



A Centennial Celebration of First Church of Christ, Scientist,
Wellesley, Massachusetts

A Hundred Years of Healing and Hope 2004

First Church of Christ, Scientist
8 Rockland Street
Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts 02481

History of First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, Massachusetts

“He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.” (Psalms 111:4)

TODAY FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, IN WELLESLEY, MASS, MARKS WITH GRATITUDE AND JOY ITS FIRST 100 YEARS OF MINISTERING TO THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THIS COMMUNITY.

SIMULTANEOUSLY IT CELEBRATES THE OPENING OF ITS SECOND CENTURY OF CONTINUING THE SAME—PREACHING, TEACHING, AND HEALING THROUGH THE LIGHT THROWN ON THE SCRIPTURES BY THE TEACHINGS OF MARY BAKER EDDY, THE DISCOVERER, FOUNDER, AND LEADER OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND AUTHOR OF THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TEXTBOOK, AS SHE FOLLOWS OUR WAY-SHOWER, CHRIST JESUS.

Pioneering Period

Our branch church has a unique and interesting history. It was the love of Christian Science and of God and man in the hearts of two college students that laid its foundation.

It all began in the late 1890's when Wellesley College did not consider it appropriate for young ladies to ride steam trains and electric trolleys on Sunday. This was not a mere arbitrary decision. Though non-denominational, Wellesley was founded as a Christian college. As such, its aim was to keep the sabbath holy, to observe it as a day

“without frivolity.” “Driving or traveling on Sunday” was not permitted.

This regulation prohibited those two Christian Science students from attending morning services in the newly dedicated Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston.

Undaunted by this ruling, in the spring of 1899 Rebecca M. White of Concord, N.H., and Mary V. Little of Memphis, Tenn., began reading the Bible Lesson-Sermon aloud in their dormitory. By the fall of that year several other students had joined them. One of them, Florence Weston, lived in Wellesley and invited the group to meet in the parlor of her par-

ents' home on Central Street. There a full Sunday service was held each week. This marked the modest beginnings of Christian Science in our town.

By spring 1900, the group had outgrown the parlor and was seeking additional space. Once again Wellesley College administrators intervened. They felt the students should not hold religious services without a qualified adult present. Undeterred, these enthusiastic young women wrote to The Christian Science Board of Directors in Boston asking for someone to conduct their Sunday services.

Responding promptly to this need, the

Directors invited Emma C. Shipman to do so. A young woman herself, only in her late 20's, Miss Shipman accepted. Just two years before, she had been one of the students privileged to attend Mrs. Eddy's last normal class of 1898, thus qualifying her to be a teacher of Christian Science. Miss Shipman served as First Reader. Miss Little, one of the founding members of the group, became Second Reader. On December 2, 1900 their first service was held in new quarters—a rented room in a photographic studio on Church Street.

The following spring, knowing of Mrs. Eddy's deep interest in the higher education of young people, Miss Shipman requested each of the nine students to write her a letter telling what Christian Science meant to them in their college work. Mrs. Eddy's quick reply to "the Wellesley nine" concluded by encouraging them to "Press on in the higher hope and you will help the whole world to be better and wiser for your early choice of the one thing needful." A copy of this letter, displayed to this day in our Reading Room, is a treasured memento of that early period.

Miss Shipman served for two years, bringing much joy and inspiration to the college students and a few townspeople who joined them. Among these was Miss J. Isabelle Harrington, the first listed Christian Science practitioner in Wellesley.

These services were held only during the college year. But by 1905, outgrowing its rented space, the group moved to the living room of nearby Wellesley Inn where services began to be held year round. From then on, interest in Christian Science here grew slowly but steadily.

The First Organizational Steps

As attendance increased, especially by townspeople, services were again relocated—this time the Lower Town Hall in 1907. In June, 1908, for the first time two Wellesley residents were appointed fulltime Readers. Previous to that, students who served as Readers had read only during the academic year.

On September 10, 1908, the members

took the major step of organizing themselves as the Wellesley Christian Science Society.

