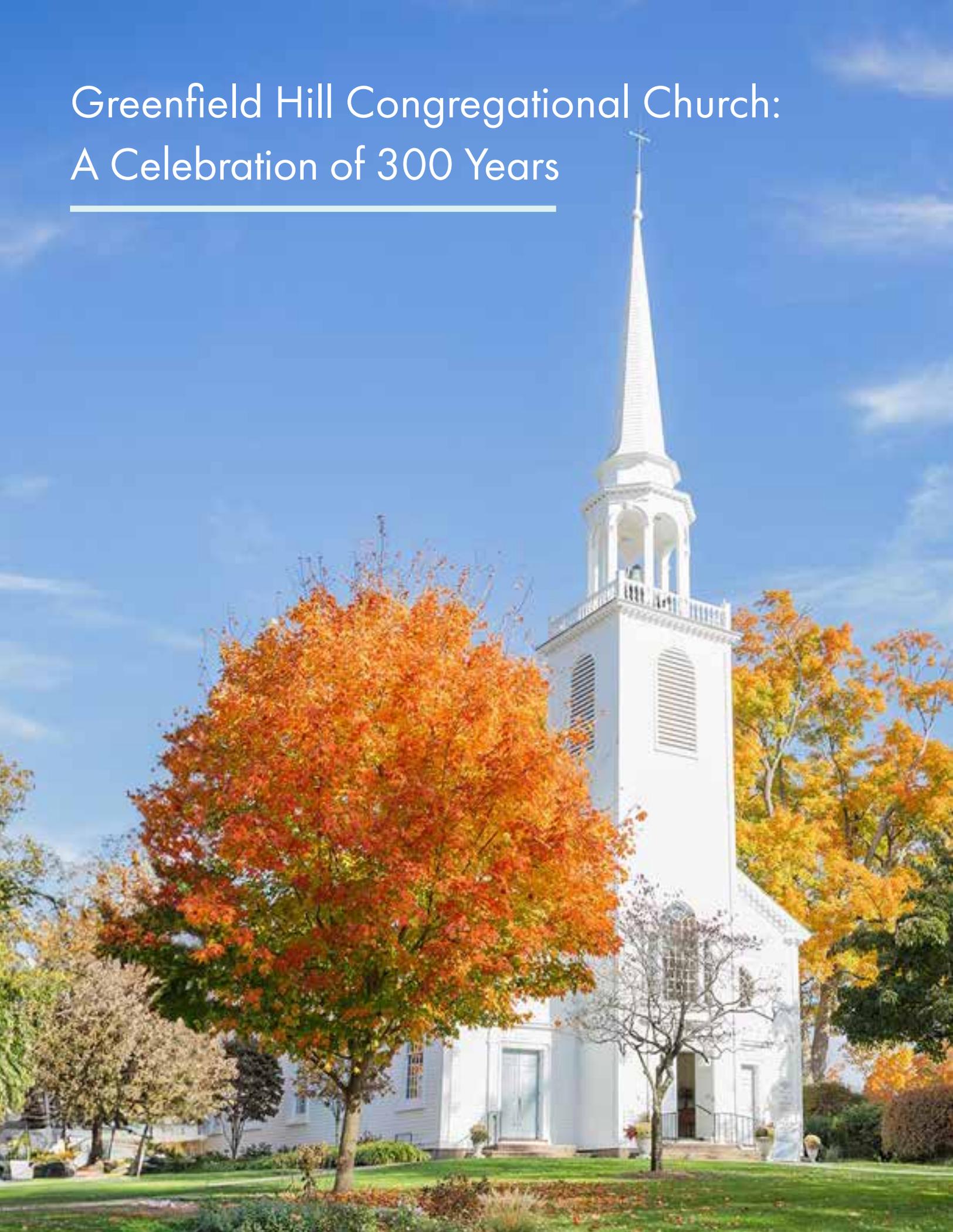


Greenfield Hill Congregational Church: A Celebration of 300 Years



What is Congregationalism?

Congregationalism emerged in the 16th century as a movement seeking to reform the Church of England. Many people were dissatisfied with the Church of England's continued adherence to the Catholic practices and structures. The Puritans, who sought to "purify" the Church of England, played a key role in the development of Congregationalism.

Congregationalists, then and now, believe in the independence of each local church, free from external control or hierarchy. They believed in the right of the congregation to administer its own affairs, select its own leaders, and allow each member of the congregation a say in the governance of the church. This self-governance and independence are key tenets that distinguished Congregationalists from other Protestant denominations.

Congregationalism has been woven into the fabric of America from the beginning. In fact, a Puritan group, then referred to as Separatists, brought the Congregational tradition to America, establishing the First Parish Church in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620. Thanks to the Puritans, Congregationalism became a dominant religious force in New England. In early America, churches were the center of every aspect of life, so Congregational churches played an integral role in the daily social, educational, and political life of Colonial America and, later, the United States. Other denominations, such as Unitarian, Methodist, and Baptist, evolved, some making more of a clean break from the Catholic Church than others, but Congregationalism led the way in social reform.



South View of the Congregational Church, Windsor, CT, 1836 by John Warner Barber

Credit: Archive.org

The Congregational Church in Windsor, CT was established in 1635 and is the oldest Congregational church in the state. It was founded by English settlers that were part of the Great Migration from England in 1630.

Congregational churches have always been known for their diversity of thought and practice with a very strong emphasis on social justice. Today, while the principle of local church autonomy and self-governance by its members remains a defining characteristic of Congregationalism, many Congregational churches, including GHCC, are now affiliated with the United Church of Christ (UCC).



Public worship at Plymouth, Massachusetts, by the Pilgrims

Credit: Public Worship at Plymouth by the Pilgrims by Albert Bobbett

The Founding of Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

Every Sunday, families living in the Greenfield Hill area of Fairfield made a two to six mile journey through muddy fields and crude roads to attend the Congregational church in town. In May 1725, a group of 55 families petitioned the government of the Connecticut Colony in Hartford for permission to establish a new church. The petition, signed by Deacon Thomas Hill and 69 other men, was denied as the First Church of Fairfield was reluctant to let these valued families break off and form their own church. A second petition made in October of 1725 was finally granted, thus creating the new Northwest Parish.

As part of the agreement, the new parishioners were responsible for:

1. Holding and instructing in the services of worship
2. Collecting taxes
3. Establishing a school
4. Training the militia in which every man aged 16-60 had to serve
5. Holding open town meetings

In the fall of 1725, Rev. John Goodsell, a 19-year-old graduate of Yale College, was hired. On May 18, 1726, Rev. Goodsell was officially ordained; 11 men signed a covenant, and two men were installed as Deacons to establish a church community. Soon after, 15 women were added as members, and by the end of the first year, the group numbered 70.

The Church's 11 Founding Fathers



"Greenfield Hill, Fairfield, Conn. Greenfield Hill Church records, 1668-1878," Congregational Library & Archives

The Church's 11 founding fathers were:

- John Goodsell
- Cornelius Hull
- Obadiah Gilburd
- John Hide
- George Hull
- Jehu Burr
- Stephen Burr
- Ebenezer Hull
- Peter Burr
- Daniel Bradley
- Theophilus Hull

The Church's first deacons were:

- Moses Dimon
- Samuel Wakeman

Owning of the Covenant

A covenant is a promise. For over 300 years, the congregation of GHCC has embraced new members by promising to walk and serve the Lord together on life's journey. Harkening back to the earliest days of America, when church was the cornerstone of American life, we recognize that we are stronger in faith collectively – as a congregation – and depend on the prayerful support of the congregation through all of life's ups and downs. Put simply, we covenant with each other and with God; it is a "reciprocal" pledge.



The original covenant written and signed by our founding fathers in 1726:

We, underwritten, through the strength of Christ, without whom we can do nothing, covenant and promise, and in the presence of God and this Assembly, do covenant and promise to deny ungodliness and worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world; solemnly avouching also the Lord Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, to be our Prophet and Teacher, our only Priest and Propitiation, our supreme Lord and lawgiver, professing ourselves heartily engaged to a sole dependence on his doctrine, to an entire reliance on his righteousness, to a willing obedience to his government, solemnly avouching also the Holy Ghost for our Sanctifier and Comforter, to be led by his conduct, to cherish and entertain his holy motions and influences, subjecting ourselves to the government of Christ in his church, and solemnly engaging to walk one with another in brotherly love, watchfulness and communion, and hereunto may Christ Jesus our lord help us. Amen

"Greenfield Hill, Fairfield, Conn. Greenfield Hill Church records, 1668-1878," Congregational Library & Archives

