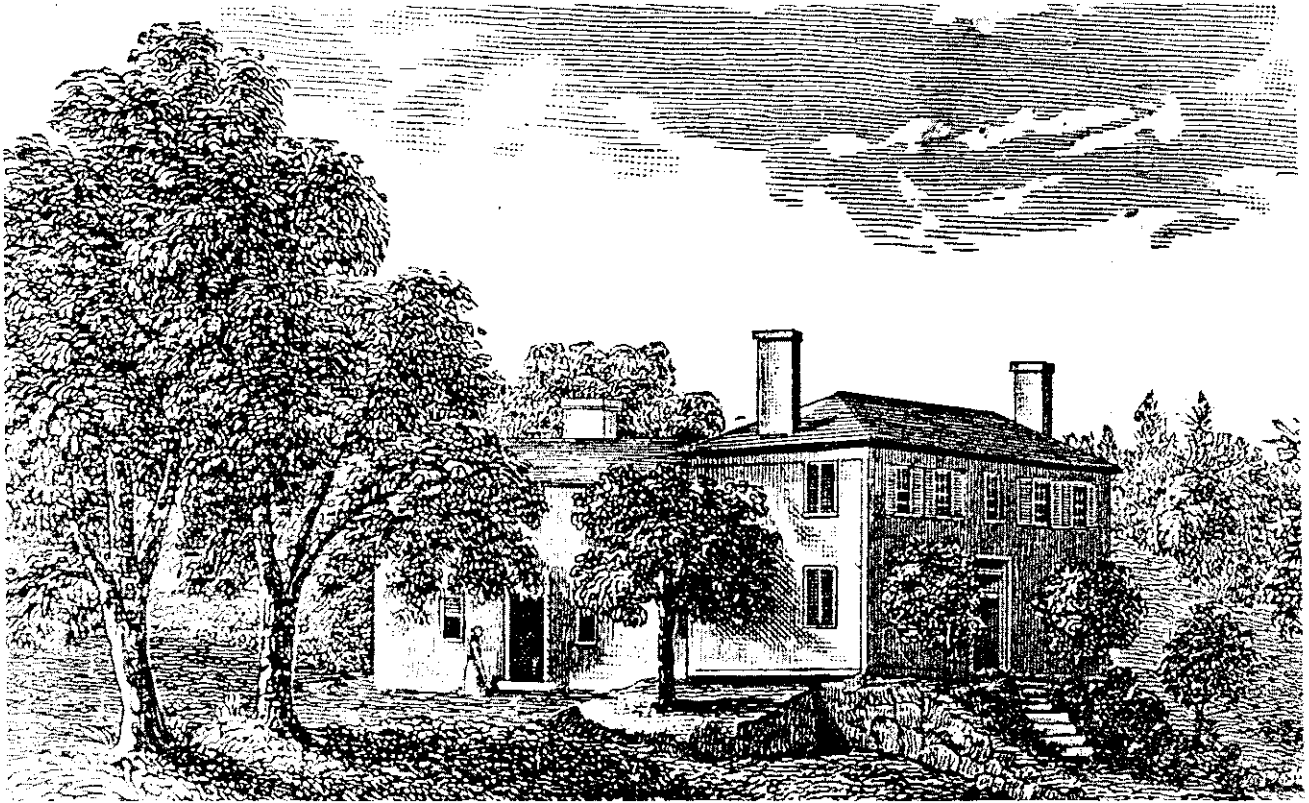


THE EARLY BEGINNINGS - 1789



Bemis - Pickering Homestead

For all the Saints, alleluia! We need to be reminded frequently of the "*Saints who from their labors rest,*" who, as a result of their faith in God and dedication to the work of His Kingdom, have bequeathed to us, not only a church building, but a like spirit of dedication of purpose.

The history of Methodism in Weston has its earliest beginnings in 1789. In that year Abraham Bemis, a prosperous farmer and son-in-law of John Quincy Adams, heard and was inspired by one of the early Methodist "Circuit Riders" while visiting the produce market in Lynn. This led to the first formal Methodist worship when a Methodist circuit rider held an open air meeting in Weston. The

service was held at the corner of Lexington Road and Leominster Road (now known as Conant Road and North Avenue). We presume this location was chosen because it was a central point and easily accessible to people from Lexington, Waltham, Lincoln and Weston. The church building now occupies that same location. The preacher stood on a small hill (about where the present parsonage now stands) and people gathered at the foot of the hill to listen. About 200 were in attendance at the meeting from the surrounding towns. It is thought by historians that the preacher was John Hill, who later became the first pastor, as he was in the vicinity at that time. The date of this meeting was August 1790.



BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY
1745-1816

Because of the interest shown at this meeting, Bishop Asbury came here on July 13, 1791, and this time the meeting was held in the rear of the Benjamin Bemis home. (This land is presently owned by the Polaroid Corporation, Winter Street, Waltham.)

After the Lynn Conference on August 1 and 2, 1793, Bishop Asbury mounted his horse and headed west. He spent time at Waltham at the homestead of Benjamin Bemis, who was one of the first Methodists in that town, and whose mansion, situated among the hills and surrounded by fragrant orchards, became not only a sanctuary for worship for his rustic neighbors, but the favorite home of the itinerants of Methodism. He was a man of wealth, and his hospitalities seemed only to enhance his prosperity.

Nearly all the great men of the early church were entertained beneath his roof and proclaimed "the glorious Gospel" in the shade of his trees to the assembled yeomanry of the town. The conversion of many souls has consecrated the spot and its old historical reminiscences still endear it to the Methodists of the Eastern States. (This paragraph is quoted from Stevens' History of the Methodist Church.)

Our church was officially organized in late spring or early summer of 1794. It was organized at the home of Bemis, and his name appeared first on the Class papers. The first class consisted of twelve members, seven of whom bore the name of Bemis -- Jonas, Tabithy, Abraham, Abigail, Elizabeth, Mary 1st and 2nd, and Ephraim Adams, Susannah Adams, Elizabeth Adams, Daniel Stratton and Martha Stratton. The first preacher assigned to Weston was Reverend John Hill.

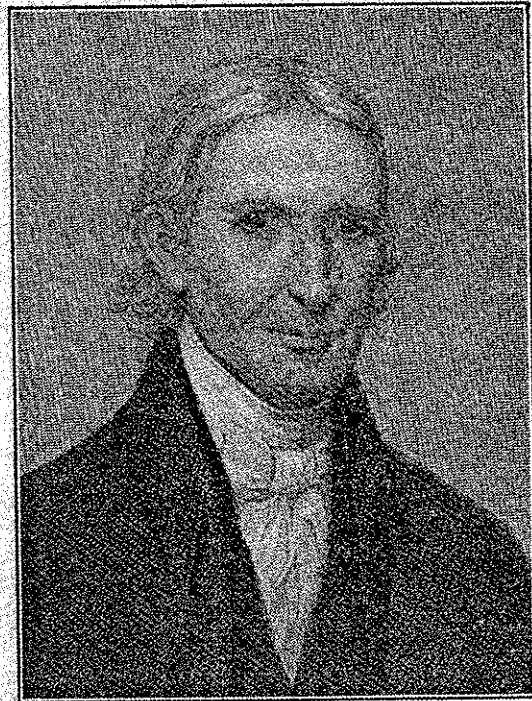
It must be remembered how difficult it must have been for these members to support a new church, as all residents were taxed by the town for the support of the Town Church, which was known as the Congregational Society and now is known as the Unitarian Church. Each member of the Methodist Church was then supporting two churches.

When the church was organized in 1794, George Washington was President of the United States. So our church has been in existence under all the presidents of the United States.

In 1795, the Reverend John Vanne-
man was the pastor. The church must
have prospered, for in 1796 two new
pastors were assigned, Reverend
Joshua Hall and Reverend George
Pickering. At this time Weston was in
the Needham Circuit, which included
Needham, Marlboro and Framingham
(now the Saxonville Church) and
Hopkinton. These pastors had to
serve each in turn -- sort of a small
circuit in itself.

It is interesting to note here that at this
time Methodist classes were held in
West Needham (now Wellesley, and
the south part of Weston). Old records
of Needham Circuit show that a great
number of classes were held at the
Bogle farm (now Bogle Street) in
Weston. Bogle was a leader in
Needham as Bemis was in our church.
It must have been rather convenient
for the "Preacher of the Day" to go
from the Captain Fiske farm (now
Cedar Hill Farm) to the Bogle farm
and not leave boundaries. Is it not
strange that a Weston man (Bogle)
should organize the Needham church,
and a Waltham man (Bemis) should
do the same in Weston.