Their next logical move was to open a building fund to purchase land for their own church home. This they did in spring, 1909. By September they had purchased the lot on the corner of Brook Street and Wellesley Avenue now occupied by Christ Church Methodist, in the part of town then known as Wellesley Village. Members promptly raised funds to pay off the mortgage.

That same year, 1909, while continuing its Sunday services in Town Hall, the Society enlarged its activities by beginning to hold Sunday School exercises and Wednesday evening meetings in the neighboring home of a member, Miss Portmore, in Wellesley Square. Within months these activities were shifted to the Odd Fellows Hall at 89 Central Street, where they continued for 14 years.

On March 20, 1910 the Society sponsored the first lecture on Christian Science in this community. Bliss Knapp, a Christian Science practitioner and teacher, was the speaker. His lecture was reprinted in full in the *Wellesley Townsman*. This inaugurated a tradition of the Society's sponsoring at least one lecture a year.

The group in Wellesley had always drawn its attendants from surrounding areas—Newton, Framingham, and other towns. In 1913 First Church of Newton was formed. In 1915, a Christian Science Society began in Framingham, becoming a church in 1924.

This welcome expansion of Christian Science activity into a larger area nevertheless reduced by more than half the size of the original assembly. Undismayed by this seeming set-back, from then on through World War I, members here carried valiantly on, continuing all their church work of holding services, teaching

the children, sponsoring lectures, distributing Christian Science literature, and visiting prison inmates.

In spring, 1918, they launched their Reading Room in a small way merely as a circulating library in the Sunday School room of Odd Fellows Hall. The following September they extended that activity by locating its first real Reading Room open to the public at 245 Washington Street in Wellesley Hills Square—on the site of the parking lot of what was at one time the Wellesley Hills Market. Now for the first time, Christian Science activities were going on in both Wellesley Square and Wellesley Hills.

Many New England towns cluster around the traditional town green. Wellesley did not develop that way. These two squares—neither of which is actually a square though so called, became Wellesley's two focal points of activity. Over the years our church's activities have alternated back and forth

It all began in the late 1890's with two young students of Wellesley College.

between the two.

First Church formed

Though the following events were, of course, in no way related, it is perhaps interesting to note that it was in the fall of 1918 when the Armistice was signed ending World War I, that the Society took its giant step of voting to reorganize as First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, thus becoming a full-fledged branch of The Mother Church. This was done on February 7, 1919.

Within the year the members had directed their Board of Directors to appoint a committee to consider building a church facility. After prayerful consideration of that committee's report, the members voted in the spring of 1920 not to build on the Brook Street property after all but to look instead for suitable property in Wellesley Hills. It was felt that this area was the fastest growing part of Wellesley, was more centrally

Among the Churches

Current Notes

WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS (First Church).—First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Wellesley, have broken ground for their church edifice on the old Southwick estate, at the corner of Linden and Rockland Streets, Wellesley Hills. Plans have been prepared for a stucco building of simple colonial type. The seating capacity of this edifice will be approximately two hundred and fifty. There is ample provision made for enlarging the building when necessary. The plans include a Sunday school which will accommodate one hundred and seventy-five pupils. The most modern and best methods in building and equipment are included in the plans, yet the qualities of simplicity and dignity have been preserved throughout. It is evident that much time and earnest consideration have been given to this project, in order to have a suitable edifice which will fill the need and grace our beautiful town.—*The Townsman.*

Announcement published in the *Wellesley Townsman* on the ground breaking of First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1926.

located—Wellesley Hills Square is roughly the geographical center of town—and more easily accessible by rail and automobile from outlying communities.

By 1921 the Brook Street lot had been sold. Two years later in February, 1923, the membership approved the purchase of a lot of more than an acre here on Rockland Street. In order to acquire more useable frontage, it became possible between 1924 and 1926 to acquire additional land from the abutter on Rockland. But because of the property's shape and location, this left the church without any access onto Linden Street.

