

125 YEARS
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LEBANON, N.H.
1862 - 1987

In the Autumn of 1860, Rev. Sumner Hale was a leader in Lebanon and had a great part in starting the groups interested in forming a church. Although he was a graduate of Waterville College and Newton Theological School, he was unable to preach because of a chronic throat problem and so continued with his profession as a scythe maker.

In a few weeks after moving here from Fitchburg, Mass. he made acquaintances personally with every Baptist citizen in town and had them assembled for church worship. The first meeting was held at the home of Joseph Cummings in December, 1860 with nine present. Meetings were held all winter on Tuesday evenings with steadily increased interest. The following spring a paper was drawn up binding the signer to certain duties with reference to a prospective formation of church. It was signed by twenty-six people; no public meetings were held because of no suitable place. All continued to work in other churches.

Early in 1862 it was decided to erect a chapel and a society was formed under the statutes. A committee was formed to purchase a lot, raise funds, and receive proposals. A lot was purchased on Green Street. It was the lot on one-half of which the house of William B. Cole now stands, the other half still open as a lawn. The house next west, (the Foster house) was used as a parsonage till 1874. The first five pastors lived there. The sixth owned a house when called, and the parsonage was disposed of. The parsonage was never owned by the society, but was held by the owner, Mr. J. H. Purmort, at the disposition of the society as long as wanted. Mr. Purmort was an original member, and he came early into the church, from the Free Will Baptist Church on Methodist Hill. He was the heaviest contributor to the cost of the house of worship, and the largest payer towards ordinary expenses. Quite a proportion of the members had indeed been Free Will Baptists.

The contract was given to Mead, Mason & Co., and by August the building was completed. A church was organized at the house of C. V. Cobb on the evening of the 27th of August. Charles V. Cobb and Thomas E. Hough were elected deacons and Sumner Hale clerk. "The New Hampshire Articles of Faith" were adopted and the form of covenant was copied from that of the First Baptist Church in Lawrence, Mass., from which some of the members had come. In the forenoon of August 29th the house was dedicated. Rev. Foster Henry of Fitchburg, Mass., from whose church Mr. & Mrs. Hale had come, preached the sermon. Pastors of nearby Baptist churches and of the Congregational

and Methodist local churches took part in the interesting exercises. On the afternoon of the same day the church was duly recognized as a Baptist Church by a council called for that purpose. The recognition sermon was by Rev. C. E. Cummings, D. D., of Concord.

The following Sunday, August 31, the chapel was opened for public worship, Rev. C. E. Cummings, D. D., occupying the pulpit. The congregations were large, that of the afternoon overtaxing the chapel. A Sunday school was organized at noon, with Rev. John McKinlay as superintendent. The evening was given to a social religious, testimony service, in which a large number took part. This was followed by a general hand-shaking and heart-shaking. It was a day of intense interest to the little band.

The pulpit was supplied by neighboring preachers until October 12th, when Mr. John McKinlay of Lawrence, Mass., came as a candidate. He preached two Sabbaths, gave perfect satisfaction, received a unanimous call, accepted, and immediately entered on his duties. On Saturday, November 6, 1862, by a council duly called for the purpose, Mr. McKinlay after the usual examination, was publicly set apart to the work of the Christian ministry, and recognized as pastor of the church. The history of his ministry of six years is one of uninterrupted church prosperity. The church more than doubled in numbers, 39 members being added.

With the beginning of 1869, Rev. C. E. Cummings D. D., came as acting pastor. Dr. Cummings was a father in the Baptist Israel, of long and distinguished service as pastor, his last two charges being in Concord. He was distinctly the founder of the Pleasant Street Church in Concord, as was Mr. Hale of that in Lebanon. From its inception he had been a trusted adviser of the latter. He had just resigned as pastor at Concord, on account of age and the severe duties required in a church of that size, but with singular fitness for such an opening. During his short ministry the present church edifice was erected at a cost of about \$12,000, of which \$7,000 was raised at home, \$1,000 contributed abroad, and a debt of nearly \$4,000 was left. The project had gone so far before Mr. McKinlay left as to secure a lot, though a change of lot was afterwards made. A building committee consisting of Charles V. Cobb, Asa Chase, Asa W. Richardson, Jasper H. Purmort, and Henry B. Hough was appointed September 15th, only five days before the pastor's decease, and in his absence. Work began in the early spring, but the first plan adopted proving unsatisfactory to many, was suspended to examine other plans, and the present house was the result. Meand, Mason & Co. had the job as before. Considerable amount of the cost went into the trusses which support the roof, made strong enough to admit of taking

out the partition which separates the vestry, should it be necessary, without additional support. Honorable A. M. Shaw, the well-known Lebanon railroad man, said he would dare run a railway trail over them.