The Early Church

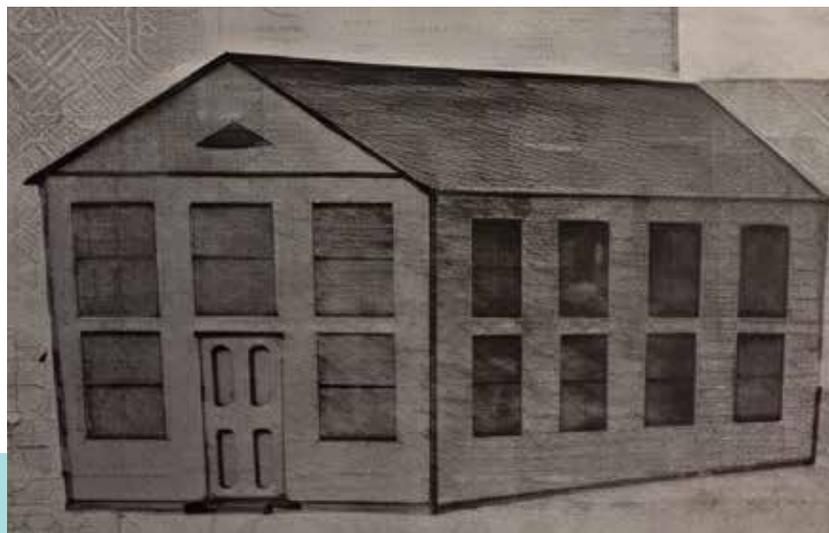
In 1726, Northwest Parish consisted of a primitive meeting house. In 1727, the name of the Northwest Parish was changed to "Greenfield" – a combination of "Greens Farms" and "Fairfield." The members of the new church needed a place to meet for worship and, importantly, a place for schooling. So, in 1730, the first meeting house was built, echoing early Congregationalist values.

At 18 x 20 feet it was roughly the size of a one-car garage!



Greenfield Hill School - In 1726, Rev. John Goodsell was ordained in the Greenfield Hill School. The school was used as a meeting house and all Sabbath Day services and parish meetings were conducted there.

It was a simple building, reflecting the practical and unadorned style typical of early New England churches. This modest structure served as the center of religious and social life for the early settlers. It was used for Sunday worship, town meetings, and other community gatherings. Members had to build their own pews, laid out according to what people paid. Men and older boys sat on the right, while women and children sat on the left. With no church bell, a drummer from the local militia would sound the call to worship. The "Tythingman" was responsible for keeping order. He inspected everyone's behavior and corrected any inattention with a severe tap on the offender's hand. There were often two sermons. The first sermon might have lasted two hours but was shortened in the winter due to the cold.



The First Church, Meeting House - 1730

The Early Ministers

Rev. John Goodsell (1726-1756)

Rev. John Goodsell would minister to the congregation for 31 years. His starting salary was 100 pounds a year plus firewood. As a result of Rev. Goodsell's declining health, Lyman Hall served as interim minister. It is believed that GHCC was one of the first churches to hire assistance for its ministers during their ailing years.

Rev. Seth Pomeroy (1757-1770)

Rev. Seth Pomeroy followed as the second pastor and served from 1757 to 1770. Rev. Pomeroy married the wealthy daughter of Connecticut Governor Law and built the first mansion on Greenfield Hill. At three stories, it surpassed the height of the meeting house. Partly as a result, Rev. Pomeroy oversaw the building of the second church with its towering steeple. He succumbed to yellow fever at age 37.



Pomeroy-Belden House: Greenfield Hill's first grand house, located on Bronson Road, was built in 1760 by Rev. Seth Pomeroy

Rev. William Tennent (1772-1781)

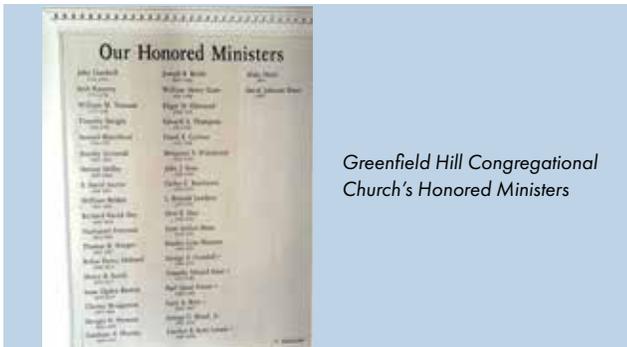
Rev. William Tennent became the third pastor in 1772 and led the church through turbulent times leading up to and through part of the Revolutionary War. The congregation showed its appreciation by gifting him thirty pounds, increasing his salary, and supplying him with extra wood.

Interim Ministers (1781-1783)

The Church then experienced a brief stint of interim ministers, including Rev. Abraham Baldwin. Rev. Baldwin would become a Founding Father who signed the United States Constitution.

Rev. Timothy Dwight (1783-1795)

In 1783, the Church finally hired its fourth minister, Timothy Dwight, who would become the Church's most famous pastor.



Greenfield Hill Congregational Church's Honored Ministers



Lyman Hall later became a signer of the Declaration of Independence as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress from Georgia.

Credit: New York Public Library Digital Collection



Rev. Abraham Baldwin would become a Founding Father who signed the United States Constitution, served as a US Senator from Georgia, and founded the University of Georgia.

Credit: New York Public Library Digital Collection



Rev. Timothy Dwight would become the Church's most famous pastor.

Credit: Yale University Manuscripts & Archives Digital Images Database

The Old Burying Ground on Bronson Road

GHCC has a special connection to the Old Burying Ground on Bronson Road. The Church's first two ministers, Rev. John Goodsell and Rev. Seth Pomeroy, are buried there, as well as Dr. Isaac Bronson, a contemporary who planted the first dogwoods in Greenfield Hill. Also interred is Rev. Nathaniel Freeman, who has a tall monument marking his family plot. Rev. Carlos Rowlinson and his wife, who passed in 1935 and 1936, respectively, are the cemetery's last burials. A team of volunteers from the Greenfield Hill Village Improvement Society and GHCC have taken on the restoration of the Old Burying Ground headstones over the course of many years.



Reverend Nathaniel Freeman (1778-1854)

Tragically, Rev. Freeman lost his wife and seven of his eleven children to tuberculosis over a two-year period. The tall monument marks the Freeman family plot.



Reverend Carlos Rowlinson (1865-1935)
Mrs. Alvina Rowlinson (1866-1936)
Greenfield Cemetery's last two burials



Reverend John Goodsell (1706-1763)

Famed Pastor

Timothy Dwight was born in Massachusetts on May 17, 1752. He was the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, the renowned theologian and leader of The Great Awakening, America's first spiritual revival. A precocious child, Dwight reportedly was reading the Bible at the age of four and entered Yale at the age of 13. After graduation in 1769, he taught grammar school, was licensed to preach in 1777, and served as an Army Chaplain in the Revolutionary War, where he became friends with General Washington.

Rev. Dwight was a man of many exceptional talents. He was one of the first American hymn writers and introduced singing into church services. His most famous hymn was "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord." He was also a poet and published "The Conquest of Canaan," which is believed to be the first epic poem produced in America. His best-known poem, aptly titled "Greenfield Hill," was inspired by his walks around the bell tower of the Church. Greenfield Hill, according to accounts of the time, "became a place of learning, of talents, of refinement and of piety."

Highly interested in education, Rev. Dwight started a school that gained international renown as Greenfield Hill Academy. The Academy was innovative and known as an experiment in education. Its strong reputation began to rival Yale's.

Rev. Dwight served as pastor at GHCC for 12 years, from 1783 to 1795. By the end of his tenure on Greenfield Hill, the Church had grown to approximately 200, including famous names known in Fairfield such as Banks, Bradley, Burr, Hill, Hull, Ogden, Sherwood, Wakeman, and Wheeler.



Reverend Timothy Dwight

Credit: Timothy Dwight by John Trumbull, 1817, Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

During his 22-year tenure as President of Yale, Dwight introduced the sciences and led significant educational reforms, emphasizing moral philosophy, the classics, and public service. Under his leadership, Yale became a hub for civic education. Many of his students went on to found and lead universities across the country.

I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord
*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth. Psa. 26:8
 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning... if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. 137:5-6*

1. I love Thy king - dom, Lord, The place of Thine a - bode,
 2. I love Thy church, O God, Her walls be - fore Thee stand,
 3. For her my tears shall fall; For her my prayers as - cend;
 4. Be - yond my high - est joy I prize her hear'n - ly ways,
 5. Sure as Thy truth shall last, To Zi - on shall be giv'n

The church our blest Re - deem - er saved With His own pre - cious blood,
 Dear as the ap - ple of His eye, And grav - es on Thy hand,
 To her my cares and toils be giv'n, Till toils and cares shall end,
 Her sweet com - man - ion, sol - emn vows, Her hymns of love and praise,
 The bright - est glo - ries earth can yield, And bright - er bliss of Heav'n.

In the mid-1800s, the words of Rev. Dwight's hymn, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord" were altered, and the hymn was renamed "I Love Your Church, O God." Both variants still exist and are in use. The Chalice Hymnal, used today by GHCC, likely chose to go with the latter as it is gender-neutral.

"Greenfield Hill. Part II. The Flourishing Village."
 "Greenfield Hill: A Poem, in Seven Parts" is a poem by Timothy Dwight, published in 1794. The poem is a pastoral work that describes the country's history, scenery, and social conditions. It also includes a vivid description of the burning of Fairfield by the British in 1779.



