

North Castle History



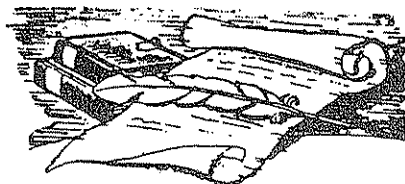
Armonk United Methodist Church, 1787-1987. Photo by Albert Conte.

METHODISM AT NORTH CASTLE

MECHANICS HALL

The North Castle Historical Society

Bedford Road, Armonk, New York 10504



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

As our annual publication goes to press, the joy I feel is tempered by the tragic death of our editor, Norman "Bud" Stone. At his death, he was working on this issue, and we know he would have wanted us to bring it to you as quickly as we could. His efforts and those of our other devoted volunteers and contributors continue to bring the history of North Castle to life for us all.

By now many of you have seen the "37 mile marker," a marker from the old Danbury Post Road, which, after much effort, was moved to our property this year. Unfortunately, at its original site, approximately two hundred feet to the east, the marker had been subjected to the vicissitudes of 20th century traffic. Its move, like the move of the East Middle Patent School and the Brundage Blacksmith Shop, has insured that present and future generations can see what life in North Castle once was. These buildings and our Colonial Crafts Fair allow the children in our local schools to observe and participate in activities recreating their earlier life. Our entire complex, including Smith's Tavern, welcomed many other visitors this year. We hope that more of you will come and visit with us on Wednesdays and Saturdays, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m.

I want to close by thanking all of you who have made our activities possible. If you have not yet volunteered, and have any spare time, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Without help, our history will be lost.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan R. Shimer". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'S'.

Susan R. Shimer

— IN MEMORIAM —



NORMAN M. STONE
JESSIE C. STONE

In the midst of the holiest and happiest season of the year, the citizens of North Castle were shocked and horrified by the tragic disaster that took the lives of two of our most active community leaders. Norman "Bud" and Jessie Stone died when a fire engulfed their home in North White Plains in the early morning hours of December 21, 1987.

Bud was born in Utica, New York November 27, 1920. He came to New York City and attended Fordham University and City University of New York. Jessie Clawson was born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri on November 22, 1920. She moved to Rutherford, New Jersey and was educated there. Jessie and Bud met in New York City when they were beginning their working careers, and they were married December 6, 1941. In 1948 Jessie and Bud "found" North Castle and the lot at 2 Roberta Place where, on holidays and weekends between 1948-1951, they built, with their own hands, their lifetime home.

During these years Bud was employed by the New York Central Railroad, working in advertising and public relations. He became editor of The Headlight,

the railroad's "in house" company magazine. He retired in 1968 as vice president in charge of that division having been with the railroad for 27 years.

As soon as the Stones arrived in North Castle they began to participate in community affairs. They joined the Republican clubs, and became Friends of the Library, Bud having greatly assisted in bringing the Library branch to North White Plains. They became active in the First Church of Christ Scientist in White Plains where they were leaders in the church, both serving terms as First Reader and Bud as a member of the Board of Trustees. At the time of her death Jessie was a highly respected and admired legal secretary in White Plains.

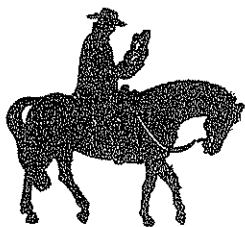
Both the Stones were active in their chosen political party and each served as a member of the Republican Town Committee. Bud had the honor of serving twice as chairman of the party, first from 1962 to 1968 and then from 1986 until his death. He was elected to the Town Board in 1966 and resigned in 1971 to fill an unexpired term on the Westchester County Board of Legislators. At the close of his term he devoted himself to his own Manhattan based public relations firm, The Stone Group. In 1982 he returned to public service when appointed to membership on the North Castle Planning Board, serving until 1986 when he resigned to accept the post of Republican Town Committee Chairman.

In every position of public trust Bud distinguished himself as being fairminded and innovative. To Bud, honesty and integrity were the essential ingredients in good politics and good government.

However, the main purpose of this memoir is to pay tribute to Bud's active membership and participation in The North Castle Historical Society. He was present and joined the membership on Charter Night, February 29, 1972. He served two separate terms as a trustee: from 1972-79 at which time he served as corresponding secretary, and in 1984 he returned to the board to take over the editorship of this publication, a painstaking project that takes much expertise and attention to accuracy. Bud had edited three volumes and was working on this volume at the time of his death. He was also serving as third vice president. Over the years he served on numerous committees and carried out special assignments, including 1987 co-chairman of the Society's annual tag sale, and securing permission from the N.Y. State Department of Transportation to move the 37th mile marker on the Danbury Post Road (Route 22) to the Society's property. Bud was extremely interested in historic matters and our Society is deeply indebted to him for his significant contribution towards preserving our town's history.

The Stones are survived by their son, Peter, daughter, Alice MacMillan, four grandchildren, and a host of friends who will ever remember their graciousness, style, and love for their community, friends and fellowman.

Richard N. Lander



1787-1987

METHODISM AT NORTH CASTLE

By Richard N. Lander

The following article was excerpted from a book titled, A History of the Armonk United Methodist Church, written by Richard N. Lander and published by the Armonk United Methodist Church, first on the occasion of its 175th Anniversary in 1962, and revised and reprinted in 1987 in celebration of its 200th Anniversary.

Mr. Lander is a trustee and president of the Board of Trustees of the church.

The War for Independence had completely devastated Westchester County, and the Town of North Castle was no exception to the general situation. In 1785-86, the town embraced all of the territory presently in the Towns of North Castle and New Castle, with an estimated population of 2,475 persons.¹ Of all the interior towns of the county, with the exception of neighboring Bedford, it was the largest and most populous.

With the close of hostilities in 1781, the countryside began to return to normal. In 1783, a regular appointment for New York City again appears in the minutes of the Methodist Conference. If any of the appointed pastors ventured out of the city to Westchester, or to North Castle in particular, all traces of their coming and their work have been lost. Tradition says there was a class meeting at North Castle prior to the war, but the author has found no record to substantiate this. However, the reader must wonder, as has the writer, at the rapidity with which the Methodist movement grew once it reached North Castle, and at the events which followed so quickly upon one another, culminating in the founding of the church. Perhaps it can be explained by the hunger of the people for religious services after the hard, cruel times of the war. Reverend Thomas Lamont, in an address delivered at the Katonah Methodist Church in 1878, states:

"No part of the country had suffered more in the late contest. Westchester County being a kind of borderland had often been ravaged by both armies. In some places the churches had been burned, in others closed, and the ordinances of religion suspended. The people in many places, not only impoverished but morally and spiritually destitute greatly needed the Gospel whether they were ready to receive it or not."

Barrett and Horton in *Scharff's History* (of Westchester County—1886), tell us that the coming of the Methodist itinerants was warmly received, and "when they entered upon this field of labor they found it 'white to the harvest.' "

The first itinerant to reach North Castle was Thomas Ware.² He was actually appointed to the newly established Long Island Circuit at the conference of 1786. Ware, one of the greatest traveling preachers of the church, did not go immediately to Long Island, but supplied his appointments there with local preachers and extended his labors into Westchester County.

Although Ware does not mention North Castle by name, the historians of the church agree that he preached throughout the county. Written fifty years after his work, his memoirs tell in some detail of his labors in a new and fruitful territory:

"In 1786, my field of labor was Long Island, in the State of New York. But I did not confine myself to the Island. With the consent of my presiding elder a local brother was employed to take my appointments, and I visited New Rochelle, across the sound twenty-five miles above New York. A class had been formed in this place previously to the taking of New York by the British. But at this time there was not a Methodist on the east side of the Hudson above New York.

"From New Rochelle, I went up to Bedford, and Peekskill. In every place where I went the people flocked to hear the word, and I was treated generally, with great kindness. At Croton, Lieut. Governor Van Courtland and Lady took me to their house and charmed me with their Christian courtesy and hospitality. At Bedford on Christmas Day, I dwelt largely on the universality of Atonement, with which subject I felt deeply affected myself as the people also appeared to be. When I was through, a Calvinist minister stood up in the congregation and accused me of preaching false doctrine. The sum of his argument was 'If Christ died for all, then must all be saved, but we know some are lost. Therefore he did not die for all.' It was an unfortunate time for him to attack the doctrine, in the manner which he did, as the feelings of the people were evidently enlisted in favor of it, while I was endeavoring to illustrate and enforce it with tears. They were therefore on my side.

"Before the minister sat down he requested the people not to let anything he had said so prejudice their minds against the young man as to call in question his piety. Here he was interrupted by an elderly man, who arose and said 'I am surprised Mr. H——s that you have so little discernment. What you have said instead of exciting our prejudice against our young friend, who has preached the truth to us, has, on the contrary, filled us with disgust against yourself. There is not a person present but must condemn your spirit, and very few, I hope, who do not despise the sentiments you have advanced. If there be one here who approves of the rude attack you have made upon this youth and stranger amongst us let him get up and defend you.' At this sharp rebuke, Mr. H arose to defend himself, but the people manifested their unwillingness to hear him by rising up and beginning to talk. A Mr. Eames³ then, in the audience of the people, invited me to go with him, and make his house my home, and preach the same doctrine to his neighbors. I accepted of his kind invitation and went.

