much a part of our history. So we were fortunate to host Paul Wegner, the Assistant Executive Director from the Institute of Native American Studies, who presented a compelling and sobering lecture on the relationship between Native Americans and Congregationalism in April.

The story begins as early as the 1500's when the French, Dutch and Spanish explorers were in this area, many of whom were wiped out through smallpox and bubonic plague that Europeans brought to North America. The English arrived on the scene in the 1600's when

the Pequots were the most powerful tribe in Ct. When the treaties were violated by the British, the Pequot War of 1637 erupted; at first in the area of Saybrook, Ct, but ending in a swamp in Southport. The Pequot War represented one of the turning points in the history of all of North America because it changed forever the balance of power between the English and indigenous people. (You can visit this battle location which is a memorial site in Southport. Opened in July of 2024, Southport Park is located next to the Equinox Health Club in Southport)

After the Pequot War, the English claimed land rights and the “Christianization” of the Indians began. Becoming a Christian meant “being civilized” - living and dressing like the Puritans. One of the first initiatives, which was crafted to “save the souls” of the Native Americans was called Praying Towns which was created in 1640 by John Elliot, an English pastor from Massachusetts Bay Colony. From the 1700’s until the 1960’s the US Government ran Boarding Schools for the purpose of erasing tribal. Ties and cultural practices.

It was not until 1978 when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed that the indigenous people were allowed to practice their native religions.

In terms of boarding schools, in July of this year, a report was issued by the Department of Interior investigating the troubled legacy of the Native American Boarding School era. The report includes a formal apology from the US Government and outlines recommendations and actions aimed at supporting a path to healing the Native American people.

DID YOU KNOW

There are five reservations in Ct today. The Golden Hill Reservation is located in Trumbull and was the first reservation established in Ct. It was formerly much larger, but now is the size of a city block.

The land that GHCC is located on is the ancestral grounds of the Paugussetts Indians

There are three Native American Museums in Ct: Institute of American Studies in Washington, Ct and the Mohegan and Pequot Museums near the Casinos.

6. Pat McCullough- Greenfield Hill Congregational Church and the Revolutionary War

Fairfield's first encounter with British troops in the Revolutionary War did not happen in 1779, with the burning of Fairfield, but two years earlier, in 1777 in Greenfield Hill.

On a rainy afternoon in April 1777, 1800 British troops landed at Compo Beach. They marched North and East across Cross Highway, Near midnight, they encamped at Cross highway and Redding Rd., a mere mile from GHCC. The imposing 7 story steeple just to the south, would have greeted them in the morning light.

They marched north on Redding Rd toward Danbury. They passed multiple farms of Greenfield Hill members on Redding Rd, and in lower Easton. These farms were spared burning as the owners proclaimed loyalty to the crown, and in some cases, provided food and water to the troops.

After burning Danbury, there was great concern the British would return via Redding Rd, and sack Fairfield and the Greenfield Hill Church. Instead, the British retreated through Ridgefield, sparing Fairfield.

In 1778, militia sentries were posted in the steeple of Greenfield Hill Church to watch British movements. At 7 stories, the steeple provided an unobstructed view of Long Island, as well as the Ct. coast from New Haven to Greenwich.

On the morning of July 7th, 1779, the British fleet arrived under the cover of dense fog. First sighted by the fort at Black Rock, then the sentries of Greenfield Hill, the town of Fairfield was alerted to imminent danger.

Town residents fled north to Greenfield Hill, Easton and Weston.

General Tryon's first goal of capturing the fort in Black Rock was thwarted when the bridge across Ash Creek was destroyed. Incensed, he ordered Fairfield to be burned, sparing only Loyalist homes and churches.

His orders were ignored by the Hessian mercenaries, who burned everything they encountered.

Bereft of trees, Greenfield Hill residents watched in horror as flames engulfed downtown Fairfield the night of July 7th, punctuated by violent thunderstorms on the coast.