"Fair Vernal! loveliest village of the west; Of every joy and charm, possessed; How pleased amid thy varied walks I rove, Sweet cheerful walks of innocence and love, And o'er thy smiling prospects cast my eyes, And see the seats of peace and pleasure rise, And hear the voice of Industry resound, And mark the smile of Competence, around. Hail, happy village!"

The Congregation and the Revolution

Greenfield Hill and the Church played important roles in the Revolutionary War. Many church members and residents were active in the war effort. Connecticut's 4th Militia Regiment was predominantly made up of fathers, sons, brothers, and cousins from Greenfield Hill who served throughout the eight-year war.

The Church's 4th minister, Timothy Dwight, also held a significant role. Prior to serving as Minister, Rev. Dwight was an Army Chaplain and friend to George Washington. His fiery sermons often expounded on the virtues of the Americans' cause.

In April 1777, 1800 British troops landed at Compo Beach and encamped almost in the shadow of the Church at Cross Highway and Redding Road on their way to Danbury.

Militia sentries were often posted in the steeple of the Church. It is from its belfry walk in 1778 that Major Benjamin Tallmadge, an intelligence officer for General Washington, is believed to have watched British troop ship movements on Long Island Sound. In his journals, Tallmadge said he was stationed in "Greenfield" for an extended period, from where he could watch ship movements and "easily cross to Long Island."

On July 7th, 1779, the British fleet arrived again. First sighted at the fort at Black Rock and then also by the sentries of Greenfield Hill, the town of Fairfield was warned of imminent danger of another British raid. As the residents of Greenfield Hill watched the Town of Fairfield burn, Rev. Tennent hurried to a well on Bronson Road to hide the Church's valuables, including two precious silver communion tankards.



Major Benjamin Tallmadge was a key figure in the American Revolution, serving as an intelligence officer, notably overseeing the Culper Spy Ring that provided George Washington with information on British activities.

Credit: New York Public Library Digital Collection



The Burning of Fairfield by British Troops on July 7, 1779

Credit: Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

The Old Burying Ground on Bronson Road

The Old Burying Ground on Bronson Road contains the graves of a reported 103 Revolutionary War veterans, more than any other cemetery in the country. Most were part of Connecticut's 4th Militia Regiment, made up of many men from Greenfield Hill.



In Memory of the men who fought in the Revolutionary War



The Old Burying Ground was originally used as an American Indian burial ground. By custom, these indigenous people buried their dead at a depth of six feet, so there was room closer to the surface for the new white settlers and parishioners of Greenfield Hill. It is now the final resting place for nearly 1,000 of Fairfield's earliest residents.

GHCC GROWS!

By 1760, with a thriving membership of 1400, the congregation decided to build a new, expansive building, including the Church's first steeple. This seven-story structure, completed in 1762, was used as a land reference visible from Long Island Sound. Befitting the congregation's desire to be a "beacon on a hill," a hilltop location was selected where the current church now stands.



The Second Church - 1762 to 1848

Between 1840 and 1855, two churches were built in quick succession. The first was a Gothic-style building whose new furnace, funded by the Ladies Sewing Society of Greenfield, also led to its fiery demise. Its replacement was essentially the building now known as Greenfield Hill Congregational Church.



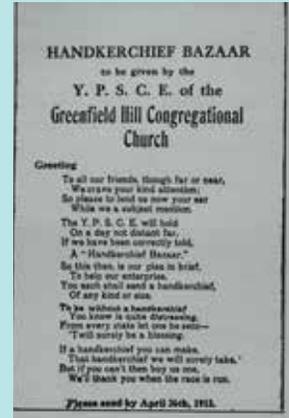
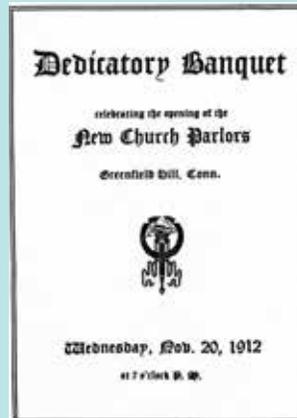
The Third Church - 1848 to 1853



The Fourth Church - 1854
This is the steeple which was destroyed in the hurricane of 1944

In 1874, the first Parsonage was built for Rev. H. B. Smith and his family of ten children for \$3,575. The original home was a Victorian farmhouse, while a later renovation added a Greek Revival facade.

In 1912, Fairfield sold the church a small piece of land 50 x 40 feet that would be used for the present-day parlor. Selling price: \$10. The funds were raised by the Ladies Society with a Handkerchief Bazaar selling donated items, including a handkerchief from Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, bringing in \$1.75.



In 1946, renowned architect and resident Cameron Clark was hired to redesign the steeple and exterior of the Church after the hurricane of 1944. A successful auction raised the money for this project through donations of rationed food items and "household treasures."



“... and Grows!”

The purchase of the Milbank House (for \$6,186) at 3237 Bronson Road allowed GHCC to grow exponentially. The farmhouse became the present-day Church House, the home to church school and one of the first weekday nursery schools.



In 1967, the Church purchased 3192 Bronson Road for use as the Parsonage, still used as the ministers' residence today.

In 1968, the addition of the Memorial Wing provided the Memorial Room, including a stage and kitchen, plus a new area for education and programming, while space on the ground floor gave the Nursery School its own dedicated space.

GHCC Expands with Future Generations in Mind

One of GHCC's most significant updates occurred in 1984 when the former Milbank Stables was converted to a welcoming space for the church's three wildly popular youth groups and community activities.

“

“The body of the church and the people who hold it are absolutely beautiful. I wanted it to look historical and modern at the same time. It's the gift that keeps on giving. It was an honor of a lifetime.”

- Dawn Lauf, Interior Designer
Church Renovation



The New Millennium

With the new Millennium came major improvements to the Church House, providing bright, larger classrooms for the popular nursery school and Sunday school programs while creating a welcoming environment for Vacation Bible School, church events, and the Dogwood Festival. To honor GHCC's 300th Anniversary, the church sanctuary and Len Morgan Youth Barn received significant renovations, ushering in a new era for the congregation.

GHCC's Lasting Educational Legacy

From its origins as a humble one-room church meeting house and school established in 1725, the Church became the local center for worship and education. Over time, GHCC grew into an influential religious and intellectual hub with close ties to Yale University from its earliest years.

Greenfield Hill Academy – A Trailblazer in Modern Education

Rev. Timothy Dwight, GHCC's fourth minister (1783-1795), was trained as a teacher. He started what became known as Greenfield Hill Academy. The school was innovative and known as an experiment in education. It was one of the first to offer higher education to young women. It taught navigation, calculus, Latin, Greek, and theology. It also favored moral suasion over corporal punishment. More than 1,000 people studied under Dwight, coming from all parts of the U.S., Canada, and even Europe. Many students went on to become leaders in the new United States. The Academy developed such a strong reputation that it began to rival Yale. It is believed that Yale may have asked Dwight to become its president rather than compete with the growing prominence of the Academy. In 1795, Dwight left GHCC to become Yale's eighth president.

A very popular man, Dwight's loss was keenly felt in the parish, but his Academy remained until 1887 when it merged into the Town of Fairfield's school district. It was renamed Dwight in 1899 and later moved to its present location on Redding Road in 1963. It now lives on as Timothy Dwight Elementary School, one of the best elementary schools in the state.



The Academy built by Timothy Dwight about 1786



The Academy and Congregational Church circa 1786



Greenfield Hill Academy in 1885

Photograph from *More About the Hill – Greenfield Hill* by Elizabeth Banks MacRury

GHCC as a Pioneer of Sunday School

Rev. William Belden, who served from 1812-1821, is given credit for starting one of the first Protestant Sunday schools in the country and went on to become its first superintendent. To this day, the Sunday School is a vibrant place for children to spend time learning about God, the Bible, and faith in active and dynamic settings across various disciplines of art, music, story time, and even cooking.



Sunday School Picnic in 1897

Photograph from *More About the Hill – Greenfield Hill* by Elizabeth Banks MacRury

Greenfield Hill Church Nursery School: Small Students, Big Impact

Thanks to the vision of Rev. Stanley Lyon Houston, Greenfield Hill Church Nursery School was established in 1954 as a service to the town. While it is one of the first nursery schools in Connecticut established by a church, it is currently non-sectarian. Now in its 70th year, the preschool offers a warm and loving environment where each child's uniqueness and creativity are encouraged.