"When we arrived at Mr. Eames house, he introduced me to his wife as a Methodist preacher, and said, 'You know I told you God would send the Methodist preachers among us when I dreamed I saw Mr. Wesley riding through the country with his Bible open in his hand.' After spending a short time with this pious and interesting family, during which I preached repeatedly and formed a class, I set out on my return to New Rochelle, but

was overtaken by one of the most dreadful snow storms I ever witnessed. I was accordingly driven to the necessity of putting up at an inn where I was detained for a week. The landlady was tenderly impressed the first time I spoke to her on the subject of religion, but the innkeeper himself, though civil, appeared to be out of my reach. Both of them were very fond of singing, and as my voice was good, they seemed much delighted with some spiritual songs I sung for them. On the third night of this tremendous storm, while sitting around the cheerful fire, listening to the howling of the wind and the beating of the snow and hail against the windows as if resolved on a forceable entry, I perceived my host and hostess were pensive; so I sung them one of my favorite pieces with which they were much affected. I then knelt down to pray, and they, for the first time fell upon their knees. After prayer I retired leaving them both in tears. He afterward during my stay made many efforts to resume his former gaiety, but his vivacity was gone.”⁴

Here we have the first accounts of Methodism in Northern Westchester, and also the typical trials and tribulations of every early Methodist circuit rider: the weather, the hecklers and scoffers whether churchmen or local rowdies. Yet we see the compensations, the conversion of the old man, and the innkeeper and his wife and the warmhearted reception by the great, such as Pierre Van Courtlandt, and the humble, like Henry Eames.

The labors of Ware must have borne much fruit, for at the Conference of 1787 the Second Circuit outside New York City — Long Island was first in 1785 — styled “New Rochelle” appears in the minutes. It must be that Ware reported great promise in Westchester for the circuit to be so quickly formed. The new circuit as originally set up “had no definite limits but embraced Westchester County and the regions beyond.”⁵ Samuel Q. Talbot was the first conference-appointed pastor to enter North Castle and begin regular Methodist work.

The class which must have been formed by Ware as a result of his preaching seems to have had the center of its activities, at New Castle Corners, about four and one half miles north of Armonk, and some two miles south of the center of the present village of Mount Kisco. Here, near the junction of the town lines of Bedford and North Castle (now New Castle), resided a group of sturdy farm folk, many of whom will play an important part in the story of the church. At the present junction of Sarles Street (formerly Hall Street) and present Byram Lake Road lived James Hall,⁶ destined to be the leader of the Methodist group. Close by in both North Castle and Bedford were Amos Dean, Caleb Merritt, Thomas Lyons, Caleb Sands, Samuel Sands, Othniel Sands, Joseph Woolsey, and William Wright. All of these families were powerfully awakened by the preaching of Ware and Talbot, and there can be no doubt that immediately after Ware’s visit James Hall organized his class meeting, the first of so many that were to be held under his roof.

About this time, or somewhat later, another class was organized at “Mile Square” (Armonk) or to the east of Armonk. This class meeting probably contained the families of Peter Lyon, Gilbert Lyon, Gilbert Thorn, Thomas Nash and Charles Green.

The group at Hall’s was by far the largest and most influential. However, it

must be presumed that neither was strong enough to organize a church without the other. It would seem that they must have united in a common venture especially in view of the location of the church when constructed some three and one quarter miles south of Hall's and closer to Mile Square. Barrett and Horton in their work for Scharff's History could not ascertain when the church society was actually founded or the church erected. They record as follows:

*"The faithful and earnest itinerants visited nearly every part of the County, preaching and organizing classes, which, were the germs of the future Churches. Traditions of their labors in North Castle, Bedford and the northern Towns of the County have come down to our day, and the Church at North Castle, was one of the first results of these labors. Just when this Society was organized the writer has not been able to ascertain, but it had become strong enough and energetic enough to build a Church before it was deemed necessary to avail itself of the Act of 1784 authorizing religious bodies to incorporate."*⁷

The author is positive that the society was organized in 1787, for some years ago the ancient deed for the church property was found among the papers of the church's Board of Trustees. This deed dated April 29, 1788, from Samuel Sands and Martha his wife to Peter Lyon, Esq., William Wright, Gilbert Lyon, Amos Dean, Thomas Lyon, Caleb Merrit and James Hall, (presumably trustees, through not stated) in consideration of ten pounds, granted a lot of approximately one half acre of ground "with the church thereon."⁸ The deed closes with a trust clause for the benefit of "the Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America."⁹

It is the assumption of the author that the society was organized in 1787, and the church erected during the summer and fall of that year. It would also seem that Samuel Sands did not convey the land to the society until he saw the church building up and a reality.

Concerning the building of the church, not a scrap or shread of record has come down to us. It must be presumed that the members of the society hewed the timbers, erected the frame and made the shingles themselves. One of the great gaps in our society is any real information concerning the erection of the building, so rich in association with the great names of early Methodism. Some years ago the author, long interested in the subject, interviewed three of Armonk's oldest citizens regarding the historic structure. Those interviewed remembered the building in its last days and unused.

Daniel See recalled the building as being two stories in height, with a pitched roof of wooden shingles. He estimated the size of the building to be approximately thirty feet wide by forty feet in length. The interior, Mr. See thought, had a high pulpit in the north end, galleries about three sides, and would accommodate at least three hundred. This last figure is probably too large.

Mrs. Martha Taylor, interviewed on August 11, 1954, stated that she thought the old church was about the size of the main body, without chancel or choir, of St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Armonk. (St. Stephens is 36 ft. x 36 ft.) The gable ends of the church faced north and south. On both east and west sides were three long windows, with small panes of common glass. Upon

the roof was a small, square belfry with four points at each end, no doubt added after the original construction.

Mrs. Edwin F. Acker's recollection substantiates Mrs. Taylor's, except that she remembered the church being in wretched condition with peeling paint. These are the only known descriptions of the cradle of Methodism in Northern Westchester.

The society drew its members from the entire surrounding countryside, and soon became one of the main churches in the New Rochelle Circuit, and, indeed, a permanent place for all the itinerants to stop, gather a congregation and preach.

Bishop Francis Asbury, on his return from the South, visited the infant society. On June 13, 1787, he rode from New Rochelle, and records in his *Journal* as follows:

"We had a long and warm ride to North Castle. Here a multitude were gathered together, to whom I spoke in an orchard on 'Him had God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Savior, to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins. I was quite unwell, faint, yet pursuing.

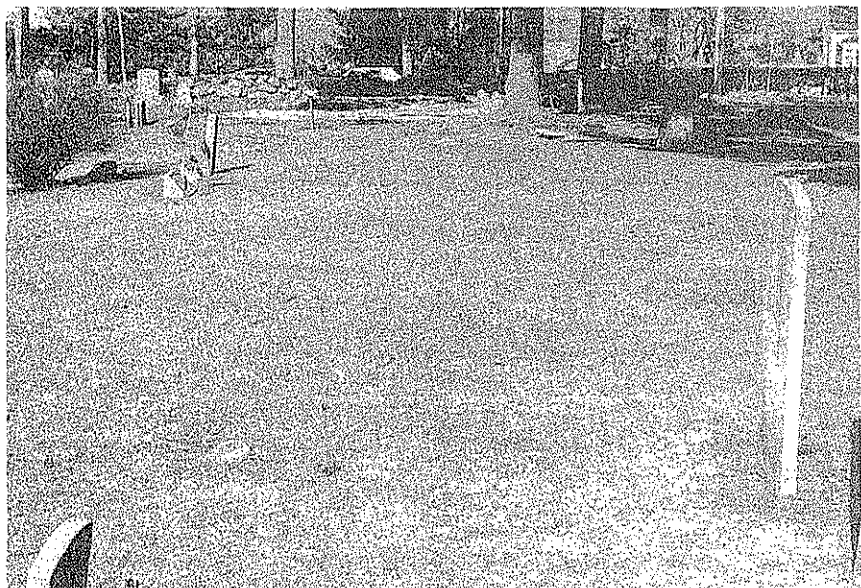
"Rode to R——'s of the Society of Friends, who received us with great love.

*"At Hall's a multitude came to hear, whom I exhorted to 'seek the Lord while he might be found.' "*¹⁰

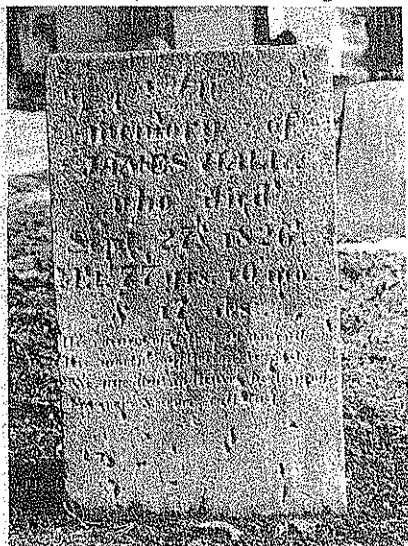
It must be presumed the church was not yet finished, for Asbury makes no mention of it in the *Journal*. Only two days before while preaching at Eastchester he says, "Came to Eastchester and preached in the shell of the new Church," if the new church at Eastchester had been mentioned, no doubt a new church at North Castle would have been also. In the late afternoon he rode the three and one quarter miles to James Hall's and again preached. It is evident he was pleased with the size of the congregation which he describes as "a multitude," bearing out all previous research that the North Castle society drew its membership or hearers from a vast area of countryside. Since there is no entry in the *Journal* for the fourteenth, it would seem the great bishop tarried a bit at Hall's before going on to Peekskill where he preached on June 15.

