

— HISTORY —

# Baptist Church played leading role in temperance drive

Part two of seven

In November 1832, the Willimantic Baptist Church's third pastor, the Rev. Alva Gregory, arranged for the church's female members, its "sisters," to vote for deacons in church council. Such actions were a revolutionary step in the history of American women's suffrage.

The Baptist Church also played a leading role in the temperance movement. The Yankee millworkers of the 1830s were famed for their alcohol consumption, and the Willimantic Baptist Church stood firm in its opposition to liquor, and was abhorred of the fact that the local mill owners were paying their workers in whiskey. In November 1834, a member of the church was expelled for being intoxicated, and in 1840, the church voted to "withdraw the Hand of Fellowship" from those engaged in "the sale of ardent spirits as a beverage." A year later the Willimantic Baptist Church forbade slave-owners from participating in services.



Tom Beardsley

By 1857, Willimantic's population, and church membership had grown dramatically, and it was decided to sell the old church to the growing Roman Catholic parish, and to build a new church on the same site.

Willimantic's Baptist society thus engaged the famed local architect, Colonel Edwin Fitch of Mansfield, to design a new church edifice. It was dedicated on Feb. 3, 1858.

Edwin Fitch was one of Connecticut's earliest architect/builders. He designed and built many fine houses, and in 1850 had built a large factory for manufacturing and repairing silk spinning machinery for William Atwood on the Mount Hope River in the section of Mansfield named for him, Atwoodville. This building burned down under mysterious circumstances in October 1877 when being operated by silk

thread manufacturer James MacFarlane. Probably the finest example of Fitch's work is his own house, built in 1836. It is located at 563 Storrs Road (Route 195), just north of the junction with Route 89, and is one of the finest examples of a Greek Revival houses in eastern Connecticut. The Fitch House now serves as a bed and breakfast establishment.

In 1860, Andrew H. Fuller (1812-91) was appointed deacon of the Willimantic Baptist Church. On July 12, 1860, he purchased land on the southern side of Back Road (Pleasant Street), on the church's behalf.

The lot was adjacent to the Linen Co.'s quarry. In recording the transaction, the Windham Land Records, noted that "the Willimantic Linen Company reserves themselves the right to cross or land at all times at a suitable place with teams to their quarry on the bank of the river." In 1861, Willimantic's First Baptist Church financed the building of a large Italianate-style house for its deaconry.

It also served as accommoda-



The deaconry on Pleasant Street is captured in this winter scene in 1946 when it was a private residence.

tion or visiting church dignitaries. It still stands and is located at 197 Pleasant St., just east of the foot-bridge.

Andrew H. Fuller was born in Mansfield in 1812. He came to Willimantic in 1854 to work for the Willimantic Linen Co. and became its chief box maker for the wooden packing cases employed to transport spools of thread. He served as deacon of the Baptist Church for 30 years. Shortly after his retirement from he post, Fuller died of a heart attack. When his widow departed for Hartford in 1896, the Baptist

Church sold the deaconry.

The Willimantic Baptist Church, as well as being in the forefront in woman's suffrage, was a staunch supporter of the anti-slavery movement. It also provided 35 soldiers to the Union Army during the Civil War. Two were killed, one in action, and one starved in the prison camp at Andersonville. In 1864, the church's pastor, the Rev. E.D. Bentley, went to the battlefield and field hospitals to provide "spiritual things" to the soldiers.

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The Lincoln Square area of Willimantic is captured in this

Beyond the color, form and design of every early Native American basket lay a woman's unspoken story about weaving a culture. Baskets were her paintings, sculpture, and cathedrals. Her struggles and triumphs.

The Pacific Coast Pomo legend has it that when the mythical hero Marumda created the world he gave its women all the plants necessary for crafting baskets.

With an infinite source of raw

Monache basket maker Norma Turner. The baskets were fine enough to honor a tribal hero and worthy enough to be taken into the afterworld.

Sometimes called the mother of pottery, basketry is as old as the human race. From carrying water to storing nuts and seeds, baskets played a part in shaping Native American life from birth to death.

Infants were placed in basketry cradleboards after birth. The tra-

spirits lingered at their own graves. As a result, mourning friends would leave baskets of bread and food next to burial places for nourishment.

The weaver's patient hand along with her teeth and fingernails were used to shape baskets for trapping and fishing, cooking, serving, and storing food.

Weavers lead lives as different as their designs. Even though each worked within a limited