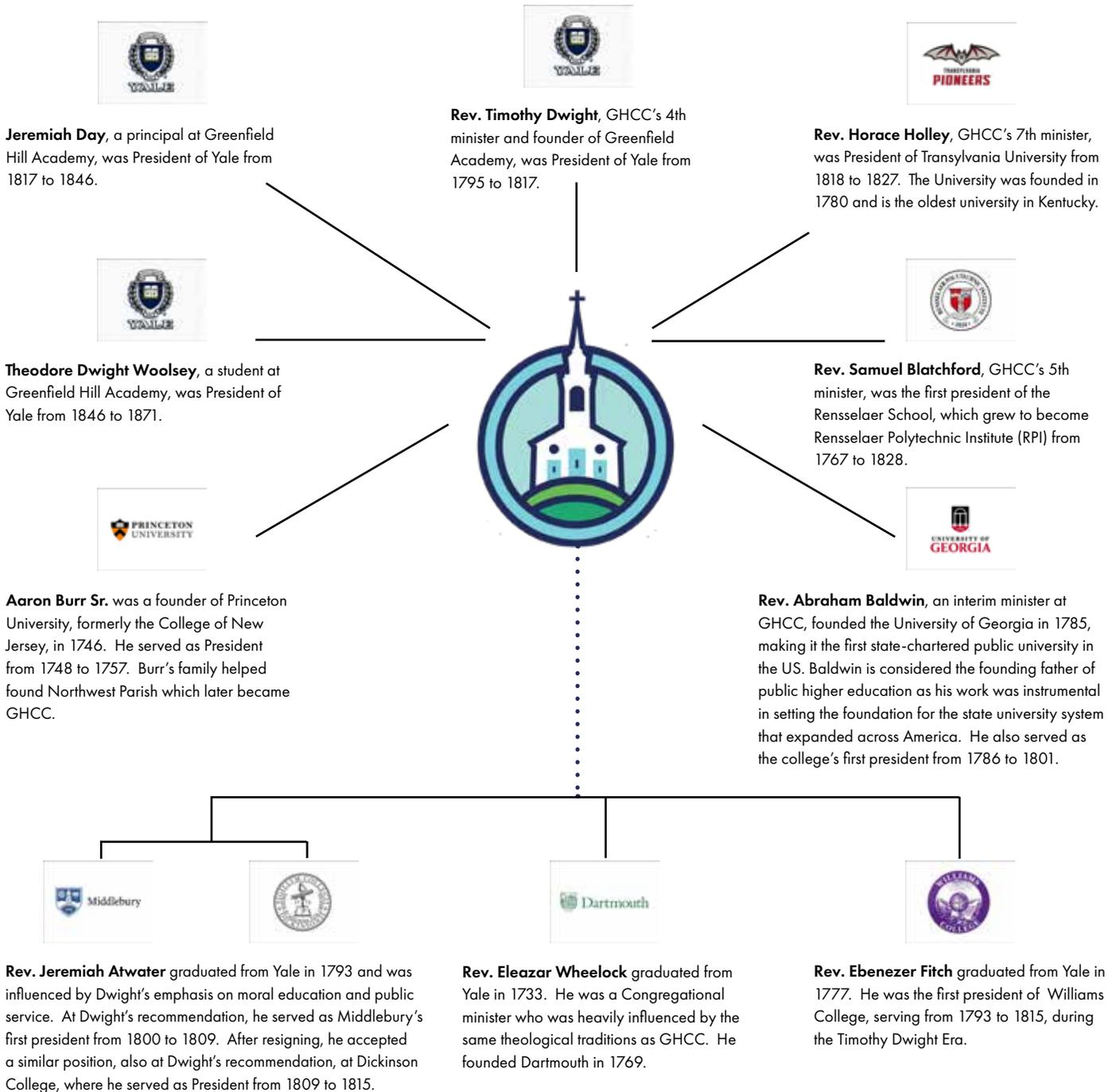


Fun times during a beautiful day at Greenfield Hill Church Nursery School

GHCC's Influence on Higher Education

The legacy of Greenfield Hill Congregational Church lives on in the numerous educational institutions it influenced, reinforcing its role as a key player in early American academic and theological history. Many prestigious academic institutions and their faculty were shaped by Yale-trained ministers who carried forward the Greenfield Hill Academy traditions, many with direct ties to the school on the Hill. Their curriculums were designed to follow the Congregationalist model of education, emphasizing theology, classical studies, moral philosophy, and civic leadership training. Heavy emphasis was also placed on missionary work.

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church was more than a place of worship – it was a center of intellectual and theological training that had a lasting impact on American higher education.



Faith Comes First



GHCC List

- **First Meeting of the New Church (The Northwest Parish of Fairfield)** – November 4, 1725
- **First Membership** – 70 parishioners in 1726; now, it is 1163
- **First Pastoral Salary** – 100 pounds a year, plus firewood!
- **First True Minister** – John Goodsell was ordained on May 18, 1726, aged 19. A graduate of Yale in 1724, he served for 32 years and preached 3,000 sermons. Resigned in 1756 due to ill health; died day after Christmas in 1763.
- **First Meeting House** – Erected in 1727 by Samuel Thorpe and Benjamin Darling. They did such a good job that just a year later, they were voted 5 pounds, 12 shillings more than the original bargain.

*As related in *Ye Church and Parish of Greenfield (1913)* by George H. Merwin: The new meeting-house which was so acceptably framed during the summer of 1727, was not completed at once. The members of the parish were evidently not inclined to tax themselves too heavily during any one year, for we must remember that all parish expenses were met by a tax rate levied at the annual parish meeting precisely the same as we now levy the annual town tax. So each year, for five years or more, the parish voted to raise a rate for Mr. Goodsell's salary, and for the carrying on of the work on the meeting-house. We have conclusive evidence that the new meeting-house was in use at least as early as 1730 for the records of the meeting held October 13 of that year state that "ye school shall be kept in ye old school-house where ye parish used to meet in."*
- **First Financing** – The selling of pews. The owner had to build the pew, and pews were laid out according to what people paid.
- **First Singing** – In 1794, A Singing Master was hired to teach psalms and hymns.
- **First Children's School** – Under Rev. Belfen's tenure (1812-1821)
- **First Heating** – In 1848, the Ladies Sewing Society purchased a furnace. (Sadly, the church burned down 3 years later.) Prior, women would use footstoves while the men just endured the cold.
- **First Electricity** – In 1916, at the urging of church ladies who needed power and light to run their electric sewing machines.
- **First Parsonage** – Built for Rev H. B. Smith in 1874
- **First Dogwoods Planted** – Dr. Isaac Bronson bought Timothy Dwight's home (now Fairfield Country Day School), and in 1895 planted the white Dogwood trees on Greenfield Hill streets. The ones in front of his home are the oldest on the hill. (It is said the Indians named the trees because they used its bark as poultices for dog bites.)
- **First Dogwood Festival** – In 1936, just a few women set up a card table on the lawn at Dogwood time to sell potholders, bean bags, pickles, and aprons to passersby.
- **First Full-Time Female Pastor** – Rev. Alida Ward

Women: The Overlooked Backbone of Congregationalism

While women's roles in history tend to focus on family and household duties, their contributions to Congregationalism were significant. Women were always welcome as members of the Congregational Church. As a result, literacy was highly encouraged to enable women to read the Bible. Many taught Sunday school, participated in Bible study, raised funds for missions, and performed community service. They became involved in social reform, participating in the temperance, abolition, labor reform, and suffrage movements. A minority even became preachers and religious leaders. Today, women account for half of all ordained clergy and over one-third of pastors in the United Church of Christ.

The Ladies Sewing Society of Greenfield

In 1850, the Ladies Sewing Society of Greenfield formed an organization that later became the Ladies Society in 1924 and the Women's Guild in 1946. One qualification for membership was the payment of annual dues; that first year, forty-four women joined, paying 12 1/2 cents each and nine men at 25 cents.

The Society primarily raised funds for mission and church projects. Projects ranged from purchasing items, such as a preacher's desk and chairs, to recarpeting the Church, installing a furnace, repairing streetlamps, and paying for telephone service in the parsonage. In 1916, they paid for half of the cost of the installation of electricity. This enabled them to put their new sewing machines to good use in supplying bandages and hospital garments for WWI soldiers and influenza masks for the epidemic. The Society helped fund larger projects, too, such as building the Church parlor in 1912 and repairing the steeple in 1944. Of most significance, they strengthened the Church's financial health by helping pay down debt and reduce church deficits.

The Ladies Sewing Society is probably best known today for sponsoring one of the country's first dogwood festivals in 1936, of which 100% of net proceeds went toward mission and still do today.

The Society raised funds to upkeep, repair, and beautify the church by selling homemade goods and hosting fellowship activities. They held luncheons and dinners, organized bazaars and festivals, and provided entertainment.



"The Quilting Bee" is a scene from a church pageant. The quilt before them, "The Rising Sun," was made by the ladies of the Church in 1830. It was won in a raffle that year by Adelia Gray. The first woman pictured on the left is Anna Merwin Gray Taylor, who inherited the quilt from her cousin. She later gave the quilt to her granddaughter, Mary Little, as a wedding gift. Mary Little donated "The Rising Sun" to the Church on its 300th anniversary in recognition of the ladies of the Church.

