

Address by

Mr. David Floyd

Delivered June 4, 1911

On the Occasion of the Observance of the Fortieth  
Anniversary of the Dedication of the  
Edifice of the First Methodist  
Episcopal Church of  
Winthrop

"What is a church?' Let truth and reason speak, they would reply: 'The faithful, pure and meek from Christian folds, the one selected race of all professions, and in every place.'"

"What is a church?' An honest sexton tells, 'Tis a tall building, with a tower and bells.'"

In what I shall have to say this morning I shall rely almost entirely on written or printed records, to give some idea of the place which this building has occupied in the religious history of Winthrop.

While the one thousand sea-washed acres known since 1852 as the town of Winthrop, have been the place of abode of white men for 274 years, and where a few dwellings still remain which were erected before the passing away in Boston of Governor John Winthrop, this service is held in the only building in our town which has been continually used as a place of Divine Worship for forty years.

The few seventeenth century residents of old Pullin Point sold or exchanged the products of their farms and fish weirs at the Boston market, attended town meetings at the town hall at the head of State Street, and had their children baptized in either the First, Second or Old South Churches. The families of Dean Winthrop, Captain William Pierce and those bearing the name of Bill were connected with these earliest churches of Old Boston, the pastors of which came here to attend funerals and perform marriage ceremonies.

When in the year 1710 the first meeting house was erected in old Rumney Marsh, the territory now Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop, and then inhabited by about forty families, it appears that certain



of the half a dozen families then living at Pullin Point signed a protest to the town against the proposed action claiming that ample accomodations for worship were furnished by the meeting houses in near by places. None of the seven men who signed the Covenant when the church was organized in 1715 by Rev. Cotton Mather were residents of Pullin Point, but a number of the descendants of its early members soon moved to this section, and for a century thereafter the old church which celebrated its 200th anniversary last December, was the place of worship for most of the Pullen Point people.

About the year 1756 the first meeting house was erected in the territory now Winthrop. This was at Point Shirley, where a number of Boston merchants had established a fishing station, built dwellings, a school house and a church. On the occasion of a dinner celebrating the opening of the enterprise in 1753 the place was named Point Shirley in honor of Gov. William Shirley, who was present. As most of the proprietors of the Point at that time were Episcopalians, Judge Chamberlain's history thinks this may have been a chapel of the Church of England. The town of Chelsea in making an appropriation of 100 pounds in 1756 for the support of the ministry of the whole town, provided that such part of this amount as should be laid on Point Shirley, "go towards the support of the ministry there."

The first school house in this part of Old Chelsea was erected in 1805 on a part of the present town hall grounds. Here Rev. Joseph Tuckerman of the old Revere church already referred to,



sometimes preached, as the records under date of Nov. 1, 1809 state: "Admitted Miss Priscilla Belcher to full communion. The service was performed in the school house at Pullin Point, the deacons being appointed to represent the church. On this afternoon I closed the services at the Point for the season. They were commenced in the spring of 1804 and have been conducted regularly."

The first Methodist preaching in the school building referred to was by Rev. Daniel Fillmore on the evening of January 18, 1817. In the following year a church organization was effected and certificates given contributors, who were thereby excused from paying the "minister" tax to the town of Chelsea.

In 1827, through failure to hold annual meetings, the organization was void, and on March 28th of that year a meeting was held with John Sargent Tewksbury, chairman, and Joseph Belcher, clerk. It was voted to support Methodist preaching by subscription, and Joseph Belcher, Joseph Burrill and Samuel Belcher were made the Committee.

In 1832 a revival of religion added many to the little society, and as a result the few people then living here built a church containing 24 pews which was dedicated Nov. 19, 1834.

In 1857 the church became independent of either the Malden or North Bennett Street quarterly Conferences and received its first pastor from the New England Conference, Rev. John M. Merrill. The church was then filled, and the town hall having been just erected, services were held in the latter place until 1862. The old church building was enlarged, settees taking the place of the pews, and was again used as a place of worship. Rev. Porter M. Vinton



followed Mr. Blackmer, and in the year 1869 Rev. Charles S. Nutter came from Boston University, where he was one of the first class in the Theological school, as a pastor, and through his efforts in uniting the people the work of the church prospered, a tent was erected at Hamilton Camp ground, an old debt on the chapel was paid off, and a subscription obtained by the pastor towards the erection of a new church.