This no doubt explains why our edifice, with its imposing colonnaded Greek façade looks straight ahead onto a narrow Rockland Street rather than facing the now open outlook towards town across our sloping lawn to Linden.

The year 1923 brought significant changes. The church ended its long association with Town Hall and Odd Fellows Hall and moved into the Community Theater directly across Washington Street from its newly purchased plot of land. Church services were conducted in the auditorium. Sunday School and

Wednesday evening meetings were held in rooms above. While the church shifted its location from Wellesley Square to Wellesley Hills, its Reading Room left Wellesley Hills that year for quarters in Wellesley Square.

Church Building

On April 30, 1926, members authorized the Building Committee "to proceed with the building of a church edifice, the maximum cost not to exceed \$60,000." Ground was broken on the first day of October. And in the early morning of Thanksgiving Day, November 25, a small group of officers and pioneer members gathered to lay the cornerstone of the long awaited church building.

In accordance with the *Manual of The Mother Church*, the simple ceremony was "devout," with no large crowds attending. Citations were read from the Bible and from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Then a copper box—containing the Bible, copies of all Mrs. Eddy's published writings, recent issues of the Christian Science periodicals, and a history of the

church—was sealed and inserted in the cornerstone.

Metaphysical meetings were begun at once to support the building program and continued throughout the period of construction.

To consolidate all its activities in Wellesley Hills, in April, 1927, the church moved the Reading Room from its downtown location into the Community Theater. Now for the first time, services, Sunday School, business meetings, and Reading Room were finally all under one roof! It was a foretaste of the joys to come in their new home as members watched their church building rise across the way.

Construction proceeded harmoniously during the winter, and on Sunday, June 5, 1927, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, held the opening service in its new edifice. Sunday School was suspended that day so that the children could be part of that happy occasion.

At this important juncture, our Leader's words in *Retrospection and Introspection* (93:10) come to mind:

"The ideal of God is no longer impersonated as a waif or wanderer; and Truth is not fragmentary, disconnected, unsystematic, but concentrated and immovably fixed in Principle. The best spiritual type of Christly method for uplifting human thought and imparting divine Truth, is stationary power, stillness, and strength; and when this spiritual ideal is made our own, it becomes the model for human action."

Financial Challenges

Wellesley church had barely settled in its own home, when it faced severe financial challenges that required the constant attention and prayers of all its members. Less than three years after the church had opened its doors, on October 29, 1929, the stock market crash shook the nation. At one point during the Great Depression that followed, The Christian Science Board of Directors in Boston contributed funds to assist in meeting this branch's financial need. Though continual efforts were made to

pay the mortgage on the new building, refinancing was finally necessary to ease the financial burden.

It was not until 1937—a decade after the church opened—that it finally was current with all its bills, once again in control of its financial affairs. Six years later, immediately after receiving a grant of \$3,800 from the Trustees Under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy to enable it to finish paying off the mortgage, the church held its long awaited dedication service on January 10, 1943, an event that was recorded in the *Wellesley Townsman*. In grateful recognition of this loving gift from the Trustees, the members made contributions during the next few years until the grant was fully repaid.

Despite the trying years of the 1930's several steps of progress were taken:

- Up to this time, the two Readers had been appointed by the Board of Directors. In 1933 a by-law change gave the membership the authority to elect its Readers.

- The Reading Room was not working out well in the church building, so that same year it was returned to Wellesley Square in quarters at 39 Grove Street that were subsequently enlarged. There it remained for 22 years until its move to 101 Central Street in 1955.

- This branch augmented its service to Wellesley and surrounding communities in 1939 by adding Sunday evening services during July and August—the two months in the year when, in accord with the *Manual*, regular Sunday evening services in The Mother Church are omitted.

World War II

As World War II began in Europe in 1939, even though the members were still making earnest metaphysical and financial efforts to hasten dedication of the church, they enthusiastically joined the nation's war relief work, giving

their financial support to that activity as well.