Photograph from: *More About the Hill - Greenfield Hill* by Elizabeth Banks MacRury

Forty-four women joined at 12 1/2 cent and nine men at 25 cents.
Here are a few things under each headed that first year:

Making 1 vest	\$ 75
Making 2 suspenders	50
Making 6 shirts @ 25¢ each	1.50
Making 6 shirts @ 25¢ each	1.50
Making 1 pair pants	.50
Making 1 coat in part	.20
Making 20 button pqs. @ 20¢	4.00
Making boy's coat	.375
Making boy's alpaca coat	.75
Quilting bed quilt	5.00
Cutting 2 dresses	.375
Knitting 1 pair socks	.375
Sold one-half yard muslin	.24
Sold 2 yards turkey red satin	.40
Sold 2 linen jackets	.25
Sold 2 yard muslin	.25
Sold 1 lb. candy	.15
Sold 1 doz. oranges	.31
The following year—1852—expenditures included:	
Furnace	\$205.70
Melodeon	72.00

A list of homemade goods sold by the Society in 1851 to fund the purchase of a furnace and a melodeon.

We have given:

- \$150.00 to Church
- \$100.00 for Missionary work
- \$ 10.00 to Palmer Institute
- \$ 5.00 to Community Chest
- \$ 10.00 for Choir Robes
- \$ 25.00 to Mr. Lundeen — expenses to Council Meeting
- 3 sheets & 1 blanket to Talladega College
- Paid balance of paint bill for Church Parlor
- Sent a missionary barrel to Rush Memorial Church
- Mrs. Wheeler—1 ton coal
- Paid rent for Mrs. Jones

A list of donations made in 1934. The \$150 that was given to the Church was for the purchase of silver and dishes, helping with a new roof on the parlor, and making repairs at the parsonage. The women raised those funds by organizing a bazaar, hosting dinners, card parties, and a minstrel show, and selling food and other items.



Lady Washington Tea Party, 1890: Benefit GHCC held at the home of Simon C. Bradley

Photograph from *More About the Hill - Greenfield Hill* by Elizabeth Bank MacRury



Rev. Antoinette Blackwell

In 1853, Rev. Antoinette Blackwell became the first woman in the United States to be ordained a minister. She served the members of the Congregational Church of South Butler, NY.

Credit: Archive.org



Mrs. Joan McMahon

In 1975, McMahon was elected the first woman Deacon at GHCC.



Rev. Dr. Alida Ward

Rev. Dr. Ward became the first woman minister at GHCC. She began her pastorate in 1989 and is currently GHCC's longest-serving pastor, now in her 36th year.

Greenfield Hill's Dogwood Trees

Greenfield Hill's First Dogwood Trees

In 1798, Dr. Isaac Bronson, a Revolutionary War surgeon, first brought the wild dogwood trees out of the woods and planted them along what is now Bronson Road. A century later, his grandson's wife, Sarah Bronson, created the Greenfield Hill Village Improvement Society, which then imported pink dogwoods from Japan. The Ladies Sewing Society and the Greenfield Hill Village Improvement Society continued the tradition of planting dogwoods until an estimated 30,000 dogwoods now line the streets and the Green of Greenfield Hill.



Dr. Isaac Bronson - First to plant Dogwood trees in Greenfield Hill in 1798

Photograph from Shannon's Auctions, Milford, CT



Sara Bronson - Imported pink dogwoods from Japan to Greenfield Hill in the late 19th century

Dogwood Blossoms Burst into Festivals

Scores of people visit Greenfield Hill each May to view the gorgeous dogwoods in bloom. In 1936, the Ladies Sewing Society, led by Mrs. Reverend Reinald Lundeen, decided to make use of the beautiful attraction and set up a card table in front of the Church to sell homemade aprons, potholders, pickles, and flowers as a fundraising event for the Church's mission work...the birth of the Dogwood Festival!

The trees received national acclaim. Eleanor Roosevelt viewed the dogwoods in 1938 and wrote about her visit in her "My Day" column, saying, there "is an avenue of pink and white dogwood on Greenfield Hill such as I have never seen anywhere in this country." National news outlets, such as Reader's Digest and the New York Times, also covered the Festival. As the crowds grew, so did the Festival's offerings, which now include a crafts fair, children's crafts and games, live music, the Blossom Café, the Blossom Bakery, food trucks, a plant boutique, guided walking history tours, and Blessing of the Animals. All net proceeds go to local, national, and international charities.



May 8-14, 1938 - Miss Amelia Jennings, Miss Marjorie G Banks, and Peggy Jane Lundeen, daughter of Rev. Reinald Lundeen, minister of the Church

Photograph from More About the Hill - Greenfield Hill by Elizabeth Banks MacRury



"Totally a labor of love. Absolutely. It's my way of doing something that matters to the church and the town. I have met so many people that I have been sharing a pew with for years, and didn't know their name, and now they are my close friends, up and down the age spectrum."

- Marike Toothaker, Chair Dogwood Festival



Members of the Guild prepare for the Festival: "Needles and tongues keep pace in a duet of gay conversation and apron creation at sewing bee ... though the March winds howl, the women turn their thoughts to warm May days which bring the dogwood and visitors to the hill." Circa 1950



Getting ready for Dogwood in 1956: Mrs. John Marsh preparing a roasted bird for turkey salad for a seated luncheon at the Dogwood Festival



1972 - Mrs. James McMahon and Mrs. Ray Petit, originators of the Heritage Walking Tour

Photograph from More About the Hill - Greenfield Hill by Elizabeth Banks MacRury



Kate Smith, founder of Kate's Corner, where visitors could find gently used and new treasures



Blossom Bakery - Then and Now



Rev. Alida Ward blessing of the animals



At today's Craft Fair, over 50 vendors offer jewelry, accessories, hand-crafted furniture, photography, garden items, artisan foods, and so much more

Photograph from Erin Belles Photography

Congregationalism at Work

In true Congregational tradition, GHCC is governed by its members. At an Annual Meeting in February, the congregation gathers together to vote on an annual budget, to elect Board members and other church leaders, and to make decisions affecting the life of the church. The day-to-day operations and the overall direction of the Church are overseen by the Church Council, which is composed of the Chairpersons of all the Boards. GHCC currently has 10 Boards and several standing committees: Adult Education, Diaconate, Development, Facilities, Fellowship, Jr. Deacons, Children & Youth, Member Involvement, Member Care, and Mission & Outreach.

While the principle of autonomy and self-governance remains a key principle of Congregationalism, many Congregational churches, including GHCC, are now affiliated with the United Church of Christ (UCC).

"Jesus Christ fought for justice. Rejected the status quo. And did what was right regardless of the consequences. At the United Church of Christ, we're just following in his footsteps." "Jesus didn't reject anyone. And we don't either." "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here."

UCC Churches Are...

- Open and affirming
- Multiracial and multicultural
- Accessible to all
- About "just peace," a call for UCC churches to address systemic injustice using non-violence and affirming with prophetic hope that "Peace is possible"



United Church of Christ: Making History in Social Justice

The UCC is known for its progressive social justice stances and inclusive practices. For over 400 years, the UCC has a history of being a church of firsts, weaving God's message of hope and extravagant welcome with action for justice and peace:



1620: Pilgrims Seek Spiritual Freedom

Seeking spiritual freedom, forebearers of the UCC prepare to leave Europe for the New World. Later generations know them as the Pilgrims.



1700: An Early Stand Against Slavery

Rev. Samuel Sewall's "The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial" (1700) is considered the first anti-slavery tract published in New England. Sewall lays the foundation for the abolitionist movement that comes more than a century later.



1773: First Published African-American Poet

Phillis Wheatley becomes the first published African American author with "Poems on Various Subjects." "The piece is a sensation, and Wheatley gains her freedom from slavery soon after."



1785: First Ordained African-American Pastor

Rev. Lemuel Haynes spent most of his childhood as an indentured servant for a farmer in Massachusetts and later served in the American Revolution. In 1785, he became the first black man in the US to be ordained as a minister.



1853: First Woman Pastor

Rev. Antoinette Blackwell became the first woman in the United States to be ordained a minister and perhaps the first woman in history elected to serve a Christian congregation as pastor. Quoting the New Testament: "There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."



1972: First Ordination of an Openly Gay Minister

Rev. William R. Johnson was the first openly gay person ordained in the history of Christianity. He was the primary author of the extensive body of social justice policies regarding LGBTQ persons adopted by the UCC.



2005: Bold Stance for Marriage Equality

UCC overwhelmingly passes a resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality and encourages UCC churches to celebrate and bless these marriages.

Photographs from:

- Samuel Sewall - Credit: Museum of Fine Arts Boston
- Phillis Wheatley - Credit: Library of Congress
- Rev. Lemuel Haynes - Credit: Archive.org
- Rev. Antoinette Blackwell - Credit: Archive.org
- Rev. William Johnson - Credit: LGBT Religious Archives Network

Worship – Offering Inspiration, Hope, and Thought

Worship at GHCC is a joyful celebration of God’s presence. Sundays include engaging messages from ministers, lay members, and guest speakers and often include an entertaining children’s message. Music is an integral part of worship at GHCC. The church is blessed to have both a gifted organist and Adult Choir Director, Dr. Michael Crowley, and Junior Choir Director, Sara Hofer. As of January 1, 2025, active membership was 1,163, with an average attendance of 225 each Sunday. On its 300th birthday, GHCC is thriving and continues to share God’s love in the community and the world.



