

A SKETCH BOOK

OF THE HISTORY OF
COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DEER PARK, NEW YORK

BY REV. JOHN F. UNDERWOOD



INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Community Presbyterian Church in 2006, each issue of *The Light* included a sketch or vignette offering a glimpse into some part of the church's history. Those sketches have been re-edited and compiled — with some new material — into this church history booklet to celebrate the church's sixty-fifth anniversary in 2011.

The primary source of information for the sketches (including the quotations) is *Our Friendly Church*, the first history of the congregation, published for the church's thirty-fifth anniversary in 1981. Other information is from *The Fiftieth Anniversary Journal*, published in 1996. Some information about dates and about church members is from The Church Register. Rev. Underwood provided personal information about his background. Rev. Rambo corrected a mistake in *Our Friendly Church* about the date he came to Long Island to begin the ministry in Deer Park. The information about moving the chapel on graphite planks and the story about cranking home-made ice cream at the Bahner's home came from conversations with long-time members of the congregation.

John F. Underwood,
Pastor



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1—HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Our Friendly Church tells this story:

One day the Rev. Dr. Abbo E. Abben, pastor of the Babylon Presbyterian Church, noticed some boys throwing stones at the Deer Park Chapel. He stopped and asked them, "What are you boys doing?" They answered, "Oh that's the old Church, nobody cares." At that moment Dr. Abben began thinking about the Chapel that no one wanted and why no effort had been made to keep it alive.

That November the Babylon session voted to take responsibility for reopening the chapel and using it again as a place of worship.

In May of 1935, they set about buying the church and the property.

Dr. Abben sought a seminary student to help organize the chapel. On Mother's Day 1935 William T. P. Rambo came to see the chapel for the first time. He accepted the challenge and became the driving force for the creation of the Deer Park congregation.

Just think...it all started with mischievous boys throwing stones!



2—THE CHAPEL

The Chapel is the oldest part of Community Presbyterian Church

- It was built by the Primitive Methodist Church
- It opened for worship in 1879 (the cornerstone was laid in 1878)
- The cost of the building was \$800 (\$50 over the estimated cost)
- The Presbyterian Church of Babylon bought it for \$100 in 1935
- It seated about fifty people in two rows of pews
- The building was heated by a pot-belly stove in the center of the room between the pew rows.

The Chapel has changed considerably since 1879

- Additions have been made to the original building:
 - the vestibule area under the small roof in front
 - the kitchen and bathroom area in the back
- In 1954 the building was moved on boards greased with graphite from its original location facing Deer Park Avenue (where the present sanctuary stands) to its present location facing Lake Avenue
- The steeple tower eventually became structurally unsound and had to be taken down
- The bell that used to hang in its tower is now at the Presbyterian Center at Holmes
- It survived a fire in 1959



3—PAYING THE PASTOR

1880's: In 1882, the salary for the pastor (a Methodist minister in those days) was \$9.00 a week, but the arrangement only lasted nine months for lack of money.

1930's: When Bill Rambo began working on Long Island full time (after he graduated from seminary in 1936), his salary was \$143 a month — \$35 from the church in Deer Park, \$83 from the church in Bellmore, where he also served, and \$25 from the National Board of Missions. His salary did not include housing, which was provided for the first six months at the Blachly's home in Dix Hills.



4—COMING OF AGE

When Bill Rambo began to gather people to worship in the old Deer Park Chapel, the congregation was too small to function on its own. It was governed by the Babylon Presbyterian Church. A series of people served the chapel in Deer Park as “stated supply”

Bill Rambo served from 1935-1941. During his ministry the church averaged seven new members a year.

Howard Davies from Princeton Seminary served briefly as stated supply for Deer Park and Brentwood. He married while in Deer Park. The wedding was the first in the Presbyterian history of the chapel.

George Hermanson came as stated supply in 1942. He was ordained the following October. During his ministry a ledger of church meetings was begun and a new heating system replaced the old pot-belly stove. He left to become a missionary in Africa.