The end of the war brought a surge of new building throughout the country. The Wellesley church became part of that physical expansion. Even before the war, it had begun feeling the limitations imposed by the size of its building and grounds. Now the Sunday School was flourishing more than ever, with average attendance at 102 pupils and occasionally reaching 135. A nursery had become an urgent need. And lack of parking facilities on the property was causing problems.

The solution to all three of these problems depended upon expanding the church building and the land around it. However, because of restrictions that were placed on the land when it was purchased, enlarging the building seemed impossible. These restrictions and the adjacent property needed for expansion were both owned by the next-door neighbor along Linden Street.

What was known as 'the old Southwick house' had an interesting story of its own. Over 100 years old at the time, it had been the home of Sara Southwick, who had worked to free slaves before the Civil War began. The house became a stop on the famous 'underground railroad.'

The membership decided to purchase

the Southwick house and grounds, if possible. This would enable the church to enlarge its Sunday School room and add a nursery. At first, negotiations to buy were unsuccessful. But in June, 1951, though a satisfactory price for the entire Southwick house and lot was not achieved, a price was agreed upon for the release of the restrictions on the church's use of its own property. This opened the way not only for the desired expansion but for other needed improvements in the church building, planning for which began in earnest.

Within a year plans were approved to extend the Sunday School space to the south, add space for a nursery, remodel the platform in the auditorium, and improve the Reader's rooms behind the platform. A coatroom and an usher's room, originally in the foyer, were removed to groundfloor level, making it possible to add the two side doors into the auditorium that we have today.

Construction began in the fall of 1952. By the following April the new Sunday School space was occupied. That summer, landscaping was completed, and a special gift made it possible to create what we now call our upper parking lot.

It was not until 1965 that the church was successful in its efforts to buy the Southwick House. The thought was that, if needed, the property could be used for

Among the Churches

Current Notes

WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS (First Church).—All services and activities of First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, are now held in the new church edifice, Rockland Street, Wellesley Hills. The edifice is of stucco, of simple colonial type. Ample provision is made for enlarging the building when necessary. The most modern and best methods in building and equipment are included in the edifice, yet the qualities of simplicity and dignity have been preserved throughout. First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, take this opportunity to thank all their friends and townspeople who have helped them in thought, word, or deed, to build their church.—*The Townsman*.

Announcement published in the *Wellesley Townsman* on the inauguration of First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1927.

future expansion of the church. In the meantime, it was rented as a residence, providing the church a modest income from its investment. During subsequent years the interior of the church saw additional improvements in decoration, lighting, and to its Allen electronic Organ.

While expanding and upgrading its physical facilities, the church also supported other activities. For many years after World War II, the membership made regular contributions to various programs to assist war-damaged Europe. They contributed regularly to building and renovation programs of The Mother Church that took place during the 50's and 60's. And strong support was given to a fund providing special assistance to its own members of advancing years.

From the 1990's onward the church built stronger bridges with other faith-based and community services organizations.

First 100 Years of Christian Science

To commemorate the centennial year of the Christian Science movement in 1966, The Mother Church expressed the desire that all those following these teachings rededicate themselves to new and higher spiritual goals. In response to this call, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, selected as its guide these words of Mrs. Eddy from her *Miscellaneous Writings*:

"The truth uttered and lived by Jesus, who passed on and left to mortals the rich legacy of what he said and did, make his followers the heirs to his example; but they can neither appreciate nor appropriate his treasures of Truth and Love, until lifted to these by their own growth and experiences."

The word "growth" was selected by our Executive Board as the keynote for prayer and study. Members were invited to write briefly their sense of what the spiritual goals of our branch church

should be and how best to attain them. Their spontaneous response resulted in 12 pages of comments that are contained in a brochure that is a part of our church record and is available to be read.

Recent Times

The decade of the 1980's brought changes.

- The first of these was moving the Reading Room from 101 to 79 Central Street—a much better location even closer to the center of Wellesley's downtown shopping district, where it remained for 22 years.