Church School and Programs for Children

At GHCC, programs for children and youth are a source of great pride — and great joy.

Each fall, Church School students and volunteer teachers are “commissioned” to begin a new year of education and activities. Thanks to the expertise of Marcia Carothers, Director of Christian Education since 1990, children are exposed to a variety of topics, always delivered in a creative manner. Church school is divided by age (Kindergarten through 5th grade), and the groups rotate through six different interactive stations based on one Bible story that ranges from STEM activities to service projects. There’s a special group just for 6th and 7th graders who have a separate curriculum, allowing them to dig a little deeper as they approach confirmation age. One of the highlights of everyone’s year is the Christmas Pageant, featuring Church School actors and singers presenting a unique twist on the birth of Jesus. Whether or not a child attends Church School, all are welcome to attend Vacation Bible School, a weeklong day camp in August, and other seasonal events including an Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween Party, and a Birthday Party for Jesus!



Commissioning of Church School Students and Teachers



Vacation Bible School

Our fearless leader, Rev. Alida Ward, dressed up as a bumble bee!



“

All the time and love we put into our programs is amazing. The children are our future and we need to keep it going strong for the next 300. Whether they live here in Fairfield or go out into the world, we want them to be able to shine their beautiful light everywhere.”

- Kara Snyder, Chair Children and Youth Board

Outdoor Worship

In response to declining summer attendance and a desire for fresh expressions of faith, the church introduced the “Alternative Summer Worship” services in the 1990s — held outdoors, early in the morning, and led almost entirely by church members. These gatherings offer a creative, flexible approach to worship while preserving its core elements. The speakers have ranged from high school students sharing their faith to elderly members offering life lessons with their years of wisdom. The variety in the worship services also includes topics ranging from Broadway musicals to business to mental illness. Besides fulfilling one of the original goals of allowing golfers, sailors, and other early birds a chance to attend an earlier worship service, the more casual, outdoor format has allowed for creative ways of engagement with scripture, music, and theology. The services include lively discussions and innovative formats, including country music and once even a Jeopardy-style game show. Despite the more casual style, congregants have also been able to have rich and thought-provoking discussions about such topics as mental illness and achieving sobriety.



The success and depth of these lay-led services inspired the creation of the Advent and Lent devotionals. Written by members of the congregation, these seasonal collections offer 100 days of reflections grounded in scripture and centered around themes meaningful to each holy season. Together, they represent a vibrant continuation of the church’s commitment to shared spiritual leadership and creative faith expression.

“

“I love beginning my Sundays in the summer with a GHCC outdoor service. I never quite know what to expect but I am guaranteed to learn something interesting and get to know more about a fellow church member. The outdoor services never disappoint!”

- Adam Simon, Chair Deacons

Music at GHCC

The Greenfield Hill Congregational Church’s rich history of music has evolved with the times and greatly enriched the worship program. In the early 1700s when the church was founded, music was not a typical part of church services. The forward-thinking minister Timothy Dwight, who was a singer, hymn-writer, and poet himself, likely introduced music during his time at the church beginning in the 1780s. The first reference to singing in church records was in 1794, when the church voted to hire a singing master. The same year, a group of church members were also hired “choristers to pitch Psalms.” In later years, a brass viol and violin were added to the choir. Dwight also published a hymn book which became extensively used not only in New England Congregational churches but in Presbyterian churches of the South. He is most well known for the hymn “I Love Thy Kingdom Lord.”

In the mid-1800s, the words of “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord” were altered, and the hymn was renamed “I Love Your Church, O God.” Both variants still exist and are in use. The Chalice Hymnal, used today by GHCC, likely chose to use the latter as it is gender-neutral.

When the church built a new meeting-house in the 1860s, nearly everything from the old meeting-house was sold or taken apart to use for raw materials except for the bell, pews, weather vane, and lightning-rod. A new bell was purchased for \$276.80 and installed in 1854. In 1885 a new bell was purchased as the old one was cracked.

For several years in the 1890s, the church held several concerts and events in order to raise the money for a pipe organ. In 1897, sufficient money had been raised, and with \$1491 the church purchased an organ made by Johnson and Son, a company based in Westfield, Massachusetts. This replaced a prior organ, details of which are scarce. In 1962, a new organ was acquired, funded by a bequest from the estate of Bradford Warner. Today, the church houses an organ built by Angell and Stephen Russell, comprising two manuals and 25 ranks. These developments reflect the church’s ongoing commitment to enriching its musical heritage and worship experience.

Today, the church’s music program is led by Michael Crowley, an accomplished organist and director of the Adult Choir. The Junior Choir is led by Sara Hoefler.

GHCC is also committed to musical education, and Mr. Crowley currently also leads the Greenfield Hill School of Music. The school offers private lessons in instruments such as violin, cello, flute, guitar, piano, and voice, serving individuals of all ages and fostering musical talent within the community.

In 2014, the church appointed Fairfield resident and accomplished cellist Niles Luther as its first Artist-in-Residence. The program has continued since then and engages the congregation through performances and collaborations that complement the church’s regular music program.

For the 300th anniversary of the church, Mr. Crowley rewrote Timothy Dwight’s hymn “I Love Thy Kingdom Lord” and set it to a new tune.

“

“I love my church and I love my choir. It’s a highlight of my life. When you sing with a choral group, you live longer. I wish people knew this ... because it’s joyous.”

- Sue Leiss, Choir member since 1972



Organ installed in 1897



New organ bought in 1962

Programs – Something for Everyone!

The faith tradition at GHCC encourages congregants to love God with “heart, mind, and spirit,” and so programs are designed to stretch minds and enliven spirits. From lively fellowship events to thought-provoking adult education programs, from our Shalom Mental Health and Wellness ministry to quiet services in the Memorial Garden, from Sunday Morning Religion in the News led by Rev. David Rowe to annual parties at the beach, programs at Greenfield Hill offer something for all ages and interests.



Deacon’s Picnic



Celebrating Together



Fellowship Golf Outing



Family Chili Cook-Off



Rev. David Rowe leading the popular “Religion in the News” program held after worship on most Sundays, taking a look at today’s events from a faith perspective.



Adult Education Chair, Michael Moore, introducing “GHCC Greenfield Hill Historian” Pat McCullough and Walter Matis from the Fairfield Museum and History Center, on the discussion of “Greenfield Hill and Fairfield during the Revolutionary War.”

“

“I wasn’t groomed to be a teacher or preacher, and I have always wanted to revisit that. This role has allowed me to participate in providing the congregation with insight into some important issues related to our faith – philosophical thought, current events, talks and tours, the history of the Greenfield Hill area.”

- Mike Moore, Chair Adult Education

Youth Groups – A Unique Community for the Next Generation

Young Pilgrim Fellowship (YPF)

Junior Pilgrim Fellowship (JPF)

4th and 5th graders meet monthly for YPF, a chance to connect with peers in a different way. Kids enjoy games, activities, field trips, and plenty of snacks while making new friends. Middle schoolers gather weekly for JPF for games, service projects, and pizza while also discussing topics of special interest to tweens. Both groups are led by Rev. Alida Ward, known for her ability to blend fun with helping kids navigate the challenges of growing up.

Senior Pilgrim Fellowship (SPF)

No mention of GHCC would be complete without SPF (Senior Pilgrim Fellowship)! This program attracts approximately 280 high schoolers each year from the congregation and beyond, thanks to its welcoming approach. Thursday, 6 – 7:30 pm is a standing appointment for many Fairfield teens! Deep discussions, stress-buster games, meaningful guest speakers, service projects, and plenty of pizza give students a space outside of school and home to connect with peers and adults. A large percentage of students also participate in the Appalachia Service Project, a weeklong summer service trip repairing homes in West Virginia.



Young Pilgrim Fellowship (YPF)



Junior Pilgrim Fellowship (JPF)



Welcoming Meaningful Guest Speakers Alan Moskin, WWII Liberator of Gunskirchen concentration camp



Pizza with Friends in the Barn

Mission at GHCC

GHCC is a member of the United Church of Christ, one of the largest Protestant denominations in the U.S. From its earliest days, the UCC has been actively involved nationwide in relief work, ministry among the poor, movement for civil rights, and it has worked internationally in places of need. At GHCC, support to missions is a proclamation of faith. It is reflected both in mission giving and the time and talent the congregation offers to direct caregiving and service in the community and beyond.

Many churches tithe a maximum of 10% of their income to missions and charity. (from Tithely.com)

A full 15% of GHCC's total operating budget, all net proceeds from the Dogwood Festival, and all donations from the Christmas services are disbursed directly to local, national, and international charities by GHCC's Board of Mission and Outreach. Additional mission monies are raised through special collections for specific needs and charities. Victims of abuse in Bridgeport are protected, men and women from near and far get a second chance on life, soup kitchens and food pantries are staffed and stocked, adults learn to read, families in West Virginia are safer, warmer, and drier, children and widows in India are fed and housed, and so much more! That's what mission giving means to GHCC.