The unexpected cost was in the thoroughness with which the work was done. The end of the year saw the structure completed. It is a singular fact that the man, Nathan F. Tilden, who was destined afterwards to be 25 years pastor of the church, began his work in Lebanon, having just moved here, by digging the trenches for its foundation, and labored upon it in one capacity or another till it was completed.

The little chapel saw its last congregation assembled for worship on the 19th day of December 1869 and the new structure was dedicated on the 31st. Dr. Cummings preached the sermon. Appropriate service was also held in the evening, the sermon being by Rev. Foster Henry. The little chapel was sold to the Lebanon High School Association, the precursor of the present high school, and for a year or two was used for school purposes, then sold and moved to Elm Street, where it serves as a tenement house.

Dr. Cummings had no sooner seen the new house completed and everything going smoothly in it, than he himself initiated the movement to release him and settle a pastor. With this end in view, in August, 1870, he invited a man to occupy the pulpit whom he thought most suitable and the people likely to appreciate, Rev. Jirah Tucker of Randolph, Vt. And they did. When Dr. Cummings resigned, two months later, taking a leave which was most affectionate, mutually, the church knew whom it wanted. The call was unanimous again, was accepted, and the church once more started out with bright hopes, save for the shadow which the debt left.

The fourth pastor was Rev. Horace F. Barnes, a native of Newark, N.J., and a Graduate of Amherst and of Newton. He had fulfilled a successful pastorate at Buffalo and might easily have coveted the larger city church and salary. He chose the humbler field because he found a flock which more nearly seemed to meet his ideas. His, too, was a charming personality. He was an excellent pulpit orator. He attacked the debt, put his whole soul into an effort to pay it, and he succeeded. But it was at cost of so crippling the church's ability to raise money for ordinary expenses, coupled with the death of one liberal giver and the removal of others, with the abandonment of the enterprise by the State Convention, that it became impossible to raise his salary, and having a flattering call elsewhere, he accepted it. He resigned February 1, 1874.

Sunday, September 18, 1872, Rev. Mr. Barnes preached an historical discourse, covering the first ten years of the church history. This has been preserved. Mrs. Barnes has kindly forwarded it as a possible aid in the preparation of this history, and it has been found of great value. It is to be preserved.

Rev. J. H. Gannett was next called, and accepted at the salary which the church thought it could raise. He was an excellent minister, who had done good work elsewhere and who did good work to the end of his life. But conditions had greatly changed in Lebanon and in the church now. It was passing through a period of adversity, which tried its faith to the uttermost. Rev. Sumner Hale left, carrying the unbounded love of those to whom he had been so long as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." He retired from active labor, ending his ability to give; had given himself poor, and settled in Camden, N.J., where a few years later he died-poor in worldly goods but rich in faith. Other liberal givers also left. It was the ebb of the tide, even if disaster had not overtaken the town, in the failure of the Sturtevant Manufacturing Co. That crippled all the churches. It seemed as if the little Baptist Church would have to close its doors. Again the pastor had to leave because it became impossible to raise the money to pay his salary. And pastors must live. Mr. Gannett read his resignation, December 12, 1875. The church parted with him unwillingly and its love followed him to the end of his life.

It had, however, among its numbers, a preacher, Nathan F. Tilden, of no mean ability, whom it had itself licensed to preach, and who had filled its own pulpit and many others in emergencies, that at Etna and the Lebanon Congregational Church among others. He was a native of Boston and educated in her schools, but without the advantages of theological training. He was now a measurer of lumber for the company that went into bankruptcy. He was thrown out of work. He owned a house and wanted to stay. He loved to preach and people loved to hear him. The church asked him to supply, and he did, taking what it could pay, and it paid as liberally in proportion to its ability as ever. He was ordained June 22, 1876, Rev. Dr. Lorimer, the noted Tremont Temple pastor of Boston, preaching the ordaining sermon. He continued in the pastorate 25 years, and under his ministry the church gradually recovered somewhat of its standing. At the end of fifteen years he had a unanimous call to the New London church, where he had often preached on exchange. The students especially were glad to hear him. But his church simply would not let him go. He afterwards held pastorates in Warner, N. H., and Fiskdale, Mass. He then settled at Baldwinville, Mass.

During his pastorate various church improvements were carried out. The church was made glad by the presentation to it of a very excellent pipe organ, by one of its members, Mr. A. W. Shapleigh. The audience room was frescoed and otherwise improved, and a new carpet was provided. Previous to his call to preach, Mr. Tilden had won the favor of the whole community by his remarkable efficiency as president of the Y. M. C. A.

Mr. Tilden was followed in 1900 by Rev. W. L. Stone, in a three years pastorate, during which also the church recovered somewhat of its lost ground - lost almost wholly by the removal of members and most liberal givers. The audience room was renovated again, and a commodious kitchen and parlor were added and furnished, free of debt. He was finally recalled by the church in Sterling, Mass., whose pastorate had resigned to come to Lebanon, and preached there.