In the first visit of Asbury to North Castle we see the importance of James Hall to the society, for it was at Hall's he preached, and at Hall's he lodged. The memory of James Hall should be most precious to the lovers of the church, for he emerges from the mists of the past as the father of the North Castle society, and the literal rock upon which it was founded. From the time of Ware's visit until his death, exactly forty years later, Hall was the leader of the North Castle church. He was a class leader, and exhorter, his home was a preaching place, a meeting place of the classes and the shelter of every traveling Methodist preacher who came along. He was the friend and confidant of such men as Asbury, Garrettson, Morarity, Phoebus and a host of others who have become "Heroes of Methodism." One of Asbury's entries in the famous *Journal* for May 27, 1805, is as follows: "I dined with James Hall. We rejoiced that after sixteen years we were bound heavenward."¹² (This passage must allude to some meaningful experience during their long and close association.)

Elizabeth, the wife of James Hall, was a person with marked peculiarities. Mr. James S. Hall of Brooklyn, writes of her as follows:



Open space marks the site of the old North Castle Methodist Church (1787), Cox Avenue and School Street, Armonk, looking North from the front door to the pulpit. Photo courtesy of Richard Koenig.



Left: The stone of James Hall (1748-1826), friend and confidant of Bishop Asbury, the literal rock upon which the North Castle Methodist Society was founded. Old Methodist Cemetery. Photo by Richard Koenig.



Right: "She would jump and skip like a boy, yet sinners would tremble and saints shout aloud for joy as she exhorted." The grave of Elizabeth (Merritt) Hall (1751-1841) in the old Methodist Cemetery at Armonk. She was the foremost woman member of the early congregation and keeper of the Methodist Hotel." Photo by Richard Koenig.

*"She would sing, pray, exhort, shout, stamp her foot, clap her hands, and was ever exceeding happy. She would jump and skip like a boy, and yet sinners would tremble and saints shout aloud for joy as she exhorted."*¹³

For over forty years she entertained scores of preachers. In fact, her home was dubbed the "Methodist Hotel," and a special room was fitted up for their use. The author believes that this venerable house still stands, and is presently the residence of Mrs. Amy Jones Frisbee, Byram Lake Road, Mount Kisco. During long and hard years this remarkable man and wife kept the society together and take first place among the founders of Methodism in North Castle.¹⁴

— The Incorporation —

In 1788, the Methodist Church literally began a campaign of action to evangelize eastern New York State. At the conference session, Freeborn Garrettson¹⁵ was appointed the presiding elder to take charge of this field. Many young itinerants had sprung up and appeared in the field about New York. Asbury, himself, commissioned Garrettson to take charge of a band of them and to extend the march of the church up the Hudson River. At this time Methodism had not extended further northward than Westchester County, except for the Ashgrove Society, alone in the wilds of Washington County. Garrettson was uneasy about his new commission, being a stranger to this part of the country and not knowing any of the inhabitants. His anxiety led him to much prayer for divine direction. He had in his dreams a sublime vision. "It seemed," he said, "as if the whole Country up to North River, as far as Lake Champlain, east and west, was open to my view." After the conference adjourned, he requested the young men to meet him. Light seemed so reflected in his path, that he instantly gave each preacher instructions, where to begin and how to form their circuits, and that he should soon follow after them. By this time Garrettson himself had no doubt that "the Lord would do wonders."

These young assistants of Garrettson's were Peter Morarity, Albert Van Nostrand, Cornelius Cook, Andrew Harpending, Darius Dunham, Samuel Q. Talbot, David Kendall, Lemuel Smith and others. Some of them became historic characters in the church. They formed six circuits extending from New Rochelle Circuit to Lake Champlain, and from this work the denomination was founded all along the Hudson.

Garrettson, having sent his young men up the river, soon after set out himself. He ascended its east bank through New Rochelle, North Castle, Bedford, Peekskill to Rhinebeck preaching everywhere on his route. Thus New Rochelle and North Castle were the fountainheads from which New York State Methodism has its origin.

During his long career as a preacher, Freeborn Garrettson was seven times the presiding elder of the New York District, which encompassed the North Castle church. He preached repeatedly in the area, and in the old church. His labors in opening New York State to the denomination is one of the great stories of Methodism. He ranks with Asbury and Ware as one of the most honored names of Methodist history.

The North Castle society grew and the pastors appointed to the circuit preached far and wide in the countryside surrounding the church. By the year

1791, the North Castle church was the focal point of all Methodist work in the area. Asbury's repeated presence in the area gives some indication of the church's importance. Here are some entries in his *Journal*: "Thursday, June 2, 1791, We had a decent lifeless congregation at the Courthouse in the Plains [White Plains]. In the afternoon I preached at North Castle, on Phil. II, 12. My clay is heavy and my spirits low." It is interesting to note that on this visit Asbury was suffering from a cold taken from riding in the rain.¹⁶

Again in August he returns, with this entry: "Saturday, August 20, 1791. Quarterly Meeting at North Castle: it began well; I was happy in mind, although unwell, whilst I spoke to many who attended on 1 Samuel VII, 3."¹⁷

By the year 1791 the church leaders decided to avail themselves of the Special Act of the Legislature of April 6, 1784, permitting religious denominations to incorporate. Accordingly on December 24, 1791, pursuant to fifteen days' notice, the male members in the society met at the church, and elected Caleb Merritt Sr., Othniel Sands, James Hall, Thomas Nash, Charles Green and John Ferris "discreet and prudent persons of the said Church as Trustees etc." The name chosen for the church and trustees was "The Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North Castle in Westchester County." The Committee to Incorporate, Caleb Merritt and Othniel Sands, executed the certificate and the same was recorded February 2, 1792.¹⁸

Some years later another corporate meeting was held. On January 4, 1800 the church reincorporated under the same corporate name. At this meeting only three trustees were chosen to replace the original six. They were James Hall, Caleb Kirby Esq., and Jacob Craft. John Ferris Jr. and Samuel Sands were the Committee to Incorporate, and the certificate was recorded May 30, 1800.¹⁹

The author presumes that some question had arisen to the title of the church property, for on the same day of the meeting, January 4, 1800, Samuel Sands, in consideration of \$25.00, reconveys the property to the newly elected trustees. The deed describes them as "Trustees" and closes with a trust clause in favor of the "Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America."²⁰

Sometime between the years 1800 and 1814 the church edifice underwent some repair work. The original subscription list, one of the few fragments of record still in possession of the Board of Trustees is worthy of inclusion here:

"Dear Friends

Our preaching house at North Castle calls for our attention and assistance, as the windows are much out of repair. Inasmuch that the house is taking damage by the weather, and is dirtied by the birds that nest and lodge in it, and it is also uncomfortable for the people who assemble there for Divine worship. It is hoped that the idea of advantage and Decency will excite you to contribute something in the present occasion. That the house of the Lord may be rendered decent and comfortable."

The subscription, undated, was signed by twenty-eight men and women, all pillars of the society.²¹ They collected £2 18s6d, which they expended as follows:

	£	s	d
"Bought of John Griffin Sixty lights at 7 s	1	15	0
To five pound puttie at 1 s per pound	0	5	0
To git a staple for the lock of Noah Cocks	0	0	6
To git one lock cost 4 s	0	4	0
Paid to Abijah Sands (labor)	0	14	0
	2	18	6"

These business transactions, with the exception of the deeds and the certificate of incorporation, are the oldest known records of the church.

About this period a person of importance to the church, second only to James Hall, makes his appearance among the Methodist group. Caleb Kirby came to New Castle about 1792. Tradition says he brought with him a certificate of membership from a church on Long Island. Possessed of considerable means he purchased a quantity of land (near Mount Kisco at a place later called Kirbyville in his honor) where he farmed and ran a mill. He, too, became a class leader, and soon became, with the exception of Hall, the leading member of the church, and its largest financial supporter.

The society was also favored with leadership in another quarter. Daniel Whelpley, a member of the church, was a local preacher in the grandest sense. He was the son-in-law of James Hall and lived near Sands Mills, (corner of High Street and Cox Avenue) where he carried on a tanning and shoe business. When the preacher could not keep his appointment it was he who filled the church pulpit, or left his business to preach to some neighboring gathering. His death on November 15, 1814, at the age of forty years, was a blow to the local congregation. His grave is marked by a small stone within the old cemetery, on the site of the church he served so well.