“This is something I really believe in. Our congregation is so giving oriented and socially conscious. It's a privilege to visit the organizations, get tours, and meet the people we are helping – I love seeing how much good work is going on out there. It's a nice blend of different nonprofits – and there's always more need than we have funds.”

- Karen Kirchner, Chair Mission and Outreach (2023-2024)



Feeding the Hungry



Supporting the North End Food Bank



Serving Meals at St. George's for Bridgeport Community Suppers



Turkeys for Thanksgiving

Church volunteers help the **Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI)** set up fully furnished apartments, stocked with household supplies for families and individuals new to the United States.



The Appalachia Service Project (ASP) is a home-repair ministry to impoverished Appalachian families. Since 1978, GHCC has sent teens and adults each summer to participate in this beloved mission to the people of rural Appalachia, making homes 'warmer, safer, drier.' In 2024, 231 youth and 102 adults joined in the ASP mission work, doing emergency home repairs in the 'hollers' and mountains of West Virginia. Ask any past participant about ASP and the response will be, "It was the best week of the entire year."



ASP Trip – 1978
A caravan of station wagons heads to ASP with just 21 young people and 8 adults.



The Pivot House
Bowling Outing with the Men from Pivot House



Friends of Christ in India (FOCI) is a mission effort founded by Rev. David Rowe in 1983 and has been supported by GHCC since 1997. GHCC supports many ministries in Telangana, India. They include schools, orphanages, churches, micro-loans, homes for the aged, scholarships for girls, sewing centers for women, after-school programs for children, food, and medical care. Each year, Rev. Alida Ward and a group of youth and adults travel to India to do hands-on mission work in support of FOCI programs.



“It is just a great experience to get to know so many people and heartwarming to get so close with the homeowners whose houses we helped to build.”

At the end of the week, our county gathers together in 'A God Circle' to share highlights, special memories, and 'God Moment' of the week – everyone shares, and cries.”

- Mia Nishiyama
Junior Deacon
ASP - Appalachia Service Project, 3 years



Nursery School and Memorial Garden

Founded in 1954, Greenfield Hill Church Nursery School has been a cornerstone of early childhood education in our community for more than 70 years. Originally established as a service to families with young children, the school first opened its doors in the basement of the Church House. After major renovations in 2008, the school expanded into a bright and welcoming space designed to nurture curiosity and growth.

Today, we continue that tradition of care and learning with programs for children ages 2–5. Our play-based, child-led emergent curriculum encourages exploration, creativity, and discovery — providing children with the tools, confidence, and joy to begin a lifelong love of learning.



“

“The garden is an outdoor sanctuary. It means something different to every person, except there’s this common feeling of calmness, grace, and beauty that brings everyone comfort. I feel closer to God here than anywhere else in Connecticut. Our Memorial Garden is a hidden gem.”

- Lynn Davies, Chair
Memorial Garden

**I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses....**

Hymn, In the Garden, Charles Austin Miles, 1912

The Memorial Garden is an outdoor sanctuary; 2.2 acres of tranquil beauty set aside for meditation, memorial services, interment of ashes, communion services, baptisms and other services of worship and praise.

The Garden grew out of love. In 1996, church members, Bob and Anne Bossa, were searching for a space to plant a Dogwood tree in memory of their daughter, Betsy. Unfortunately, the property surrounding the church was town-owned, the only available space being a neglected, and overgrown parcel of land behind the church house.

With full support from Board of Trustee Chair, Bob Dies, Trustee, Cynnie Goldrick accepted the charge of creating a new vision for the unused space. Many devoted friends of the Garden are to be credited with the initial Garden plan. Oliver Nurseries worked with Charlie Stebbins to create a landscape design, stonemason, Gino Vona, donated granite stones and masterfully set a circle of 4 memorial walls.

Thirty years later, the Garden houses 9 memorial walls, curated planting beds, a bluestone patio at the foot of a locally handcrafted cross, teak benches, a pollinator garden, and a wind phone, all the while maintaining a natural New England setting true to the original vision of the Garden as a place of rest. Care of the Memorial Garden is lovingly overseen by a church committee.



MINISTERS

The Church Today

Three centuries after the first worship as the “Northwest Parish” in 1725, Greenfield Hill Church is still living out the spirit of Congregationalism. Congregants come to enjoy the power of community within the church and to decide together the direction of the church’s presence and work in the larger community.

Clergy and Staff at GHCC

The two ministers of GHCC offer support with both heart and hope. Their strength lies in their signature hands-on, open-minded approach to all people and circumstances. With two such extraordinary pastors (and a devoted staff to match) inspiring the congregation and the community, it’s easy to see why GHCC draws such a diverse population.



Rev. Dr. David Johnson Rowe
Co-Pastor

Raised in New York City, David Rowe is a graduate of Colgate University, Andover Newton Seminary (M.Div.), and Eastern Baptist Seminary (D.Min.) Prior to his call to Greenfield Hill in 1997, David pastored churches in New York and Massachusetts. A prolific writer and author of numerous non-fiction and poetry books, David enjoys crafting these works in coffee shops all over the globe. Titles include: *My Jesus*, a reflection on his personal faith journey, *Church*, a look at what makes for a good church, and *My Habitat for Humanity: The “Mostly” Good Old Days* – the story of David’s many years with Habitat for Humanity International. David has also authored *Fieldstones of Faith (volumes I and II)*, collections of poetry based on scripture. The Church’s gifted minister is also known for his love of fruit pies and the band Green Day.



Rev. Dr. Alida Ward
Co-Pastor

Alida Ward grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia, and graduated from Bryn Mawr College. Her seminary training was at Yale Divinity School, followed by a Doctorate in Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary, where her thesis was based on the return of young adults to church life. Alida currently serves as Chaplain of the Fairfield Fire Department and Convener of the Fairfield Clergy Association. She is also on the Board of the Appalachia Service Project, Inc. Past service includes the boards of Operation Hope and the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, as well as the Human Services Commission for the Town of Fairfield. Alida is also beloved among local students as the exuberant leader of the Church’s three popular youth groups and her allegiance to Bruce Springsteen.



Rev. Dr. Brian Bodt
Pastor of Community Care

Joining the GHCC staff in October 2022, Rev. Bodt makes pastoral visits in homes, hospitals, and skilled care facilities and consults with members and their immediate families in times of need. He also facilitates a bi-weekly Support Group, seamlessly fitting into GHCC’s community. Brian is a train enthusiast with a model railroad set up at his house – and he even did some freight train hopping in his college days!



Marcia Carothers
Director of Christian Education

Marcia Carothers joined the staff as Director of Christian Education in 1990. She is a “preacher’s kid” and comes to the position with an extensive background in teaching and special education. In her free time, Marcia enjoys knitting, playing games, spending time with friends and family, and watching college basketball, especially Purdue men and UConn women! The response to many, many questions is “ask Marcia,” thanks to her diverse knowledge and clever problem-solving abilities.



Dr. Michael Crowley
Director of Music

Dr. Crowley became GHCC’s music director in 2019. He has earned a Doctorate of Musical Arts and has received training in hymnody and congregational song at Yale’s Institute of Sacred Music. His passionate conducting and piano playing during services put a smile on everyone’s face. Michael is also an avid home cook and a dog-lover who owns two giant Newfoundlands.



Sara Mastrony Hoefler
Junior Choir Director

Sara Hoefler grew up in Fairfield and attended the Fairfield Public Schools. She obtained a degree in music and history at Bucknell University. Sara began teaching middle school choir at Tomlinson before moving to Roger Ludlowe and has been working with high school a cappella groups for many years. She has been working with the Junior Choir at GHCC for close to 20 years and has loved watching young singers grow and blossom. Her other passions include the Buffalo Bills, “everything” Broadway, and baking with her kids.

Acknowledging Our Past

GHCC Rests on the Ancestral Homelands of the Paugussett People

In the earliest days of Fairfield, the Pequot War began as a conflict over trade and control of land between the Pequot people and English colonists in New England from 1636 to 1638. The war ended with the defeat of the Pequot Nation, resulting in the elimination of the Paugussett villages in present-day Fairfield. Many Paugussetts were killed, sold into slavery, or forced to move to smaller reservations. GHCC respectfully acknowledges that the Church is sitting on the ancestral homelands of the Paugussett people.

Troubling History with Slavery

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church has a complex history intertwined with the institution of slavery, reflecting broader societal norms of early America. Historical records from the church indicate the presence of both free and enslaved Black and Indigenous individuals within the congregation during the mid-18th century. Baptismal records from the 1760s document the baptisms of sixteen enslaved children and two adults who “owned the covenant,” signifying their formal association with the church.

In 1700, Reverend Samuel Sewall of the United Church of Christ (of which GHCC is now affiliated) published “The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial,” which is considered to be one of the first anti-slavery texts published in New England. This helped lay the foundation for the abolitionist movement which gained momentum a century later.