In 1911 a tower bell was given to the church by the Honorable E. H. Cheney, a long standing member of the Church. Earlier in 1901 extensive work was done to the church. A new pulpit platform was enlarged, a new furnace was installed, also new lights and hardwood floors. In 1909, the Ladies Fellowship donated new pew cushions. In 1919 a decision was made to allow the women of the church to have voting privileges. Further renovations were done and arches were added to the inside of the church.

The following pastorates filled our pulpit from 1903:

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| L. L. Knapp 1903-1912 | J. H. Miller 1912-1918 |
| C. L. Chamberlin 1918-1922 | H. H. White 1923-1927 |
| J. K. Miller 1927-1930 | W. J. B. Cannill 1930-1943 |
| F. K. Neary 1943-1956 | R. J. Bracey 1957-1968 |
| F. K. Emerson 1968-1975 | B. S. Howe 1976-1982 |
| K. B. Solheim 1983-1985 | D. Edwards 1986 to present |

The church has gone through many different styles of leadership. The ministers have all varied in age and background. Some came from previous pulpits and the last three came directly from seminaries. They all have contributed to the growth and development of the church.

Over the years many gifts were contributed to the church. In 1919, the Ladies Aid Society donated folding chairs and in 1914 they donated 116 hymnals. January 1, 1916 was the beginning of the duplex envelope system which is continued to be used today for the collection of the genral funds and missions. In 1925 a gift of \$50. was received towards the organ motor. In December 1926, the first junior choir robes were made. The Ladies Aid Society changed its name to Baptist Women Society in May of 1937. On February 6, 1940, coffee urns, oil and gas stove were purchased

by the church. On June 1, 1943, the Ladies parlor was carpeted. On October 14, 1945, new hymnals (125) were donated to the church by Robert Leavitt in memory of Roland Leavitt. The church voted at that time to sell the parsonage on 3 School Street and purchase the existing parsonage on 16 Kimball Street. In October, 1949, Nellie Hurlbutt contributed a piano to the parsonage and communion glasses were given by Robert Leavitt. The Church and Society voted to merge and the Church became incorporated. In 1956, a new oil burner was installed, the vestry ceiling was lowered and lights were reinstalled. In 1958, a full heating plant was installed, the sanctuary carpet was replaced with runners. In 1959, brass altar cross and brass candle holders and vase were given to the church. In 1960 brass offering plates were given. The large front window and vestry window were decorated by Robert Leavitt. In August, 1961, an electric clock was given to the church and placed in the sanctuary. The Church was completely redecorated. Everything was done over to match the new decor. In 1966, a Kohler and Campbell piano was given for the sanctuary. The first annual report was written for the Baptist Church and an annual report has been written every year since 1966. In 1967, the church exterior received repairs and a paint job. In 1971, an entrance was built on the South side of the building to give people access to the church basement. A new kitchen and rest rooms were completed. New ceiling tile was installed and partitions for the stage at the west end of the basement were done. The hall was named "Kilburn Hall" in 1973. In 1977 the church received new siding and the trim was painted. The church had a year of fund raising to pay for the renovations to the church. The pastor's study and the exterior of the parsonage were also painted that year. The church received a new oil burner at this time. In 1978 the church sanctuary was completely redecorated and a 2,000 gallon oil tank was installed. In 1979 a new tile floor was installed in Kilburn Hall. This was a gift from the Pellerin family. The Social Committee raised funds to purchase a new gas stove for the church kitchen. In 1980, extensive repairs were made at the parsonage. In 1981, the church family raised funds to reupholster the pew cushions. In 1982, new junior choir robes were donated, Sunday School dividers were made and the Sanctuary received new carpentering. In 1983, the Baptistry was panelled and Ernest Gilchrist painted the mural which still remains. The room behind the sanctuary was dedicated as the "Pellerin Room" after extensive redecoration and a new partition. The room was in memory of Jesse and Cora Pellerin. In 1984 the trim of the church and the parsonage were repainted. In 1985 a new sound system was installed and a copy machine was purchased from gifts. New kitchen wares were given by the Social Committee. The Womens Fellowship redecorated the nursery with new carpentering, new child proof cribs and Noah's Ark mural was painted on the nursery wall by Ernest Gilchrist. In 1986,

repairs were made to the parsonage in anticipation of the new Pastor Dale Edwards and his wife Laurie. The church family got together and made up a welcome basket for the Edwards.

The church is going forward once again, a fund drive has been going on to raise money to install handicap equipment throughtout the church to make it more excesable to the public.

The church has grown in numbers, we now have approximately 90 active members and many nonactive members. The church has many loyal and faithful members who in the past and those who are with us now have given very generously to the growth and development of the church.