The Rev. Amos Dushaw, an awe-inspiring “fire and brimstone” Scotsman, became stated supply in July 1945. The church had continued to grow. In December 1945 a motion was made to begin to organizing the chapel into an incorporated church.

On May 5, 1946, at 3:00 p.m. Community Presbyterian Church of Deer Park was formally organized with fifty-five charter members. The little chapel church had grown up and come of age.



5—THE SOCIAL HALL

Community Presbyterian Church was incorporated on May 5, 1946. Immediately after the incorporation the congregation began planning to build a new church home. The chapel had served the congregation well, but it had become much too small.

In 1949 the building that is now the social hall was completed. It became the new church sanctuary, the church's second worship home. It was intended to be a place of worship for only a limited time. The vision was to make it into a Christian Education center.

The entrance to the new church sanctuary faced Deer Park Avenue. Worshipers came in through a vestibule that would later become the church library. A steeple sat at the peak of the social hall roof. It was so loved that when a new sanctuary was built in 1957 the steeple was relocated to the top of the new church's bell tower. Two stained glass windows were installed on the back wall of the chancel. The place they occupied is still visible behind the rear curtains on the social hall stage. Four more windows were installed on the north wall. Those six windows are the same windows that adorn the church sanctuary today.

The congregation worshiped in this second sanctuary from 1949 to 1957.



6—THE SANCTUARY

The present sanctuary of Community Presbyterian Church was built in 1957. Groundbreaking took place on February 27, 1957. Exactly eight months later the sanctuary was dedicated on October 27.

Some parts of the sanctuary had also been part of the previous sanctuary.

- The stained glass windows were used in both buildings. They came from Second Presbyterian Church in New York City. The windows were given in honor of Mary Hollings.
- The steeple from the old building was given a new pedestal to make it fit the new sanctuary.

For the first time the congregation had good church school space. A full basement was built beneath the sanctuary for church school classrooms.

The old sanctuary became the church social hall.

The completion of the sanctuary concluded the work of the church's first pastor. Rev. Abbo Abben retired just over two months later, on January 1, 1958.



7—SOME EARLY CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

THE YOUTH GROUP (established 1946)

Raised nearly \$500 at a fair in 1947. "They also distributed Thanksgiving baskets, bought the new hymnals for our church, and make visits to the Sanitarium in Holtsville."

THE LADIES' AID (established 1946 or 1947)

Conducted fund-raising dinners and conducted a "cake and Christmas green" sale, giving the proceeds to the building fund.

THE KUM DOUBLE CLUB (established 1950)

This was a club "with both service and sociability as goals." As soon as it was formed its members volunteered to paint a floor the ladies were concerned about.

THE MEN'S CLUB (established 1953)

Two annual events: a fall dinner and a May communion breakfast. Social events: bowling, basketball, and volleyball. "The members assisted in visitation and work in the buildings," including building a firewall around the heating plant.

OTHER GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES INCLUDED:

The Church School, Vacation Bible School, an Adult Bible Class, and a Church Fair.



8—THE CHURCH SCHOOL BUS

Nowadays some congregations have church vans. In the 1950s Community Presbyterian Church had a bus. Four glimpses of the history of the bus can be found in *Our Friendly Church*:

1951—The annual meeting reported purchase of a church school bus.

1954—The bus broke down and the church school gave a “Tom Thumb Wedding” to help pay for a new, second-hand bus.

1955—The Deacons report at the annual meeting noted that members of the board rotated in driving the bus for the church school.

1957—The bus provided service a mile from the church. There were three sessions of the church school every week (at 9, 10, and 11 a.m.) and the bus served three routes for each of those sessions.

In the church history, *Our Friendly Church*, there is a photograph of the bus, but the volume makes no other reverence about its service to the young conegation.



9—THE MINISTER WHO PLANTED THE SEED

The Rev. William T. P. Rambo

William T. P. Rambo was invited to come to Deer Park while he was still a student at Princeton Theological Seminary.

The pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Babylon, Dr. Abbo Abben, was looking for someone to do mission work in Deer Park as a step toward beginning a church in town. Bill Rambo responded. He visited in the spring of 1935 and came to spend the summer.