During the American Revolution, Connecticut had the highest proportion of slaves in all of New England, with slaves comprising 3.5% of the population. This led to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison to call Connecticut the “Georgia of the North.” Within the town of Fairfield, the proportion of slaves was even higher, at 6%, or 260 of its 4455 residents being enslaved. As Fairfield became home of many wealthy families, slaves became integral to the region’s growing economy. Prominent church members, including patriots like Gold Selleck Silliman and Thaddeus Burr, were among the slave owners. This reflects the broader acceptance and integration of slavery into the social and economic fabric of the time.

Three ministers of GHCC owned slaves in the 18th century. Reverend John Goodsell owned five enslaved persons (Anne, Caleb, Hager, Sew, and Time), Reverend Seth Pomeroy owned two (Asaph Hull and Jack), and Reverend Timothy Dwight owned four (Naomi, Maria, York, and an unnamed person). Historical records show that Dwight intended for Naomi to earn her freedom through an unspecified period of service, though it remains unclear if she achieved emancipation.

Over time, attitudes toward slavery began to shift within the church community. In 1780, two slaves from Fairfield, Prince and Prime, petitioned Connecticut’s General Assembly for the emancipation of all slaves, arguing against racial discrimination as a basis for servitude. Although their petition was denied, it signifies early resistance to slavery within the community.

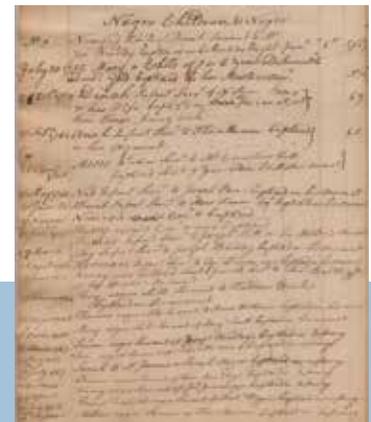
In 1784, a “gradual emancipation” law was passed in Connecticut that allowed for slavery to slowly be phased out. By this law, all slaves born before 1784 remained slaves for life, but slaves born on or after March 1, 1784 became free once they reached 25 years of age.

There are speculations that several homes in the Greenfield Hill neighborhood were stops on the Underground Railroad, a network of homes that were safe spaces for slaves who fled their homes and sought freedom. For instance, the Millbank family assembled rifles in the building beside the main house during the Civil War. The family members were known abolitionists, and a tunnel under the house may have been a stop for runaway slaves. The slaves that supposedly stopped at homes in Greenfield Hill were on their way to Canada. There is very little concrete evidence due to the required secrecy, since there were harsh punishments and fines for hiding slaves. However, the Dr. Rufus Blakeman home at 3173 Bronson Road has been certified as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The church’s history with slavery is a reflection of the broader societal norms of its time, showcasing a journey from acceptance to a gradual recognition of the injustices of the institution. Today GHCC is proud to foster an inclusive community and welcomes all people regardless of race or ethnicity.



“Pequot War,” North Wind Picture Archives

Credit: New York Public Library Digital Collection



A list of baptisms from the 1760s shows baptisms of sixteen enslaved children and two adults.

“Greenfield Hill, Fairfield, Conn. Greenfield Hill Church records, 1668-1878,”
Congregational Library & Archives

“Greenfield Hill Ministers’ Slaveholdings,”
compiled by Alec Lurie

What Does Greenfield Hill Church Mean to You?

“

“It’s a place where I can get outside of myself and feel part of the community, and focus on my faith and remember what’s really important. Feel **spiritually refreshed.**”



“It is a place where we can come together and everyone can share what’s unique, whatever they bring to the table, and have a real community of people supporting you.”

“I think my family has received so much more from the church than we could have ever anticipated. I don’t know if it’s possible to give back enough.”

“Our church is so **vibrant**, there is something going on in every corner... the church lights are on, the doors are open, it’s amazing.”

“The comfort that you find here is that they teach what’s valuable to know about Jesus Christ, and yet, what you do with it is up to you.”

“How lucky we are to be a part of this vibrant, thriving, inclusive, **incredible community** that looks around and sees a need, and fills it, all the time... it’s miraculous.”

It’s such a special place. It’s really hard to capture all the things it means to me – on a good day, a bad day, for my kids, my family. I think of all the times I have been at an inspirational sermon that brings me to tears. Our **brilliant leaders** share their words and speak to every person in the room... meeting them where they are.”

“Being you matters here.”

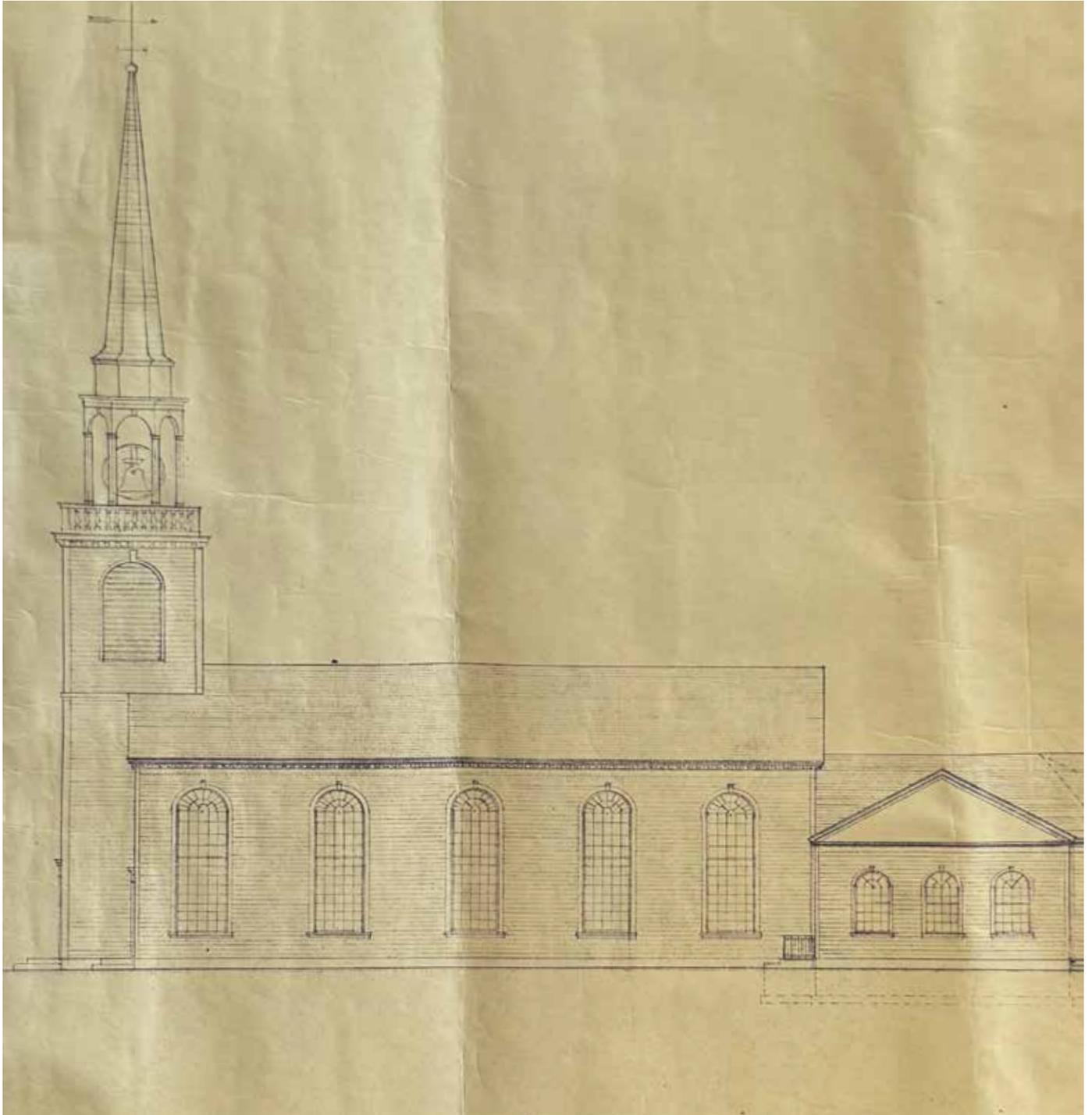
“For me, GHCC is a lifestyle. I walk a three mile loop from my house to church three times a week. I love that the sanctuary is **always open**. I go in and light a candle and I sit. It’s a great ritual for me and it grounds me. It’s a place where I can start the week off, it keeps me on track... where I want to be.”

“A common place with caring, generous, warm, loving people. Inclusive – not because it’s a catch phrase, because it’s what we do. Diverse – not because it makes us look good, because it’s core to everything.”

“For my family, having my child involved in the church has been fantastic. I want it to continue for others. The **connections** amongst themselves, to the church, and to the community, is incredibly important.”

“I have always considered church important and sought it out. It was impressed on me early in life that the Christian calling demands more than church attendance – time, money and effort.”

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Greenfield Hill Church: A Celebration of 300 Years
is dedicated to:

Reverend Dr. David Johnson Rowe
and
Reverend Dr. Alida Ward,
Our beacons on the Hill!

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