— The Mother of Churches —

Perhaps no church in Westchester can claim to be the mother church of so many other religious societies. Three and most probably a fourth church were founded as direct offshoots of the North Castle group. As we have previously shown, the North Castle congregation was gathered from a large area of the surrounding country. The church services at North Castle were supplemented by class meetings and small preaching services at the houses of many of the members in the various neighborhoods of the large parish. James Hall, and Caleb Kirby, both previously mentioned, were always leaders in their respective localities, in Hall Street (presently Sarles St.) and Kirbyville. Israel Townsend's home at Miles Square, Armonk, Abraham Bussing, at Middle Patent, where John Ferris was the leader, Hachaliah Miller at Bedford, James Fountain near Bedford Four Corners, and James Sutton at New Castle were all classes which were related to the North Castle church.

Barrett and Horton in their work for Scharff's History describe the influence of the old society in one short but informative paragraph:

*"The congregation seems to have been gathered from a considerable region of the county. The churches at New Castle, and Middle Patent were offshoots from it, and it is quite likely that its influence extended as far northward as the old Church at the Four Corners in Bedford, out of which grew those now at Bedford Village and Chestnut Ridge (1885)."*²²

— Bedford —

For many years the Methodist preachers visited Bedford. Asbury, Ware, and others respectively refer to it in their travels and there can be no doubt that classes were formed. However, no church or society seems to have been formed from them. It is presumed that Barrett and Horton are correct in stating that the North Castle church claimed the loyalty of those Bedford Methodists who lived in the western part of the town. The author also believes that the class formed by Ware at or near Henry Eames' resulted in the Pound Ridge church which ministered to those living in eastern Bedford.

In 1806, under the leadership of James Fountain, "an ardent and able Methodist exhorter" and class leader, a church was built at the "Four Corners," two miles west of Bedford Village on the road (Route 172) to New Castle (now Mount Kisco). With the erection of this church any influence the North Castle society exercised over Bedford came to an end. It is interesting to note that thirty-one years later, 1837, this church was taken down under the direction of James Fountain and was removed in sections by ten teams of oxen to be re-erected at the foot of Bates Hall on the Bedford Village Green, where it stands to this day.²³

— New Castle —

By far the largest and most influential group of the North Castle church were those who lived on Hall Street, in Kirbyville and around Byram Pond. The members of this group were the successors of the original class organized by James Hall. The later addition of Caleb Kirby strengthened and buttressed the efforts put forth by Hall. This section of the area experienced a far greater growth in population and prosperity than Mile Square (Armonk) to the south. New men were adding to the strength of the New Castle classes: Morris Carpenter, James Fish, John P. Horton, Robert Halstead, Lewis Reynolds, Thomas Charlick and others.

In 1817-1818 a great revival swept the Methodist movement. So great was its affect that Jonathan Hall, son of James, opened his house, opposite his father's, for overflow meetings. It is reported that both Hall's and Kirby's quarters were crowded to capacity by the converts. The newcomers soon began to agitate for the building of a new church at New Castle itself. By the year 1820 sentiment for the new church was rising, but the New Castle group was stayed by the venerable James Hall. His position is admirably told by the Reverend William E. Ketcham in his address on the *History of the New Castle Church* (1878) as follows:

"There was a heavy debt on the North Castle Church, and it seemed at one time to exhaust their resources to maintain their running expenses, with interest on the debt; yet it was shouldered by Mr. James Hall, and it was considered presumptuous to think of building a new Church at New Castle, and assuming new responsibilities."²⁴

There can be no doubt that Hall by the sheer weight of personality and long standing in the church held off the separation some four years. But it was inevitable that a separation should take place. On December 16, 1824, at a meeting held at the house of Tyler Fountain, the New Castle Methodist

Episcopal Church was incorporated with Caleb Kirby, James Fish, John P. Horton, Tyler Fountain and Benjamin Kirby being elected trustees.

A building lot of one quarter acre was given to the new society by the ever munificent Caleb Kirby on October 5, 1825, and a church was shortly thereafter erected. The new building which was adjacent to the Episcopal Cemetery at Kirbyville was no larger than an ordinary district schoolhouse, which it greatly resembled. From these beginnings Methodism was launched in New Castle, and the present Mount Kisco Methodist Church was born.²⁵

— Middle Patent —

For many years the Methodist itinerants had visited Middle Patent, an area in the eastern part of the Town of North Castle. From the beginnings of the North Castle church, John Ferris and Charles Green from this area were early trustees of the society. Class meetings were held for many years at the homes of John Ferris Sr., John Ferris Jr. and Abraham Bussing. It is interesting to note that William H. Ferris, the son of John Ferris, became an eminent clergyman of the Methodist Church, and likewise, Peter C. Bussing, son of Abraham Bussing, was for some years a traveling preacher.

For some years the pastors held preaching services in the old Middle Patent schoolhouse near the present Middle Patent church. The distance in traveling to the mother church and the convenience of having their own preaching services must have been the influencing factor in the decision to favor the new church. Methodism prospered greatly at Middle Patent. By the time the church movement was under way all of the leading families were in the Methodist fold. In addition to Ferris and Bussing, the households of Enos Hobby, Allen Hobby, James Banks, James Guion, Ezekiel Brundage, Ezekiel Finch and Henry Brown were active in the church.

On December 24, 1825,²⁶ at a meeting held at the house of Captain James Banks, the Middle Patent Methodist Church was organized and incorporated. John Ferris, Peter C. Bussing, Ezekiel Finch, William Finch and Jacob Johnson were elected the first trustees. In the spring of 1826 the society erected its first church on land given by a neighboring farmer, Joshua Knapp. The building, not unlike the mother church at North Castle or the new church at New Castle, though larger than both, still stands adjacent to the present church at Middle Patent. When the church was opened for services in 1826, the trustees chose the name "Wesley Chapel" reminiscent of the original chapel on John Street, from which radiated the Methodist movement.²⁷

— Kensico —

For many years the Methodist pastors preached at Robbins Mills, later Kensico, in the southern part of the Town of North Castle, at the old red schoolhouse in that village. The moving spirit in the religious work of this community was John Robbins, who was for many years active in the mother church at North Castle. By 1835 the meetings were becoming so crowded, through the attendance of the local citizenry and numerous persons from the neighboring town of Mt. Pleasant to the west, it was resolved to organize and build a church.

On November 8, 1835, at a meeting held in the "red schoolhouse" the

North Castle Zion Methodist Episcopal Church in Westchester County was organized and incorporated. John Robbins, Caleb P. Horton, Sands Sutton, Hatfield Davis and Edwin Palmer were elected trustees. On December 29, 1835, the society received a parcel of land from Daniel H. Fisher, and the following spring erected a church.²⁸

Thus within the space of thirty-one years, the old church had given birth to four new societies which were to serve the faithful in their respective areas. Their respective histories are each as glorious as that of the mother church which gave them birth, and their beginnings are a bright chapter in the history of the old North Castle church.

FOOTNOTES:

1. 1790 Census of the United States.
2. Thomas Ware (1758-1842). One of the greatest of the early circuit riders, was born in Greenwich, New Jersey. He enlisted in the patriot army and served throughout the Revolution. After the war, he joined the Methodists and was a class leader, exhorter, and entered the itineracy in 1783. He first labored in the Dover Circuit but after the Christmas Conference came north. In 1786, though appointed to Long Island, he opened up the work in Westchester County and doubtless preached the first Methodist sermon in North Castle. In 1787, he went south and labored there for some years, with great fruitfulness and with exciting adventures on the frontiers of North Carolina and Tennessee. From 1792 on, he labored about Philadelphia serving as presiding elder and as book agent of the church, 1812-1816. For the last twenty years of his life he was retired and was, for some years prior to his death, the oldest traveling preacher in the United States. He wrote a small book about his life and travels.
3. Henry Eames, lived in the Town of Bedford on the road to Pound Ridge. He was of Irish descent and of a religious turn of mind. He introduced Ware to his neighbors and Scharf, Volume II, page 572, says "The Methodist Episcopal congregation of Pound Ridge owes its paternity to Henry Eames who may be justly called the father of Methodism in this Place." (This record says Thomas Coke visited Eames about 1785. This is in error, the preacher was Ware in 1786.) His son Henry Eames (1774-1852) was a Methodist minister in both New York and Troy Conferences, and his daughter Ann became the wife of Reverend Mitchell B. Bull. Both of these pastors served the Armonk church.
4. Ware's Journal
5. Address of the Reverend W. E. Ketcham, 1882, Page 3.
6. James Hall (1748-1826). Much has been said regarding Hall in the text of this work. His origins and early life are unknown. It is known he resided at North Castle, and was early converted by Ware or Talbot. From 1787 to 1826 he exercised a profound influence on the North Castle church. He was a farmer, and left a considerable estate. His son Jonathan was active in the New Castle Society and his daughter Esther was the wife of Daniel Whelpley the local preacher.
7. History of Westchester County, Scharf, Vol. II, page 639.
8. This property was located at the corner of Cox Ave. and the present School St.
9. Original deed in possession of the church trustees has never been recorded. It described the Church lot as follows:

"All that lot of land situated in North Castle as follows viz: Beginning at the southeast corner of said lot joining the road and running westerly joining the land of Joseph Fowler, deceased, eight rods, then north by the land of William Wright, ten rods, then East by the land William Wright, eight rods, to the road, then South ten rods to the first mentioned bounds, with the Church thereon erected."
10. Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, page 542.
11. Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, page 542. This church referred to was probably First Church, New Rochelle, which was less than one mile from Eastchester town line. The church at Eastchester was not erected until 1797. (Devinne, History of

Methodism in the New Rochelle Circuit printed in the *Methodist Magazine*, Vol. XIV, page 203, April 1832.) First Methodist Church Mt. Vernon is the present successor of the Eastchester church.

12. *Asbury's Journal*, Vol. II, page 470.
13. Address of the Reverend W. E. Ketcham, page 4.
14. The author believes James Hall's house to be three and one quarter miles above the church at the corner of Sarles Street and Byram Lake Road, and is the present residence of Mrs. Owen P. Frisbie (Amy Jones, the noted artist). The author is indebted to the Title Guarantee & Trust Company of White Plains, whose record department verified the author's assumption.
15. Freeborn Garretson, (1752-1827). Born in Maryland, converted in 1775, and entered the Methodist ministry in 1776. During his early ministry he met with many trials and persecutions, including arrest. He was the messenger of the Christmas Conference. In 1784 he was sent to Nova Scotia and spent three years laboring as a missionary there. His most notable work was opening of New York State to the Methodist Church, this work being begun in 1788. The rest of his career was spent in the New York Conference. He was truly one of the great preachers of the church.
16. *Asbury's Journal*, Vol. I, page 676. A footnote in *Asbury's Journal* — new edition, says that Jesse Lee the founder of Methodism in New England was present with the Bishop on this trip.
17. *Asbury's Journal*, Vol. I, page 692.
18. Westchester County Record of Incorporation of Religious Societies, Liber A, page 30.
19. Westchester County Record of Incorporation of Religious Societies, Liber A, page 68.
20. Original in possession of the church Board of Trustees.
21. From the original in possession of the church Board of Trustees. The list is signed by Amos Dean, Othniel Sands, Joseph Woolsey, Samuel Sands, James Hall, Abijah Sands, Caleb Merritt, Stephen Woolsey, Peter Lyon, Joseph Clap, Caleb Sands, Jacob Craft, Caleb Kirby, William Lyon, Elizabeth Hall, Charlotte Whelpley, Peninah Sands, Mary Sands, Deborah Merritt, Mary Woolsey, Hannah Sarles, Martha Sands, Mary Clap, Ester Quimby, Ester Brundage, Rhoda Arnold, Jane Owen and Ann Thorn.
22. Scharff, Volume II, page 639.
23. Bedford Methodist Church stands on the green at Bedford Village, having been closed for regular worship since 1918. It is owned by the Bedford Historical Society. The Bedford church was incorporated June 21, 1824. (Liber A of Religious Societies page 184.)
24. Ketcham page 5.
25. This building stood, having been rebuilt for a private residence, until some ten years ago. Its site is now occupied by "Johnny on the Spot" cleaners at Mt. Kisco. The society incorporation can be found in the Westchester County Religious Incorporations Liber A, page 183.
26. The society chose the same day to incorporate as the mother church.
27. The original building still stands at Middle Patent and has been converted into a residence adjacent to the church. The second church building erected 1847 still stands, but has been closed for regular weekly services since 1918. It has been restored and rebuilt (1939) and is open for summer services only, under the direction of the pastor at Armonk. The incorporation of the Society can be found in Liber A of Religious Societies at page 189.
28. The Kensico church stood in the center of that village and was the place of worship until 1885. In that year a new church was erected and used by the congregation until about 1910 when both the old church (then owned by the Roman Catholics) and the new church were destroyed by the takings for Kensico Reservoir. The present churches at North White Plains and Valhalla are offsprings of the Kensico Society.

For more extensive notes see A History of the Armonk United Methodist Church, available from the church.



37th Mile Marker as it now stands on The North Castle Historical Society's property. Picture courtesy of Richard Koenig.

37TH MILE MARKER

By Barbara S. Massi

Last winter the historic 37th mile marker, located just above Smith's Tavern, was hit by a vehicle and severely damaged.

In order to preserve this bit of heritage in our community, the Society's trustees decided to have the marker restored and encased in concrete and stone in order to help prevent further damage. It has been placed just off the road on the Society's property approximately 200 feet below its original site. Thus, this memorial of days gone by will be protected for the days to come.

The mile markers were installed around 1771 to indicate to the travelers along the Danbury Post Road (Route 22) the number of miles they were from New York City's City Hall. The cost of mail as well as stagecoach fares were determined by the markers. Unfortunately, most of the markers were destroyed over the years, and although some are still standing, many have made their way to museums and historical societies for preservation. We are gratified that we were able to preserve this one as an example for future generations.

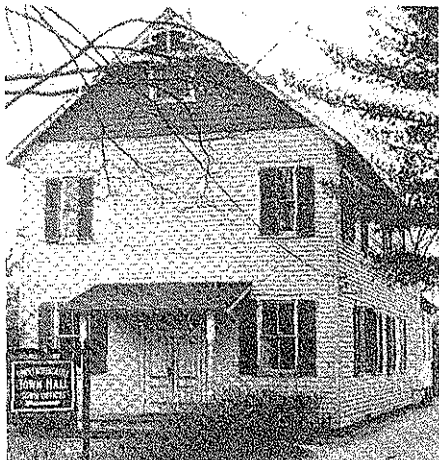
"AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL"

THE STORY OF

MECHANICS HALL

IN NORTH CASTLE

By James D. Hopkins



*Caption on page 28.

Long before the Log Cabin and the Westchester Palais D'Or (later known as Rhineland Gardens and Blue Gardens) Mechanics Hall existed in Armonk. The name has disappeared, but the building remains. Now occupied by apartments and shops, it stands on the southerly side of Maple Avenue, nearly opposite the firehouse. Today I find it inconspicuous; that may be because it has been there as long as I can remember, and I accept it as part of a familiar landscape. It is a plain building, without adornment, and there is nothing about it to excite curiosity.

That impression would not have been true 50 years ago. Mechanics Hall, as it was then called, held a notable place in the life of Armonk and North Castle, even as it had years before. During that period it was the center for the community which included Armonk and the territory which surrounded it, a roughly circular area taking in North Greenwich and Round Hill in Connecticut, the land about King Street running between Chappaqua and Purchase and the settlements between Armonk and Bedford and Mount Kisco.

The Hall was used for a variety of events: dances, elections, plays, concerts, even wrestling matches. My memory carries me back to the time of World War I, when I was six or seven years old. From then until the end of World War II Mechanics Hall was engaged almost every week in some sort of activity. Perhaps my recollection exaggerates — its lens magnifies the greater with the passage of time — but it seems to me that between the two wars (and probably before, though as to this I cannot be sure) it was the place we looked to for our recreation and entertainment.

There was, of course, no television; the radio did not become common until the late '20's, and the daily newspaper was a rarity. People conceived and made their own diversions; it was a period of many community organizations, each competing for attention, each to an extent overlapping both as to membership and purpose. I am fairly certain that this state of affairs was true at the time in other places as well. But this piece reflects my memories of the Hall in Armonk.

The name of Mechanics Hall was derived from the fraternal body which built it. So far as I know, the Junior Order of the American Mechanics no longer functions as a viable organization; Schmidt in his 1980 study of fraternal orders stated that it had less than 8500 members, from a high in 1900 of over 200,000 members. I know of no lodge existing in Westchester, though at one time — around the turn of the century — it was represented by three councils in North Castle alone and by councils in many other towns and cities in Westchester.

The Order evolved from several sources. In medieval times, long before the advent of labor unions, craftsmen were organized into guilds in England. Shortly before the Industrial Revolution held sway, a class of workmen arose, characterized by its preoccupation with machinery, not precisely fitting any existing guild. In England a fraternal order known as the Independent United Order of Mechanics was formed in 1756. It was one of the earliest of that kind of organization whose purpose was the protection of the workman and his family and thus to afford a type of insurance benefits to them in case of injury or death.

The Order spread to the United States in 1845 under the title of United American Mechanics. Here, in addition to its function as a fraternal society providing insurance benefits, it assumed the trappings of a secret organization. In 1853 the United American Mechanics sponsored an offshoot — the Junior Order — ostensibly as a training ground for the sons and relatives of the members of the senior group and to prepare them to take their places eventually as members of the older society.

The Junior Order, apparently more aggressive than its parent, as sometimes occurs, soon outstripped the latter in size of membership and by 1885 became independent of it. In 1900 the Junior Order was vigorous and flourishing, especially in the northern and eastern areas of the United States. Finally, in 1960 it absorbed the parent organization.

I have not been able to locate the records of the Armonk Council of the Junior Order, and I can only speculate as to the date it was chartered. My speculation is that it began its existence around 1875; its charter must have been granted fairly early in the history of the Junior Order, since the Armonk Council is numbered 65 as part of its corporate title.¹

The first meetings of the Armonk Council were held in a building situated on Mount Kisco Road, near what is now its intersection with Annadale Street. However, the need for larger quarters just before the turn of the century must have been manifest, for the Council acquired property in 1898, later supplemented by other parcels in 1905 and 1914.

It was on this property — a rather long narrow strip approximately 200 feet deep and with varying widths of 60 to 90 feet (the larger widths in the rear) — that the Junior Order erected the building on Maple Avenue in Armonk. Again, I must speculate as to the time of its construction; it is my belief that the building was completed between 1905 and 1906.