SUBSCRIPTION LIST

Winthrop, April 23rd, 1870

We, the undersigned, promise to pay the sum affixed to our several names for the purpose of erecting a Church in some central locality in the town at a cost not exceeding ten thousand dollars. Said church to be known as the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Winthrop and to be held in trust by officers chosen for the purpose according to the rules and usages of said Church.

| <u>NAMES</u>       | <u>FOR A PEWED CHURCH</u>              | <u>FOR A FREE CHURCH</u> |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Joseph L. Piper,   | \$500.00                               | 300.00                   |
| David Belcher,     | 500.00 and a lot of land               |                          |
| Samuel Ingalls,    | 1000.00 and $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of land |                          |
| John L. Sawyer,    | 200.00                                 | 200.00                   |
| J. W. Dadmun,      | 200.00                                 | 200.00                   |
| Phillips P. Floyd, | 200.00                                 |                          |
| Thomas Floyd,      | 200.00                                 |                          |
| Edward Floyd,      | 150.00                                 |                          |
| H. C. Dunham,      | 100.00                                 |                          |
| L. C. Tewksbury,   | 200.00                                 | 200.00                   |
| Josiah Floyd,      | 100.00                                 |                          |
| S. G. Irwin,       | 200.00                                 | 150.00                   |
| G. W. Tewksbury,   | 100.00                                 | 100.00                   |
| H. B. Tewksbury,   | 500.00                                 | 500.00                   |
| W. B. Belcher,     | 200.00                                 |                          |
| S. H. Griffin,     | 100.00                                 |                          |
| Mary Paine,        | 200.00                                 |                          |
| William P. Willis, | 100.00                                 |                          |
| John Schuler,      | 100.00                                 |                          |
| Sumner Floyd,      | 100.00                                 |                          |
| Alfred H. Pierce,  | 150.00                                 |                          |
| J. W. Davison,     | 50.00                                  |                          |
| Hannah B. Floyd,   | 100.00                                 |                          |
| Warren Belcher,    | 50.00                                  |                          |
| W. B. Floyd,       | 200.00                                 |                          |



NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS OF THE DAY

Boston Evening Traveller, September 14, 1870:

WINTHROP

"Quite a company gathered at an early hour this morning to witness the ceremony of breaking ground for the New Methodist Church at Winthrop. Services commenced with the singing of Coronation, the singing being conducted by Rev. J. W. Dadman. The pastor, C. S. Nutter, then made a brief address. Prayer was then offered by Rev. E. P. King, a former pastor. After singing again, the first sod was thrown out by the pastor, and then the whole congregation rose and sang the doxology with great spirit. The benediction was pronounced by Father Dunham, and then men, women, and children made some of the sod fly. The congregation then scattered and the builders began their work. The plans of the edifice, which is to be of wood, were drawn by the well-known architect, S. J. F. Thayer, of this city. It is to be erected by McLaren Brothers of East Boston."

Zions Herald, June 1 and 8, 1871:

Dedication at Winthrop

"The new M. E. Church in Winthrop will be dedicated (D. V.) on Thursday, June 8th, at 3 o'clock P. M. Sermon by Rev. I. G. Bidwell. Dedicatory service by William R. Clark, D. D. At the close of the service the ladies of the Society will furnish a collation. The former pastors and friends of the church are cordially invited. A glorious day for Winthrop and Methodism is anticipated. Persons desiring to attend will be furnished with ample conveyance from East Boston to Winthrop and return by the Winthrop Coaches. They will leave Maverick Square, East Boston, for Winthrop precisely at 2 o'clock P. M."