In 1936, after graduating from seminary, he continued his ministry as a Presbytery Missionary to the Deer Park congregation. He also served as stated supply of Bellmore Presbyterian Church. He continued in Deer Park until he married his wife, Edith, in 1941, and resigned his position in Deer Park to work full time in Bellmore.

Rev. Rambo later become the first presbytery executive of the newly established Presbytery of Long Island in 1963. He retired in 1977 and still lives in Northport. He continues his ministry as elder statesman to the presbytery and is still a close friend of Community Presbyterian Church. He celebrated his 99th birthday on March 8, 2011.



10—THE FIRST PASTOR

The Rev. Dr. Abbo E. Abben

The Rev. Dr. Abbo E. Abben was the first installed pastor of Community Presbyterian Church. He began to serve on October 1, 1946, a few months after the congregation was incorporated, and continued as pastor until January 1, 1958. When he retired he was elected pastor emeritus.

You could say he was doubly the father of the church. Not only was he the first installed pastor, but more than ten years earlier, when he was pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Babylon, he was responsible for leading the effort to create a church in Deer Park.

Among the notable early achievements of his ministry was the building of the social hall, which served as the church sanctuary for nearly a decade. The last great achievement was the construction of the sanctuary in which the congregation still worships today. He retired two months after it was dedicated.

The church roll numbered 55 members when Dr. Abben began his ministry; it numbered more than 500 members when he retired.

Dr. Abben was a great supporter of Dubuque University, a Presbyterian-related school. Tragically he and his wife, Freida were killed in an auto accident on a trip to Dubuque in 1965.



11—THE SECOND PASTOR

The Rev. Paul Troutman Bahner

The Rev. Paul Troutman Bahner served as pastor of Community Presbyterian Church from May 4, 1958 to March 31 1970. He was elected pastor emeritus after he retired.

One of Rev. Bahner's principle responsibilities as pastor was stabilizing the financial security of the church, which had been strained by the two great building projects of 1948 (the present social hall) and of 1957 (the church sanctuary).

The congregation achieved its peak membership of 675 members on the active roll in 1961, while Rev. Bahner was pastor.

Paul Bahner is best remembered for his skills in church administration and finance, but he had a social side as well. Parishioners still remember times when the people of the church would gather with Rev. Bahner and his wife Mary to hand-crank fresh ice cream at their home.

Rev. Bahner died in 1993.



12—THE THIRD PASTOR

The Rev. Dr. David C. Kaminsky

The Rev. David C. Kaminsky was the pastor of the 1970s for Community Presbyterian Church. He served from February 28, 1971 to May 31 1981.

Rev. Kaminsky had scarcely been installed when the congregation celebrated its Silver Anniversary on May 5, 1971. In 1976 he completed a Doctor of Ministry program and became the Rev. Dr. David C. Kaminisky.

During his ministry a coffee house program began, the first church history was written, and the first candidate for ministry from the congregation, Peter Magnan, entered Princeton Seminary.

After leaving Deer Park, Rev. Kaminsky spent the rest of his years before retirement as a pastor in Youngstown, Ohio. He returned to Deer Park to preach the sermon for the church's Golden Anniversary in 1996. He and his wife, Barbara, now live in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.



13—THE FOURTH PASTOR

The Rev. George Reeves Taylor

In July 1982 the Rev. George Reeves Taylor became the church's fourth pastor. Rev. Taylor was the pastor of the 1980s. He served through June 30, 1989.

The years of Rev. Taylor's ministry offered abundant opportunity for the arts at the church. The music program thrived, aided by the musical abilities of George Taylor and his wife Gretchen. The Presbyterians—the congregation's own theatre troupe — flourished in this time, and the Taylors (as the Kaminskys before them) could be seen in the stage productions produced in the social hall.

Among other accomplishments, Rev. Taylor revived the board of deacons in the church and helped launch the "Friends in Christ" food pantry. During his ministry the church manse was sold (in 1987).

