

## Cooperation, Community & Christianity: The West Concord Union Church & Its Predecessors

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During the second half of the nineteenth century West Concord's economic base decidedly shifted from agricultural to industrial, as the number of factories and businesses grew. Still more jobs were generated when the Concord Reformatory opened in 1878. More available jobs meant more workers and their families, necessitating the construction of housing on land that had once been grazed and tilled, and all of this crisscrossed with busy rail lines that facilitated commerce, allowing people, raw materials, and finished products easy access in and out of the area. West Concord, first called Westvale and later Concord Junction, was thriving. What was lacking, though, was a proper church.

Recognizing the difficulty of traveling from West Concord to the Milldam on Sunday mornings, a religious society was established in 1880 under the leadership of the Reverend H.G. Buckingham, a Methodist. Two years later the Reverend Bartlett H. Weston, a Congregationalist, was called, and the society organized itself as the Third Congregational Church of Concord. The Westvale Chapel Society was also gathered at about the same time, meeting in Warner Hall, but there clearly remained an unfulfilled need in the religious community. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1889, the first Sunday of the year, members of both churches and other interested parties met in Warner Hall with the intention of gathering a congregation to serve West Concord. On that evening the West Concord Union Church, democratically choosing to be undenominational and beholden to no one, was founded.

This newly gathered congregation needed a suitable building in which to hold services. Land was purchased on the corner of Main and Pine Streets (opposite the present Fowler branch) and fundraising was begun. By April of 1893, over \$3000.00 had been raised. Architect A.F. Hayes was hired to design the church and builder W.H. Keyes to construct it. The Concord Reading Club and Loring N. Fowler each contributed \$100.00 toward the purchase of a bell, while the former Third Congregational Church donated its communion service. The church was dedicated on February 6, 1894.

In a few short years the congregation had increased in size, partially as a result of the many Concord Reformatory employees and their families who came to worship there. Activities expanded to include a Ladies' Union, youth groups, Christian Endeavor and other programs, both religious and secular. The need for a larger building became apparent, so the original building was moved back, given over to new uses, and a new church built nearer to Main Street. It was dedicated in 1910.

In 1957 the West Concord Union Church became affiliated with the United Church of Christ, as it remains today, an *open and affirming congregation*.

If you would like to learn more, please visit the church's website at [www.westconcordunionchurch.org](http://www.westconcordunionchurch.org)

## The West Concord Union Church & Its Predecessors

### Top Shelf, from left:

- *Dedication of the House of Worship of the West Concord Union Church, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1894*
- West Concord Union Church, before 1909
- Records of the Westvale Chapel Society Sunday (Sabbath) School, 12 December 1878 - 1891

### Second Shelf, from left:

- Westvale Union Society Treasurer's records, 1886-1889
- Record book, 1891-1916 (including "Agreement of Association" and "Notice of First Meeting")

### Third Shelf, from left:

- Thanksgiving Program, 21 November 1951
- Westvale Chapel Society. Minutes from Westvale Chapel Society meetings and the Third Congregational Church meetings, 2 April 1890 - 21 December 1893
- West Concord Union Church, before 1909

### Fourth Shelf, from left:

- Ladies' Union records, 1897-1902
- Ladies' Union loose receipts, 1905
- West Concord Union Church, ca. 1909-1920 (postcard image)

### Bottom Shelf, from left:

- Treasurer's Records, 1891-1895
- List of donors (and amounts donated) for Church lot and building (formerly laid into record book with minutes of meetings, 1891-1916)