- When demand for increased auditorium space did not develop, in 1983 the church sold the Southwick house and part of the lot, retaining enough land to provide for the lower parking lot we now enjoy.

- In 1985 a needed redecoration of the whole church interior was undertaken. The Allen organ, which had been installed in 1962, was replaced by a new Rodgers Electronic Organ, an instrument of high quality and an unusual versatility that makes it especially appropriate for church services.

- For many years the membership had recognized the importance of an elevator for those who might need it. But the interior of the edifice did not lend itself well to the insertion of a standard lift. Finally a different type that did not require an elevator shaft came on the market. This made it possible in 1992 to install on the exterior of the building a glassed-in elevator that operates on a vertical track. This has proved to be a much used and appreciated improvement to our building.

From the 1990's onward, the church increased its outreach activities considerably by building stronger bridges to other faith-based and community-services organizations. Year by year its

Assistant Committee on Publication, Frederic M. Livezey, became ever more active in the local ministerial group called the Wellesley Interfaith Association. He became a founding member of the Interfaith Community for Action in Wellesley, comprised of ministers and lay members of various denominations. He also played a leading role in re-activating an annual Thanksgiving Service which the town had sponsored many years before. Recognition of these community services came in 2002 when Mr. Livezey was given the honor of being named one of the "Townsmen Ten"—ten citizens selected each year by the Wellesley *Townsmen* for outstanding community service.

Church Women United is another organization which our members have actively supported over the years, often hosting its meetings in our edifice. Mrs. Judith Jones deserves special credit for being the first member of our church to become active in this group, thus opening the door to our participation in this national organization's Wellesley unit. In subsequent years, our Assistant Committee on Publication, Mrs. Sally R. Hoagland, served as its president and was twice a delegate to its national conference. At present, Mrs. Robin E. Hoagland is co-president of Church Women United at the local level, vice-president at the state level, and as a member of a national committee is attending this year's national conference.

Peter Henniker-Heaton, Home Forum editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, once wrote that the *Monitor* "is the bridge of many spans which Mrs. Eddy threw across the chasm which might otherwise have separated the church she founded from the humanity she loved."

Recognizing the truth of this statement, our church has been using this *Monitor* "bridge" to introduce Christian Science to a wider audience in our community. In 2003 and again this year it has sponsored meetings in the new building of the Wellesley Free Library, addressed each time by a different panel of *Monitor* journalists speaking on current topics. Both meetings have been well



Auditorium of First Church of Christ, Scientist. It seats 250 people and was finished in 1927. Along the years it was refurbished in several occasions, and in 1985 it went through a major redecoration. The Allen organ, which had been installed in 1962, was replaced by a new Rodgers Electronic Organ at that time.

attended by an appreciative public audience. Last year, after 48 years of service to this community on Central Street, the Reading Room was moved back into the church. Here there is ample parking space and a great location at the corner of Linden Street and Rockland Street, that makes it convenient for visitors from all parts of town.

Remembering that our church was begun by only two young college students, we can never forget that even one genuine Christian Scientist faithful to its teachings can make an enormous difference, a contribution that multiplies in blessings not only to oneself but to countless others as the years unfold.

As First Church of Christ, Scientist, Wellesley, celebrates 100 years of continuous service to this community and looks forward to continuing the same down the long future, we may echo the sentiment expressed in the "Historical Sketch" in

our cornerstone, which concludes with these words:

"Though rejoicing in its opportunity and progress, this church realizes that only as it manifests the Mind of Christ in love for God and man can it heal the sick and sinning in conformity with the teachings of the Master of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth. Only as this church gives all honor and power and glory to God, will it build on a spiritual foundation and manifest the healing works as taught us by our Leader. Only in this way can this church truly fulfill its glorious place in this community and in the world."

This up-dated history was compiled by Emilie Tavel Lwezey from the church's "Historical Sketch," from newspaper clippings, etc., but mainly from the carefully researched history written by Carl A. Erikson, III, in 1975, and from a brief digest of that record written later by Sara Hoagland Hunter.