In the fall of 1983 the church held the first fall retreat at Holmes. It was such a success that it became an annual event for more than a dozen years. In the spring the "Holy Rollers" would take their tents and campers to Holmes for a more informal time of fellowship and fun.

For the Taylors, these were years of family growth. The husband and wife who came as a couple to Deer Park in 1982 left with four children in 1989.

The family now lives in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, where Rev. Taylor serves as pastor.



14—THE FIFTH PASTOR

The Rev. John Foster Underwood

The Rev. John F. Underwood, who was born the year the church was organized, began serving as pastor on September 1, 1991. By 2002 he had become the longest serving of the church's pastors.

The first major renovation of the church sanctuary since it was built was undertaken as the church prepared to celebrate its Golden anniversary. That was followed by a second round of renovations that saw upgrades to the facilities in the church school and youth areas.

With Rev. Underwood came a history of church service. He was the fourth generation of ordained ministers in a family most noted for its missionary work in Korea. One of the highlights of his early ministry was an international food fair that, combined with other projects, raised ten thousand dollars for North Korean famine relief. His wife, Judie, reinforced the international tone of his ministry; she came from Nova Scotia, Canada.

Those decades of ministry were also a time of growth in mission. In those years the church established the weekly Shepherd's Table meals, the Angel Tree program, the mission to El Salvador, an outreach to Haiti, and youth ministry to the hungry of New York City.



15—MINISTERS SENT OUT

From its early days Community Presbyterian has raised up ministers

Four members of the church have become ordained Presbyterian clergy

- ***Peter Magnan***, ordained in 1982, is unique in being the only member baptized and confirmed in Community Presbyterian Church before being ordained to ministry

For nearly 20 years—from the late 1980's to 2005—CPC continually had at least one member preparing for Christian ministry

- ***Beverly Snedeker***, ordained in 1998
- ***Randy Broger***, ordained in 1999
- ***Kathy Nealand***, ordained in 2005

Honorable Mention:

- ***Garfield Brown***—Confirmed in CPC in 1947. Mr. Brown was not ordained to the Presbyterian Ministry, but went on to serve for half a century as the unordained pastor of the Half Hollows Chapel in Dix Hills



16—A PRAYER

In 1955 the members of Community Presbyterian Church were starting to think seriously about building a new sanctuary.

An issue of *The Light* that year included a prayer-poem by Ralph T. Nordlund. That prayer is a good way to look back to the early days of our church. It is also a good prayer for the future of the Community Presbyterian Church in Deer Park.

A PRAYER FOR OUR NEW CHURCH

*O Master Architect who planned the world,
Who drew the vaulted arches of the sky
Help us to plan a temple worthy of Thee,
Where sacrifice of praise may rise on high.*

*O Master Builder of the Living Church,
Help us to build with more than brick or stone;
May faith support, and love cement its walls,
And welcoming doors swing wide for sad and lone.*

*Teach us to build a noble edifice
Unmarred by human faults of life and creed;
Help us to build it broad and large enough
To satisfy the cries of human need!*



17—GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY HYMN

The theme for the fiftieth anniversary of Community Presbyterian Church was "Come Celebrate our Joy."

Rev. Underwood, who wrote many hymn texts during his years of ministry, wrote this hymn to celebrate the theme of the Golden Anniversary. The hymn is sung to "Darwell's 148th" ("Rejoice the Lord is King").

COME CELEBRATE OUR JOY!

*Come celebrate our joy! The joyful strains prolong!
Proclaim our faith and hope and love in gladsome song.
The strains prolong!
Let joy abound where Christ is found! Praise God in song!*

*Come celebrate our faith! You saints who love the Lord.
Come celebrate our trust in God's almighty Word.
Saints of the Lord:
Glad anthems raise of faith; come praise God's mighty Word!*

*Come celebrate our hope! With confidence come sing
Of our eternal home with Jesus Christ our King.
Come let us sing!
May praise redound with hope profound in Christ our King!*

*Come celebrate our love! With one voice sing again,
Our hearts and souls united in a glad "Amen!"
Come sing again!
With one accord praise Christ the Lord. Amen! Amen!*