June 15, 1871, Zions Herald:

"The Winthrop Church was dedicated last Thursday. Rev. Mr. Bidwell preached with his usual power on the sacrifice of Christ, the center of Christianity. A collection of \$900.00 was taken. The house is a very neat edifice, semi gothic, costing about \$15,000. It is the only church in the place, and the town is rapidly growing. It is the prettiest watering place around Boston Harbor. It is only three or four miles from East Boston, and will ere long be attached to that ward of the City by horse cars, and possible by annexation. Dr. Ingalls, David Belcher, Rev. Messrs. Dunham and Dadmun, Capt. Irwin, Messrs. Sumner and Payson Floyd, Sawyer, Tewksbury and others, have liberally aided in the enterprise. George B. Emerson, Robert C. Winthrop and Albert Bowker have also contributed."

Zions Herald, June 22, 1871:

(The following was probably written by Gilbert Haven, then editor, who taught in the old school house at Chelsea Point in 1845.)

"We gave an account of the Winthrop Church last week. The church is one of the proofs of the old wisdom, not yet departed from us, which made us go out into unoccupied districts, and preach the glad tidings. This neglected spot thrust out into the sea, was visited by the itinerant. The schoolhouse, a little, old brown affair, echoed to his voice, a class and church were ordained, preaching by gift and by chance continued for some time, a chapel was built. Brother Southerland and others labored here as local preachers. The few fishermen and farmers were increased by Boston merchants seeking a summer home, and thus, by slow degrees, the hamlet and congregation were built up,--the pretty



church replaces the tiny chapel, which replaced the old school house. Mr. S. J. F. Thayer is the architect, and has given about as pretty a thing for the money, as one often sees. The village is called properly Winthrop, as the first Governor had a farm here, which is yet in possession of his family.--It could also have been called Sturgis, and this family belongs here, the representative of it in Baring Brothers belonging to this spot.-- George B. Emerson, L. S. D., Gen. Bartlett, the youngest and ablest of the Massachusetts Generals during the war, and other celebrities made this place their home.--Rev. Mr. Nutter had much to do in getting up the new church, as well as those mentioned last week, and Rev. Mr. Richardson, the present pastor, fills up that which remaineth behind of his predecessor's labors.-- The Society will flourish more and more, as the place is rapidly growing and their new church may yet become too strait for them. May that soon be!"

Services in the new building were well attended and the following winter many names were added to the roll of probationers and of members. One burden, however, rested on most of the men who had given much of their time, energy, and substance to make the building possible. Through failure to realize on some promises, mostly outside of Winthrop, a debt of \$6,800. remained, for which certain trustees and stewards were personally liable. For six years these men, who had already contributed the larger part of what was raised to build the church, paid the interest on



the notes. When John D. Pickles became pastor, in 1877, he soon discovered how the work of the minister and people was retarded by the state of affairs noted, and he directed an effort which resulted in a subscription which promised to pay the entire amount in four annual payments. About two-thirds of the amount was subscribed by those who had already paid largely. At the end of four years the subscriptions were all paid and the people rejoiced. Those who worship here should always bear in grateful remembrance the memory of the noble men and women who bore the financial burdens of the church when the chapel was erected in 1834, when the church was built in 1871, and when the debt was fully provided for in 1877. Such long life was given to several of the number that they contributed to each of the three offerings.

Nor should the work of the women of this church go unmentioned today. In personal gifts and as members of the Ladies' Church Aid Society they did most efficient service at the time of the church building, and also in paying the debt. On the second occasion the attempt to get subscriptions lagged, and was only begun when the women of the Church went down stairs to the vestry during an intermission, and voted to give one thousand dollars. The rest was subscribed at the evening service, Rev. D. W. Couch of Madison, Wisconsin, assisting the pastor.

What of Gilbert Haven's prophecy concerning the town and this church? Forty years have passed, and although three hundred of its one thousand acres have been appropriated for public purposes by the Town, the State, the Railroad Company or the National



Government, on the remaining seven hundred acres dwell more people than on any similar area in any Massachusetts town. A population of six hundred souls in 1871, has now become ten thousand, an increase in forty years of 1666 per cent. Winthrop's assessed value today is 2,100 per cent more than it was two score years ago, and the cost of maintaining the 24 town departments of this year, compared with the disbursements for the five divisions of the Town's activities in 1871, shows an increase in the town's expenses during the period of 4,200 per cent. The same difference is also shown by the tax rate of \$9.00 per \$1,000. when but few things were done for the people from the town treasury, compared with a rate of twice that amount levied last year.

A factor in bringing about the results mentioned has been the increase in the number of opportunities to travel between Boston and Winthrop, from five to one hundred times each day, a gain in transportation facilities of 2,000 per cent. Another reason for the growth named is the fact that the expense of such a journey is now only one-fifth of the fare paid by those who came from Boston to the dedication forty years ago.

Many of the people living in Winthrop today do not realize how much they are indebted to the strong men of this church and to other strong men of the Baptist Society, (which was fully organized the year this church was erected,) for the character of the earlier summer residents of our beaches. Doctor Samuel Ingalls had much to do in developing a part of this property



and his strong temperance convictions found expression in the declaration when offering land for sale: "There shall be one sea girt resort (at least) where the fiend of the still shall not hold court." When after a few years some said it was time the Puritanical Church people cease to control town affairs, an attempt was made to ignore prohibitions contained in deeds of land as well as in the laws of the state, the people of the churches and other good citizens under lead of the good Doctor, formed an organization which in name and in fact stood for and brought about the enforcement of law and order. Had other counsels prevailed how different would have been the character of subsequent residents.

Without the six church buildings erected during the past forty years Winthrop would never have become the summer or the year-round home of many families who have wrought well here in many good causes. That the church people of today have strong convictions and the courage of the same is evident from the fact that their protest, voiced by the clergymen of the town, against the violation of Massachusetts's Sunday laws, is receiving the attention at Washington, of Major-Generals, Senators, and Cabinet Ministers.

But some one laments: "The churches are not what they used to be in membership and in attendance." I have tried to answer this complaint by figures, as in the secular matters already referred to. From information furnished by the Pastors or the clerks of the Winthrop Churches of today there appears to be about 2,600 people connected with the six Winthrop organizations. This



is 3,000 per cent more than belonged to the Methodist and Baptist Societies in 1871.

Considering one half of the 2,600 as connected with the Roman Catholic Church, and that nearly every member of such families are included as members, the membership of the Winthrop Protestant Churches is today larger in proportion than it was forty years ago.

The amount actually paid toward building the church in the year 1871 was considerably more than the entire town tax of that year. An amount spent for church building and enlargements during the year 1911 in proportion to the offering of forty years ago would aggregate for the entire town \$300,000.

When the first chapel was built in 1834 there were but three Methodist Episcopal churches in Suffolk County; Bennett St., Bromfield Street and Dorchester. In 1871 this number had increased to twenty, and today there are 29 Methodist Churches in Boston, Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop.

This church has had seventeen pastors during 40 years and its membership has increased from 54 to 290. Its Sunday school had 15 officers and teachers and 75 scholars, a total of 90; the corresponding figures for this year are 40 and 315, a total of 355. The Ladies' Society has rendered efficient service during all these years and the church has kept pace with recent general movements in the establishment of societies for the promotion of various kinds of church work by people of all ages.

Besides paying the regular church expenses, the amount contributed towards the various benevolences of the church has constantly increased the total, obtained from an estimate calculated from the payments made one year in each decade, aggregate \$17,000



for the years since the dedication.

Those present who have attended anniversaries of earlier events in the history of this church will recall the late Warren Belcher's interesting remarks on the music rendered in the long ago days in the old school house and in the first chapel. The same ability and willingness to sing has characterized the people who have worshipped in this building, and no family contributed for so long a period as Mr. Belcher's own family. The last one of the "Belcher Quartette" Mrs. Lena E. Wyman, has recently joined her father, Warren Belcher, her sister Alice, and her brother Warren E. in "the beautiful land of Song." Members of this family and many others, whom we have heard this morning, promise a continuance of this part of the church service.