I doubt if at that time George Pickering
realized he would be connected with
our church for the following 50 years,
but this was so. At the end of the year
Reverend Pickering married Mary
Bemis, daughter of Benjamin Bemis,
who was 20 years old at that time.
They made the Bemis homestead their
home, and after the death of Bemis,
the place became known as the
Pickering homestead.



THE REVEREND GEORGE PICKERING
1769-1846

THE FIRST BUILDING CONSTRUCTED

In 1797, Daniel Ostrander and Elias
Hull were the ministers of the church,
and George Pickering the Presiding
Elder (now known as District
Superintendent) from 1797-1800. This
is the year our first church building
was constructed. It was built on the
site now occupied by the home of Mr.
and Mrs. Robert Millen (at this
writing). Following is a description of
the church found in Colonel Daniel
Lamson's History of the Town of
Weston: "The first house for public
worship was erected in 1797 and stood
in the pasture, now owned by Mrs.

Fiske, to the right of the road leading to the Poor Farm. The structure was not imposing, but often filled with devout worshippers. A very aged member of the church told the writer of this article, even though there were no stoves to warm them in winter and they had to sit on slabs and hear the Word of God, still the services were very helpful and very spiritual."

This was the fifth Methodist Church building in Massachusetts and the seventh in New England. All the difficulties and oppositions were successfully met and overcome and the new Society grew steadily. Around 1800, meetings were held to make plans to erect a new and larger church. As the town now had a Methodist Church and a Baptist Church, they joined forces to protest at Town Meetings from time to time against supporting the established church. The following is a protest made at a Town Meeting in 1822:

"The undersigned members of the Baptist and Methodist Societies of Weston, having been compelled in years past by illegal assessments to defray a proportional part of the expenses annually recurring in the Congregational Society of said town -- such as making and collecting the ministerial tax, ring bell, providing wood, abatement of Parish tax in repairing meeting house, etc., -- do earnestly petition that some measure may be taken by the town, effectually to prevent like imposition in the future, that the aforesaid Baptist and Methodist Societies may be exempt from all unjust charges and unlawful taxation."

This petition was signed by 22 members of both Societies, but these protests had little effect at that time for it was not until 1840 when this tax was abolished.

From 1800, the church grew steadily in membership and the need for a new, larger church was apparent. George Pickering was again the Presiding Elder - 1803-1805.

On Monday, June 11, 1807, Bishop Asbury visited the Bemis home. He had been attending the Annual Conference held the previous week in Boston and was now on his way to Wilbraham. He did not preach this time, but felt it was a good opportunity to see how the Weston church was progressing while visiting his very good friends, Bemis and Pickering.

In 1821, a tavern was built by Milton Daggett on the corner of what is now Merriam Street and North Avenue. Mr. Daggett became very active in our church. He was a good religious man and an ardent church worker. He taught one of the Bible classes, which at that time was attended only by adults. However, he succeeded in interesting the youth of the church in attending. Soon it was apparent there was great need of a Sabbath School. Later he became superintendent of one.

Around 1825 three families of Waltham, and members of the Weston Methodist Society, who moved to Lowell and found no Methodist Society there, organized and founded the first Society in Lowell.

The church is now St. Paul's Methodist. So the work spread.

Meanwhile, the main topic of discussion at church meetings was a new church. The problems were great. The parishioners owned no land and were still paying taxes for the support and upkeep of the established church. The first step to solve their problems was to incorporate under the laws of the Commonwealth. The paper is dated April 14, 1824 - the legal name shown to be, "The Methodist Episcopal

Society of Weston." This petition was signed by Abraham Bemis and Francis Pickering, George Pickering's son.

At the first legal meeting, Joel Smith was chosen Moderator and Ephraim Brown, Clerk. It is interesting to note Article IV, which stated, "Jonas Bemis and Jonas Stearns be on a committee to preserve order in the public meetings and provide seats when the house is crowded."



Sketch of original Meeting House for public worship - 1797