The building, like the property, was (and is) long and narrow. It was two stories in height, and double doors at the front gave access to the Hall proper, an open area perhaps 50 feet long and 35 feet wide. At the end of this space furthest from the street was a stage, raised about 2½ feet above the floor, running the width of the building and perhaps 35 feet in depth. A side door opened to the outside at the rear of the stage, from which steps led to the rear of

the property. Attached to the end of the building, adjacent to the steps, were a series of sheds, open in front, for the accommodation of horses and wagons.

The lodge rooms were located on the second floor, reached by a stairway along the west interior wall of the stage. A cloak room was also located on the second floor, used by both the membership of the lodge and people attending the public functions held below. The lodge rooms were always securely locked and only members of the Council were admitted to them.

An alley extended along the westerly boundary of the property, compressed between the wall of the building and a fence surrounding the adjacent parcel, leading from Maple Avenue to the horse sheds. But it was a cramped space, just wide enough to permit a car or wagon to drive within it; as might be expected, traffic was congested as a result when affairs were held at the Hall.

Mechanics Hall, as it was originally constructed, was constantly used for various events until the late 1940's. However, the character of the events was expanded by the addition to the building made in 1915. It was then that dances and other functions attracting more than a hundred persons could be accommodated. Thus, the North Castle Sun records in February, 1915, in the same issue, that the addition was being completed by John L. French and that the "Countryside Dance" was a huge success.

Through the years the Hall served as a community center not only for Armonk but also for the population around it ranging north of White Plains and Port Chester and Greenwich, east of Pleasantville and Chappaqua, south of Mount Kisco and Bedford, and west of Stamford and Pound Ridge. The types of events held there included a broad spectrum:

Dances sponsored for the benefit of organizations. In the beginning (from 1915) the orchestra performing was headed by Professor Wright — all orchestra leaders were then known as "Professor" — but more familiarly called "Shorty." The orchestra was a four man group — piano, violin, banjo and drums. Professor Wright, who lived in Bedford, was the drummer, using a snare drum placed diagonally against the back of an armless chair and a small bass drum crowned by a cymbal suspended on a spring. But as time wore on and jazz succeeded ragtime, Professor Wright's Orchestra fell into disfavor. A younger, more *sprightly set of musicians* was hired, such as the Sterling Club Orchestra, led by Arthur Ferris of North White Plains, or Bob McKeever's Orchestra, hailing from Port Chester, or Jimmy Caruso's Orchestra, coming from Thornwood. (Jimmy was later to be Town Attorney and Supervisor of North Castle, and County Judge of Westchester County.) These bands, usually made up of five or six musicians, in the '20's and '30's comprised piano, saxophone, trumpet, guitar and drums. Of the dances I shall have more to say beyond.²

Town Board meetings. At first the meetings were held on the stage with the audience seated before the Board in the Hall. No more than one meeting a month was scheduled — traditionally the third Thursday evening of the month. Because items of business were sparse, addresses to the Board by members of the audience were not uncommon. Later, as town business increased and became more involved, the time of hearing the pleas of residents was fixed at the beginning of the meeting and restricted as to length.

Up to 1933 there were no permanent places for the town offices. Town officials kept their records in their homes and turned them over to their

successors at the end of their term. This system changed in 1933, when the Town Clerk and Receiver of Taxes became full time officers and maintained their offices at Mechanics Hall. The Junior Order converted the horse sheds in the rear of the property into town offices by an addition to the Hall. From 1933 the meetings of the Town Board were also held in this addition. It was not until 1948 that North Castle owned its own town hall, located as now on Bedford Road.



The North Castle Town Hall and offices until 1948. This recent picture shows the long building, probably converted from horse sheds, at the rear of Mechanics Hall, where town government was conducted for forty years. Photo courtesy of Richard Koenig.

Court proceedings. Before 1933 the four Justices of the Peace (also serving as members of the Town Board) held court in their homes — not on a regular schedule, but as summonses were returnable at times determined by the local constables or the State Police or litigants. There were occasions, nevertheless, when the fame of the trial or the parties required larger quarters to suit the size of the audience. The proceedings would then be held on the stage of the Hall, where the judge, counsel, court stenographer and jury (seated in an improvised jury box) sat, facing the public before them in the Hall.

Such occasions took on the aspect of entertainment. The North Castle Sun comments on two trials in 1915, and in the '20's the number of trials at Mechanics Hall increased, as the result of greater automobile traffic and accidents. When in 1933 the law was changed, so that two justices of the peace, instead of four, were elected, regularly scheduled court hearings were held in the addition in the rear of the Hall; if necessity required more space, the stage and the Hall itself were again used. I can recall one trial in which the crowd of spectators forced it to be held in the Hall, and counsel for one of the parties was J. Edward Lumbard, later to be the Chief Judge of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.

Plays and minstrels. The coming of radio programs in the '20's and '30's gradually put an end to the community play. Mechanics Hall in 1915, according to the North Castle Sun, was a natural place for these offerings, equipped as it was with a stage and a large space for the audience. Folding chairs were quickly arranged to provide seats for the audience, and tickets were usually sold in

advance.

The Sun reports in April, 1915 that the comedy, "Men, Maids and Match-makers," was performed at Mechanics Hall, and plays and minstrels were often held there, usually for the benefit of a cause or organization, until the early '30's. Not only did local groups use it for this purpose, but also groups from other communities — a sort of traveling repertory.

Movies and concerts. The nearest movie houses in 1915 and the '20's were located in White Plains and Port Chester. The North Castle Sun tells us in May, 1921 that movies were being shown at Mechanics Hall every Wednesday evening — "5 reels including Charlie Chaplin," with tickets available at 30¢ and 15¢ (adults and children). Unfortunately, the venture was not a success: the quality of films was poor, and the projector was continually in trouble as the result of the film breaking, or the lamp burning out.³

There were also concerts by local artists held there from time to time. I remember quite vividly one concert in 1927 which was sponsored by the local chapter of the American Red Cross to aid victims of a foreign catastrophe. A packed house listened to a recital of songs and instruments by artists imported from New York who gave their services at the request of friends in North Castle.

Meetings and elections. Beside the Town Board meetings, other meetings of civic interest were held at Mechanics Hall. One such, I attended in either 1917 or 1918 with my mother and father, was sponsored by the North Castle unit of Suffragettes to gain support for the constitutional amendment to grant women the right to vote.

During the late '20's and early '30's a movement began in town, initiated in North White Plains but soon assisted in the Armonk area, to impose zoning restrictions on the use of land. Zoning at that time was a relatively new concept, not readily accepted by many land owners. The wisdom of adopting a zoning ordinance in North Castle was heavily debated, so much so that special meetings of the Zoning Commission appointed by the Town Board were held in the Hall to accommodate the crowd of citizens attending.

For the same reason, the question of whether the school districts located in the Armonk region (Districts 4, 5 and 6) should be consolidated, arising in 1920-21 through the urging of the State Commissioner of Education, was discussed in open meetings in the Hall. None of the school houses was large enough to hold the parents and taxpayers interested, and I recall the vigorous, and at times, impassioned speeches delivered about the advantages and disadvantages of the merger. The election itself to decide the issue took place in the Hall in 1922, and as the result of a favorable vote the new school building on Whippoorwill Road (still standing though no longer used) was erected in 1923.

In those days Armonk constituted one election district in the town (District 2), and the polls were held on the stage of Mechanics Hall. My first memory of town elections is centered there; paper ballots were then used, and the laborious task of counting votes lasted well into the morning hours of the next day. Under a bright unshaded electric light the election clerks and watchers for the parties or candidates clustered over the pile of ballots, recording the votes on each of the offices to be filled, scrutinizing each to determine whether any extraneous marking voided the ballot in whole or in part. Sometimes the determination would be protested by a watcher, laying the basis for a

subsequent challenge of the election. Each vote at that time was crucial because it happened frequently that an election would be decided by a margin of less than ten votes, sometimes by only one vote.

Later on — in the '30's — voting machines were substituted for the paper ballots. The use of machines eliminated the tedious counting process, but not the close elections or disputes. In 1937, for example, the contest for supervisor ended in the courts, and Richard P. Limburg was finally declared the winner by the Court of Appeals by seven votes over Carroll M. Snyder, because eleven absentee ballots cast for the latter were held to be void.

Athletic contests. It was said in my youth, though I did not see any of them, that basketball games had been played in Mechanics Hall. The playing surface would have been adequate, since the floor was smooth and resilient, but the other requirements for basketball were lacking. The playing width was short and allowed for no sidelines, so that the ball was in play off the walls and windows; the basket at one end was perched over the main doors, and at the other end the basket was placed on a backboard standing against the stage. These deficiencies brought about rough play, without any opportunity for dribbling and skillful passing, so much a part of the game. Once the school house was built on Whippoorwill Road, Mechanics Hall was not used for basketball games.

In the '20's, however, Armonk was seized by a fever for wrestling. This was due to the presence in the community of Ed Deal, a blacksmith who had his shop on Route 22 (now Old Route 22), just east of where the Armonk Lumber Company is today. Ed Deal was a professional wrestler who performed under the name of Ed Dean throughout the metropolitan region. He held the title of light heavyweight champion at that time, and he encouraged, by his example and teaching, the pursuit of wrestling as a sport by local youths. Mechanics Hall served as the forum for both training and contests.

I should say at once, in order to allay any misunderstanding, that wrestling then bore no resemblance to what passes for professional wrestling today. Wrestling then was a serious sport, without the posturing and mock heroics which characterizes it at the present time. Wrestling as then practiced was a sport of skill and stamina, close to the college and Olympic form today.

I remember attending one of the bills with my father at the Hall in the early '20's. William Husted was the promoter of the bouts, and I think the admission fee was 50¢. Among the local contestants was Joseph Wago, Jr., who later became a professional in the 165 lb. class; others were Harry J. Hunter, then the Superintendent of Highways, and Robert M. Hart, the Receiver of Taxes at a subsequent time. Ed Deal acted as the referee.

In a year or two the wrestling fever died out when Ed Deal was no longer champion and retired from the sport.

Of all the many community affairs held at Mechanics Hall the most common and best attended were the dances. A certain etiquette or pattern of behavior grew up about them which deserves special comment.

It must be recalled that in the first part of this century dancing was not altogether approved. Some religious denominations considered it, especially when practiced by couples embraced, as immoral. Ragtime, gradually developing into the foxtrot and jazz, was not regarded as respectable. There was

a counter tradition, however, which was deeply rooted. Country dancing — square and round dancing — had been accepted in Armonk and its environs for a long time; and country dancing had been performed in halls and homes to the music of jigs and reels played by little groups made up of violins and accordions and piano and drums over an equally long time. Some of these groups were better and more popular than others, and they came to be hired to play, the cost defrayed by a small admission charge. It was not an abrupt departure, therefore, when country dancing was slowly displaced by the more intimate waltz and foxtrot, and the orchestra played jazz instead of the jig.

At first dances were sponsored at the Hall by a loosely organized crew of young men calling themselves "The Jolly Ten." They hired the Hall for regularly scheduled dances; the rental and the expense of the orchestra were paid out of the receipts from the sale of tickets — usually 50¢ for an adult and 25¢ for children 12 or under. Included within the price of the ticket were refreshments — coffee and homemade cake. At the beginning — before World War I — these dances were held on Wednesday evening from 8-12 o'clock; after the war Friday or Saturday night dances were the rule. At the beginning, too, the dances were more a family affair; children from 8 years old (even younger in some instances) attended with their parents. Later, especially as the price of tickets advanced and Prohibition was in force, the number of children at the dances became less and less.

"The Jolly Ten" continued its sponsorship of dances only until this kind of an event was accepted as a means of raising funds for community organizations. There was a time during the '30's when Armonk had as many as 21 civic or charitable organizations in full operation, and each sought to obtain funds by holding dances.

Some unmarried couples came together; as the saying went — "they were going steady." But most of the young people were not attached; they grouped themselves by gender (men on one side of the Hall, women on the other), talking and laughing restlessly as they stared across the dance floor, appraising the group on the other side. It might be the second or third set before one of the young men walked across the Hall and asked one of the young women to dance with him. This was the ice-breaker; the other young men, except the shyest or the untutored in dancing, would eventually follow the lead. It would not do, however, for a young man to dance more than twice or three times with the same girl during the evening, unless he was willing to submit to railleury by his friends that he was "smitten."

Most of the sets played by the orchestra were foxtrots, but the specialties of the period — the "Peabody," and the "Black Bottom" — were recognized as well. Ralph MacDonald remembers that he was appointed by the Junior Order to attend the dances as its deputy to make sure that the "Charleston" was not played, because it was feared that the vibration and stomping caused by the dancing would result in the collapse of the floor. As the evening wore on, the music and dancing would increase in tempo, until at one o'clock the orchestra would sign off to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" or "Good Night, Sweetheart."

There were interruptions to the flow of foxtrots and waltzes. Sometime after the dance had settled to the expected attendance, say at half-past ten, it would be announced that the next dance would be a "Paul Jones." The dancers — almost everyone attending — would form a large circle; when the orchestra

began playing, the men who alternated in the circle with the women would move in one direction, the women in the other, until the caller blew a whistle, whereupon the men took as a partner the women whose hand they grasped; the partners danced together until the whistle sounded again, at which time the circle was formed once more, and the process repeated. I believe that this was an adaptation of the folk dance known as the "Paul Jones;"⁴ and it had the advantage of allowing the dancers to become acquainted with one another within the confines of convention.

Another device, which was nameless, probably invented to achieve the same purpose, placed the men at one end of the Hall and the women at the other. At the sound of the whistle the men would race to the opposite end to claim their partners. But this maneuver would not be repeated and the couple would remain partners for the set.

In the limited parking area at the rear of Mechanics Hall the automobiles were closely packed; automobiles were generally parked on each side of Maple Avenue from Main Street to Old Route 22 on the night of the dance. During Prohibition there were difficulties arising from flasks and bottles of bootleg liquor stashed in the cars: the patrons of the dance made periodic visits outside to take nips from their alcoholic supplies. Unfortunately, as a result, tempers were more easily aroused and fights would start within and outside the Hall. In most cases the brawlers would be quickly separated, but finally some of the organizations sponsoring the dances made it a point to maintain a "flying squad" to keep order. It was not until the early '30's that North Castle instituted a three man police force; up to that time the residents had to rely on the understaffed State Police troop at Hawthorne.⁵

Dances were held at Mechanics Hall until two influences made them unfeasible. The first was that the radio shows which were the cheapest form of entertainment became regularly scheduled every night of the week; and the second was that dances to raise money for organizations could be held more profitably and with more attractive amenities at the Log Cabin and Rhineland Gardens during the '30's. Gradually the Hall fell into disuse except for the activities of the town government.

The conversion of the horse sheds into the addition where the town offices were located was not altogether without its drawbacks. The addition was not large; the space provided for the offices of the Town Clerk and the Receiver of Taxes was barely sufficient to accommodate a desk and one or two file cabinets. The remainder of the area afforded room for a bulky table around which sat the five members of the Town Board for public meetings. A wooden rail divided the Town Board from the spectators, who had to perch on uncomfortable benches, four or five rows in number, thus limiting the audience to no more than 40 or 50 people. The Justices of the Peace conducted their proceedings in the same area and under the same conditions.

For some mysterious reason the heating system installed for the town offices never operated satisfactorily. The water servicing the radiators seemed to disappear, and no matter how many times the pipes were checked, no explanation was found for the loss of water. The result was that periodically little or no heat was provided by the system, and the office staff was forced to work in overcoats and mufflers, trying to function with frost bitten fingers until the custodian representing the Junior Order could be summoned and the system restored.

The Police Dept. at that time had its headquarters in a small building across from the drug store on Main Street. As the population of the town grew, so did the police force. Originally consisting of three members, by the end of World War II there were twelve in number. It was apparent that both the town offices and the police headquarters were inadequate, and a movement to construct a Town Hall developed.

Finally, in 1947 the town acquired a parcel of seven acres from the estate of Charles Remsen at the present location on Old Route 22. The Town Hall was built in 1948. Thereafter, little or no activity occurred at Mechanics Hall, save for the meetings of the Junior Order.

The Junior Order itself was suffering from unforeseen problems at the same time. Fraternal organizations as a whole experienced a decline during and after the Great Depression. The membership of the Armonk Council steadily decreased, and the Hall no longer brought in revenue from rentals to the town or for its temporary use for affairs sponsored by community organizations.

Thus, in August, 1949 the trustees of the Council (Thomas R. Bradsell, J. Fred Acker and Orrin Husted) conveyed the property comprising Mechanics Hall to John C. Stromak, an auctioneer, for a consideration of \$7,500. Mr. Stromak used the Hall for the auctions which he conducted from time to time and as storage space for the antiques and other articles which he sold.⁶

So passed from existence Mechanics Hall as the center of community activity and recreation after some 40 years of service; and it is now 40 years after its last use in that role in 1947. The memory of its meaning and import for the then inhabitants of Armonk and the surrounding area is carried only in the minds of the few who lived in that period and still survive.

It is easy to overestimate, and memory inevitably includes its own patina of pleasant reference; nevertheless, it must be true that the frame building on Maple Avenue was the scene of many significant happenings in the community and in the town, and even more poignantly, the place which affected the lives of the people who went there for entertainment and enjoyment. I, for one, will not forget hearing the music of the orchestra pour from the open windows of the Hall in the summer, the people milling within and without, the air of excitement and anticipation which surrounded the events. For one reason or another, reasons difficult to explain, the present centers of the community do not communicate the same feeling of intimacy or fill the unique purposes which Mechanics Hall served.

It is perhaps the process of growing up — a community, I suppose, matures even as an individual — so that simple pleasures no longer suffice. Today our recreational needs are arranged for us by professionals, and to a large degree under the auspices of the government. No doubt, a greater spectrum of needs can thus be satisfied, but at the price of the loss of personal initiative and inventiveness.

Nor do I forget the intensity of the elections and party caucuses and public meetings which were held at the Hall. They resembled the town meetings of the 19th century, where decisions were made by vote of the people rather than by the vote of elected representatives. The debate may not have been as polished, but it was impassioned and richly individual.

The era of Mechanics Hall has gone. Its importance in the life of Armonk and North Castle, nevertheless, can never be overestimated.

NOTES:

I am indebted in the preparation of this article to many persons who gave freely of their time and memory. I am particularly grateful to Richard Lander, who provided his notes on the title of the property and with whom I discussed the history of the Armonk Council; to Kenneth Mains, who generously supplied me, from the index he has created, citations to the files of the North Castle Sun and the North Castle Monitor concerning the Junior Order and the Hall. I am grateful, too, to Orrin Husted, Joseph Wago, Jr., John Schnoor, my sister, Marguerite Lewis, and my wife, Bertha, who all reminded me of events that had occurred at the Hall.

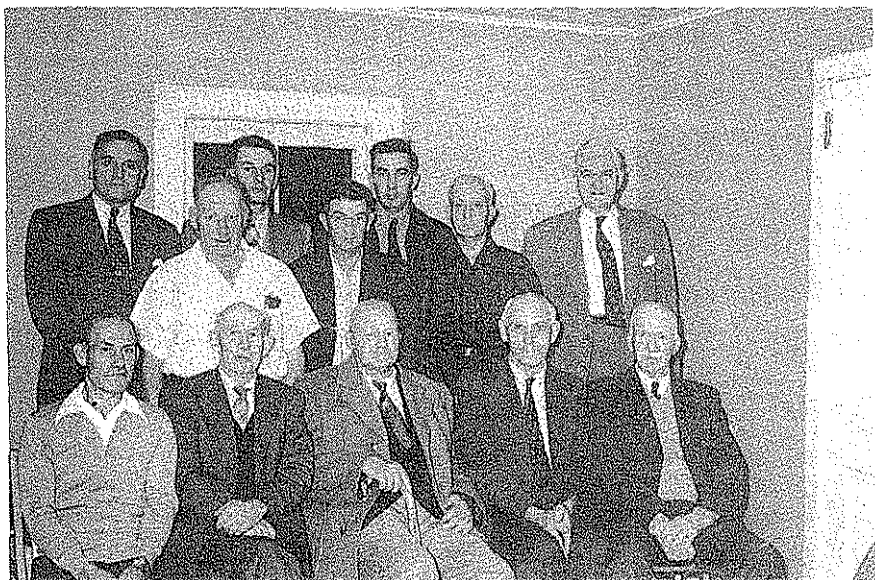
These are references not described in the article which might be of assistance to anyone who may be moved to pursue other avenues of investigation:

1. The Encyclopedia Britannica contains information about the origin in England of the Independent United Order of Mechanics (9 Encyclopedia Britannica (1955 ed.) 844, "Fraternal Societies"). The best source of the history of the Junior Order of American Mechanics I found to be Schmidt, Fraternal Organizations, 171-172, 339-340, (Greenwood Press, 1980). The story of the growth of the three lodges of the Junior Order in North Castle awaits another writer. It is likely that the chartering and dissolution of these Councils can be traced in the records of the County Clerk's office in Westchester and the office of the Secretary of State in Albany. It may be, too, that the records of the Councils can be located, and if this were so, a valuable mine of genealogical and historical references would be disclosed.
2. I have referred to several orchestras in the text. These were among the most popular that performed in the Hall, but there were others also, led by Bob Armbruster, Ted Goldman, both of White Plains, and George Abrams and Brad Lape, both of Armonk. Typically, the members were non-union, and the leader received a little more pay than the other musicians in order to compensate him for the cost of the music sheets and other expenses. The hiring rate for a four or five piece band ran from \$20-25 an engagement.
3. In addition to the movie theatres in White Plains and Port Chester, the Round Hill Community House showed movies, both silents and talkies, one evening a week. This began after the Hall ceased the projection of movies in the early '20's.
4. The "Paul Jones" is described in some literature about folk-dancing as two circles — one, inside the other, formed by the men, who remained motionless, the outside circle formed by the women, who moved around the men facing them; when the whistle was blown, the woman took as her partner the man she was facing. Perhaps the adaptation used in the Hall was preferred because it allowed for more boisterous dancing.
5. Despite the legal penalties imposed by the Volstead Act, Prohibition never stopped the sale and possession of liquor. The experiences at the dances in the Hall would have been duplicated throughout the county. The most popular beverage was applejack — a product made in the county. It was said that a gallon of bootleg applejack could be purchased for \$5.
6. Auctions were held by Mr. Stromak until the building was altered for its present purposes. The auctions attracted large throngs of bidders from throughout the metropolitan area.

*Caption from page 19:

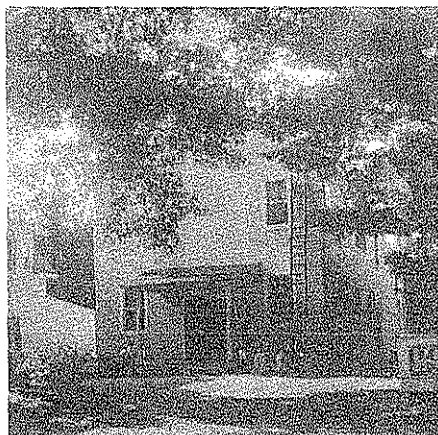
Mechanics Hall, Maple Avenue, Armonk, probably about 1935-40. The double doors pictured led to the public hall, the lodge rooms were above. The sign denotes the town offices, down the driveway in the rear of the building. A new business currently hides the front of the original building. Photo copied by Richard Koenig. Original photographer unknown.





The last meeting of Armonk Council No. 65, Junior Order of United American Mechanics, November 4, 1954. This lodge flourished in our town for more than sixty years and its membership roster was a roll of the town's leading citizens. Two other councils were formed from it: Banksville Council, and Charles MacDonald Council in North White Plains. At the final meeting the members pictured are: Front row, L-R: Orville Abrams, J. Frederick Acker, Harry J. Hunter, Eldon M. Pietschker, Thomas R. Bradsell. Second row, L-R: John Gramlich (North Greenwich), Lester Husted, Andrew Holmes. Third row, L-R: Ralph L. MacDonald, Orrin Husted, Nicholas (Ted) Husted, Marion MacDonald. Photographer unknown. Picture from the collection of Richard N. Lander.

Mechanics Hall being painted about 1959. At the time, the hall was an auction gallery owned by John C. Stromak. This view shows the front lawn, driveway and the fence on which generations of townspeople perched to await town election returns. Photo from the collection of Richard N. Lander. A new business was recently built in front, hiding the original building.





FACES FROM THE PAST

An Armonk Methodist Church picnic, summer of 1912 or 1913. Probably in the back yard of Judge Haviland's House on Maple Avenue, adjacent to Mechanics Hall. (Note the long shed in the back which had not yet become the Town Offices.) This picture, a post card never before published, was a gift to Richard N. Lander by Mary (Brundage) Schmidt (Mrs. Conrad) who is the pretty little girl with long dark curls sitting fourth from the left on the bench.

There are sixty people in the picture. Can anyone identify more? Left to right standing: Judge William K. Haviland, unknown, Ella L. Haviland (Mrs. William R.), Mrs. Mary Ryan holding her grandson James D. Hopkins, unknown, Mary B. Lander (Mrs. Norman W. Sr.), Annie S. Acker (Mrs. Edwin F.), William Brundage Jr. ("Big Will"), Lillias B. Brundage (Mrs. T. William) (Mrs. "Little Will"), Etta H. Acker (Mrs. J. Fred), Elizabeth M. Brundage (Mrs. "Big Will"), William F. MacDonald, unknown girl, Elliot Huestis, unknown, Francis H. Waterbury (Mrs. Ernest C.), Grace Brundage Cunningham (Mrs. Ernest R.), Ida L. MacDonald (Mrs. Charles W.), Lottie G. Lander (later Mrs. Harry J. Hunter), Mabel H. Brundage (Mrs. J. Chester), unknown, unknown, unknown, Miss Martha (Mattie) Lewis, unknown, unknown, Samuel French, unknown, Hon. Charles W. MacDonald (Town Supervisor), Horace G. Arnold.

Seated Second Row: Agnes Smith (Mrs. George W.), Edna Brundage MacDonald (Mrs. William F.), unknown, unknown, Elizabeth H. Cox (Mrs. Raymond), Bessie Brundage Hunter (Mrs. Harry J.), Elsie Waterbury Finch (Mrs. Elbert J.), Ella Brundage Waterbury (Mrs. Charles E.), Ralph L. MacDonald (standing). Seated on the grass in front: Rev. Joseph Emery Spencer, Pastor, Kathryn Ryan Hopkins (Mrs. Niles S.), Lulu MacDonald (Mrs. Albert), Arline Lovelett (later Mrs. Andrew Hyolbeck), Alice Lovelett (later Mrs. Leroy Farrington), Edwin F. Acker. Seated on the bench: unknown child, unknown child, Stephen Lovelett, Mary Brundage, Edna Hunter, Stanley Waterbury, Jane Brundage, William F. MacDonald, Charles Finch, George William Smith with son George J. Smith, Elsie Lander (later Mrs. Harry R. Williams). The unidentified lady with the baby between Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Lander may be the minister's wife Mrs. Spencer and her son Donald.

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