The church bundled up their valuables, including 2 silver tankards, and hid them in a well down Bronson Road. As there were few farms on Bronson Road, it is likely the well was located on the corner of Verna Hill, and still stands today.

The fear in Greenfield Hill was enormous. They suspected the British would return to Danbury, and knew the British would use the landmark steeple as a guide north. Further, they knew the British had seen the steeple from Long Island and they knew of its military importance.

Fortunately, the British remained on the coast, burning Southport and Westport before retreating to Long Island.

There are many important people with connections to GHCC and the Revolutionary War; 2 were Founding Fathers.

Interim Minister Lyman Hall became Colonial Governor of Georgia and signed the Declaration of Independence.

Interim minister Abraham Baldwin left GHCC and became a US Senator from Georgia. He signed the Constitution.

Our cemetery is noted for holding the remains of more Revolutionary Veterans than any other in America. Michael Moore cited the recent book which documents the service of all 98 soldiers. Recently, the DAR has announced it has found 4 more veterans buried in the cemetery.

7. Fred Schaefer- African Americans, Slavery and the Civil War

Did you know that Connecticut was once known as “The Georgia of the North”?

Dr. Matthew Warschauer told us this in his presentation on Connecticut and the Civil War which enthralled the audience. The video of that can be found in the Adult Ed portion of the Church website.

The derisive saying “Georgia of the North” was coined by William Lloyd Garrison, the Boston based leader of the Abolition movement. He made this comment in 1830 as Abolitionists took their crusade to CT. Garrison knew his group had a difficult time in the Nutmeg state. His assessment was correct.

This is contrary to the image many of us likely have. We are more likely to think of Connecticut as an anti-slavery state, a bulwark for the Union during the Civil War, a major source for troops, munitions and other supplies needed by the Union. This is accurate but it's only part of the picture.

We were a strongly divided state on issues of slavery and race.

- We were **not typical** of other New England states on slavery. We had more slaves than other states in the region, by a notable margin. **In CT the**

population of enslaved people was not large, approximately 2%, and certainly not on the scale of Southern states such as Virginia where over 39% of the population was enslaved.

- On several occasions between 1789 and 1865 there were statewide resolutions to abolish slavery and/or extend the vote to men of color. In every instance the anti-slavery or pro-suffrage measures were overwhelmingly defeated, typically by a measure of 3 to 1.
- As a sad footnote, the last slaves in the state were freed in 1848 at which point there were only 17 enslaved people **in CT**.
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Despite our divided sentiments, Connecticut was critical to the Union war effort supplying troops, weapons, munitions and materials needed to keep the Union Army in the field. But make no mistake – there was strong sentiment against the war and against people of color.

And finally, how did our Congregational forebears respond to the needs of the time? At the end of the war, they went South to help the former slaves to deal with their new status. Through the American Missionary Society, they headed south to help the freed slaves. Their work centered largely on education. There was a high level of illiteracy amongst the formerly enslaved population as it had been illegal to teach a slave to read. So the initial focus was on elementary reading and writing. Eventually their efforts expanded beyond elementary schooling to homemaking, agriculture and industrial arts. Predictably, these efforts were opposed by the Ku Klux Klan and others. Despite that the missionaries stayed at their tasks and it is worth noting that two-thirds of these teachers were women.

8. Mike Moore - Closing thoughts and Coming Events

On January 26 of 2025 our board has invited Dr Scott Libson, the Special Collections librarian at Yale Divinity School, to talk on his Phd dissertation, “Faith and Money: The Mission Movement, Fundraising and American Philanthropy, 1860-1930”. We expect that it will cover how Congregationalism after the Civil War began to fragment into groups that supported a Social Gospel and groups that supported a Gospel of Wealth. Dr Libson’s paper draws a contrast between social gospel leader, Rev. William Gladden and industrialist, John D. Rockefeller.

We have not yet scheduled a second talk on prominent themes in Congregationalism that are emerging in the Twenty First century.

We now are open to questions which anyone might have.

Questions and Discussion: