

# North Castle History



The Middle Patent United Methodist Church not long after 1901 when the bell tower was added. The church stands on the corner of Bedford/Banksville Road and Middle Patent Road. Note the original church (right) which was called the Wesley Chapel. It is believed that this plain structure was moved to that location to make room for a more commodious and church-like building. It still stands as a residence. The new church was completed in 1847 and added on to in 1869. Notice the horse sheds to the left. Picture from the collection of Richard N. Lander. Photographer unknown.

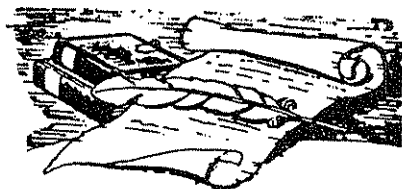
MEMORIAL TO RICHARD N. LANDER

A HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE PATENT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# *The North Castle Historical Society*

Bedford Road, Armonk, New York 10504

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*Dear Members and Friends,*

*The continued success of our endeavors is directly related to the dedication and hard work of our volunteers. We have been able to link the past with the present thanks to their tireless efforts.*

*As the Society continues to grow, so does our need for additional volunteers. If you have an interest in a particular facet of community history, please give us a call at Smith's Tavern. We'd love to be able to help you get involved! I think you would find the experience most rewarding.*

*My sincere thanks to you all for your annual membership renewals and assistance in fund raising activities. The issue of North Castle History you now hold is but one example of how your generous contributions are put to good use. I'm sure you'll enjoy it!*

*The four historic buildings on Society property are open for viewing on Sundays from 1:30-3:30 P.M. I'm sure you'll enjoy them as well!*

*Sincerely,*

J. Stuart Brown  
President



**RICHARD N. LANDER**  
**MAY 20, 1928–APRIL 2, 1993**

*This book has been published in memory of Richard N. Lander, a dedicated husband, father, church member, public official, historian and life-long resident of the Town of North Castle who so generously donated his time and shared his knowledge for the betterment of the town and its people— past, present, and future.*

Obituary from the Gannett Suburban Newspapers, April 4, 1993:

Richard N. Lander, a retired commissioner of jurors, a former North Castle Town Board member and the town historian, died Friday at home. He was 64.

Mr. Lander served as commissioner of jurors in Westchester from 1967 to 1986. He is credited with the modernization of the department, including a telephone system that allows prospective jurors to learn whether they will be needed in court the next day by a simple phone call.

“He certainly tried to make the system as painless as possible for people and was

a great one for modernization, but he was very big on seeing that people served," said his son, Jonathan Lander.

While Mr. Lander had a 29-year career with the county — he started in the division of land records in 1957 — his great love was being North Castle's town historian. He became the town historian in 1946 and held the position the rest of his life.

"I don't think there was any greater knowledge of Armonk and the town than the knowledge that passed with his death," said his wife, Jean Holmes Lander. The two were married June 15, 1957, at the Broadway Temple Methodist Church in New York City.

As historian and as a North Castle Town Board member from 1962 to 1974, Mr. Lander managed to preserve the flavor of the old with what was best of the new, family members said.

"I used to call him the 'Main Street Man.' If I sent him downtown for a loaf of bread, four hours later we'd have our sandwiches because he'd have been out talking to everyone," said his wife.

"It was during his tenure on the Town Board that Interstate 684 was built, and the board had to grapple with how many of the old homes of Armonk would have to be sacrificed for progress," his wife said.

"He loved Armonk. He used to take the boys to the four corners of Armonk and say 'Listen boys, listen now, because this is the heartbeat of the world,' " she said.

Mr. Lander was born in Mount Kisco on May 20, 1928, to Ernest W. and Martha Jane Rodgers Lander. He attended schools in Armonk and graduated from Pleasantville High School in 1946.

A 51-year member of the Armonk United Methodist Church, Mr. Lander served 40 years on the church's administrative board. He served on the church's board of trustees from 1952 to 1992 — first as secretary, then 18 years as vice president and 15 years as president.

He was a member of the boards of trustees of the Hudson East District of the Methodist Church for 10 years and the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Church for eight years.

He was elected the Armonk church's delegate to the New York Annual Conference for 38 consecutive years, from 1948 to 1986. He was also elected a delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1964.

Mr. Lander was among the five [seven] founders of the North Castle Historical Society and served on the society's board, as vice president and president, from 1971 until his death. While he was president, the society bought Smith's Tavern in Armonk for its headquarters.

He was a member of the Westchester County Historical Society since 1942 and an honorary member of the Westchester County Genealogical Society.

He was the author of numerous local historical works, including "David Brundage and His Descendents," published in 1961; "A History of the Armonk Methodist Church," published in 1962; and "A Lander Genealogy," published in 1992.

Mr. Lander was a 20-year member of the New York State Association of Commissioners of Jurors. He served as state president from 1978 to 1979.

He served on the board of directors for the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association. He was board president from 1976 to 1992.

He is survived by his wife and two sons, Jonathan Holmes Lander of Clinton, New Jersey and David Rodgers Lander of Armonk.

Memorial contributions are being made to the Middle Patent United Methodist Church, 700 Bedford Road, Armonk, NY 10504.

The Oelker & Cox Funeral Home in Mount Kisco is in charge of arrangements.

A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE  
TO  
RICHARD N. LANDER

by Barbara S. Massi, Editor and Trustee

A very special person left us on April 2, 1993, and with him went an encyclopedic knowledge of the Town of North Castle. Although time ran out too soon for him, we are fortunate that our beloved scholar of history left us with such an immense reservoir of facts, both written and taped.

Dick had an uncanny knowledge of the people, places, events, and dates relating to the town's history. He absorbed and retained every detail and gave you the feeling that he knew, personally, every citizen who ever lived in North Castle. And in a way he did, because as an avid researcher and writer he had, early on, developed an ability to separate fact from fiction. As a true historian, accuracy was very important to Dick. He was a fact-teller not a tale-teller. Therefore, he never tampered with history. His homespun reminiscences of people and days gone by could hold your attention for hours. This, and his ability to get along with everyone and make each feel at home in North Castle, made him a most revered member of our community.

First appointed by the town board as town historian 46 years ago, at age 18, he took this volunteer position very seriously. He saw the need and then set out to give North Castle its roots, selflessly donating thousands of hours to researching, writing and answering letters of historic inquiry from far and wide. "A labor of love!" he used to call it. And that is undoubtedly why he was so good at it. But let there be no doubt — although it was inconspicuous, it was very tedious and time-consuming.

While still in his teens, Dick wrote a weekly column on history for the *North Castle Sun*. When he was 15, the newspaper entered his work in a contest sponsored by the New York State Historical Society. It took second place. In 1947, at age 18, he wrote *The Middle Patent Methodist Church*, which was first published on the occasion of the church's 100th anniversary. It was then printed in the Westchester County Historical Society's quarterly publication, *The Westchester Historian*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 1948. He had been a member (later trustee and trustee emeritus) of that organization since the age of 13. Numerous articles followed, and for years prior to his death he had been working on the genealogies of many local families. He was truly a remarkable link between past and present and a faithful caretaker of our town's history!

Dick was a devoted family man and very proud of his wife, Jean, and their sons Jonathan and David and their wives. They constituted the most important part of his life. His church, the United Methodist, was also extremely important to him. His town and its history, The North Castle Historical Society, and the historic Middle Patent Rural Cemetery, where he now rests, were also very dear to him. It was during his tenure as president that The North Castle Historical Society acquired Smith's Tavern, and he was very involved in and staunchly committed to the acquisition—so much so that he wrote a comprehensive history of it for us. Amazingly, he was able to find time for everyone and also hold, for many years, the position of Commissioner of Jurors of Westchester County.

As initiator and editor of this publication I worked very closely with Dick over the years in planning articles, finding pictures and writing captions. He wrote many of the articles himself, although he was quite concerned about overexposure. Therefore he would inspire others, as only he could do, to write. Accuracy was always our most important consideration, and Dick could provide that simply by drawing on his memory or, on rare occasions, from the many books in his private collection. Needless to say, this publication has lost a resource that can never be replaced! For this year's booklet we had decided to use his article on the historic Middle Patent United Methodist Church, originally published in 1947. Last year the church was severely damaged by fire, but has since been totally restored. Dick's wife, Jean, President of the Middle Patent United Methodist Church Association, provides us with an update.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be co-editor with Dick of *Historical Records of North Castle, Minutes of Town Meetings*, Vol. 2, 1791-1848, a 400-page book published in 1986 by the Town of North Castle. Whenever I wearied after hours and hours of proofreading the typed copy from the old handwritten records, Dick would draw on his vast reservoir and give me a narrative of related history, thus regenerating my faltering attention span. I couldn't help but be moved by his enduring love of North Castle and its people. As co-chairman with him of North Castle's extensive 250th anniversary celebrations in 1986, I can attest that Dick was a joy to work with. He was patient, dignified and courteous to everyone, and always insisted on giving credit to those who helped him in any of his endeavors.

It was early in 1986 that he was stricken with a paralysis of undetermined origin from the waist down. As devastating as this could be to someone else, Dick continued to write and be active. He continued to devote much time to recording the history of North Castle. His mind and memory never faltered, even after two strokes eventually made it terribly difficult for him to relay or

write down the information. There was so much more he wanted to do, but unfortunately time ran out.

A fond remembrance of mine is when at The North Castle Historical Society's charter meeting in 1972, Dick related how on occasion he would stand in the center of Armonk, surrounded by intersections, traffic lights and highways, and recall a bed of petunias on a traffic island on Main Street many years ago. Amid the petunias was a sign that said simply, "Slow Down."

North Castle's own "Great Communicator" will be sorely missed, not only by those who knew him and loved him, but also by those who will never have the privilege of knowing him. But still we are fortunate because through his efforts we have been given the opportunity to be historically literate. His contributions are immeasurable for they are everlasting. It is significant that his funeral was held on April 6th, 1993, the 257th anniversary of North Castle's first town meeting.



### THE GIFT OF TIME

*Time is a priceless gift to use  
And mold into the soul.  
Something creative and lasting  
That keeps life pure and whole.*



*Each second of every minute  
is cast upon life's screen.  
Only the wise grasp and use it;  
Fools let it pass unseen.*

Loreta Inman



## IN MEMORIAM RICHARD N. LANDER

by the Honorable James D. Hopkins

Emerson said that history is biography, that is, the records of people. In that sense Dick Lander was a true historian. He chronicled the past in terms of people — families, towns, communities. He brought the forgotten into existence and rendered it in perspective clearly and understandably.

He could not have succeeded if he had not liked people. He was friendly and approachable to everyone. His own life was a testament to his interest in helping his neighbors and the ever-widening circle of persons with whom he dealt through the offices occupied by him during his career in public service.

The innate passion to delve into the beginnings of North Castle came to light early in his life. He became fascinated by the people who inhabited the past, and sought out the elders in the town to hear their reminiscences before he entered high school. He was appointed the town historian before he could vote by a town board impressed by his irresistible impulse to uncover the ancient records and put them into a coherent whole. He was a trustee of the Westchester County Historical Society only a year or so after he first voted, and was one of a very few to be selected as a trustee emeritus much later in his life. He was a friend and associate of many who made history a profession — Dixon Ryan Fox and Richard Hofstadler, both of Columbia University, and Richard M. Lederer, who wrote so much and so lucidly about Westchester County, among others. He was constantly consulted about events and individuals of older North Castle.

When he entered his public career, it is notable that his service was centered in offices where he was in continuing communication with people — first as a court clerk in the Supreme Court, Westchester County, and later as the commissioner of jurors of the county. Under his administration the proceedings of the court system were not a dull or indifferent process. He lent a sympathetic ear to the concerns of the persons who came to him and tried to ease their problems responsibly. He was, in the words of the justices of the court, the best commissioner of jurors in the state.

He liked being commissioner of jurors, but I am persuaded that he enjoyed his tenure of town councilman more. There were several reasons for this. He was deeply conscious that his grandfather had served as supervisor and that his uncle had been assistant to others who had served in that office, and he

wished to carry on the family tradition. Further to the point he was engrossed in the affairs of the town and of Armonk; he had an abiding interest in their proper development. Throughout his terms as councilman he was confronted by the evolution of the growth of North Castle from a scattered, largely rural population to a suburban environment— bringing in its wake inevitable problems of zoning and planning. In all of this difficult period his actions were not moved by political motives but what was conceived by him to be the welfare of the people and the communities in the town.

In other aspects his engagement with affairs in Armonk was strongly present. He was always interested in the local Methodist church, both as a trustee and as a delegate to the conferences. He became recognized as a leading layman in national Methodism. He was a founder of the North Castle Historical Society and its president, and a prime participant in the acquisition of Smith's Tavern. He was elected president of the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association and during his service the cemetery was enlarged and made financially sound.

Dick was a prolific writer and researcher. His articles filled the pages of both the Westchester and the North Castle Historical Societies publications. He was a rigorous and careful compiler of genealogies, not accepting what seemed to be obvious without checking its accuracy. Of all of his work, I think the one writing project that afforded him the greatest pleasure and satisfaction was his affectionate portrayal of Dr. George B. Clark, *North Castle History*, Vol. 17, 1990. Dick in his youth had resided next door to Dr. Clark, a student of local history in his own right, and I am sure that he inspired Dick to follow the course of discovering and describing the past. The article is replete with Dick's admiration and respect for the man who was for many of us, the model of the country doctor.

Dick had his personal heroes. In the distant years they were Bishop Francis Asbury, who had traveled on horseback throughout Westchester, encouraging the establishment of Methodism, and William Creemer, the longtime town clerk of North Castle, whose meticulous records were an example of precision and who had possessed an enduring interest in the past, so much so that he copied the ancient minutes to insure their preservation. These minutes became the foundation of the publication of *Historical Records*, Vol. 1 in 1975 and Vol. 2 in 1986.

There were others whom Dick knew and admired during his lifetime. Three come to mind: Stuart A. Freeman, who was Dick's first employer at the Home Title Guaranty Company; Frank S. McCullough, an administrative

judge of the court system, with whom Dick worked closely as commissioner of jurors, and Edwin G. Michaelian, the county executive during much of Dick's tenure as commissioner. Dick regarded all three as models in their various capacities.

Dick possessed pride in what he accomplished—a quiet and not ostentatious pride. His devotion to his wife Jean, sons Jonathan and David, and to his friends, shone through his words and deeds. His demeanor during his last years, when he was stricken by a relentless and crippling disease, was marked by courage, grace and reserve, without despair or anger because of his affliction.

Our town was endowed by his presence. It has been lessened without him.



### — MEMORIES OF DICK —

**R. EUGENE CURRY**, long-time friend:

*In the early days of the North Castle Library my wife, Margery, and other volunteers looked out the window and one exclaimed, "What are we going to give Dick Lander, he has already read everything here." He was then 13 years old.*

*Dick's love of history led him to walk to the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery, where he copied and memorized the names and families. Later, from age 22, he served on the cemetery board, and as secretary, treasurer and president.*

*The same dedication and leadership marked his concern and success in keeping the historic Middle Patent United Methodist Church open for Advent and summer vespers.*

*Dick was known all over Westchester County as an excellent commissioner of jurors, and many recall how competent, thoughtful and helpful he was.*

*The most remarkable of all was his fortitude and cheerfulness in the trying times of recent years, which made us love him all the more. His wife, Jean, while teaching in our local schools, carried the household, the personal care day and night, with the greatest dedication.*

*He slipped away in his own home surrounded by his beloved books and records.*

**STEPHEN HOLDEN**, former President, Westchester County Historical Society and Founder of the White Plains Historical Society:

*I knew him for many, many years, since he was a clerk in the county clerk's office. He was very meticulous and methodical about everything he did. He was always so pleasant and helpful. He would spend hours on research for his history projects.*

**SUSAN SWANSON, Westchester County Historian:**

*Dick Lander was a local historian in the truest sense of the word. His roots in his home town were so deep and they meant so much to him that he felt a sense of obligation to bring that love of Armonk and North Castle's heritage to everyone he knew. And he started at a very early age, when he was a teenager. I believe that he was the youngest member ever to join the Westchester County Historical Society. He had many friends who walked many miles along the highway of history with him. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.*

**WILLIAM E. FINCH, JR., Greenwich Town Historian:**

*Dick and I worked closely in the affairs of the historic Middle Patent Rural Cemetery where we served together on its Board of Directors for over 40 years.*

*Dick was barely out of his teens but from the start we had many mutual interests. Foremost among them: genealogy and the history of North Castle and Greenwich. I saw him grow to be a leader in his community, holding offices in town government, local organizations, and his beloved church. I have lost a dear comrade and the Town of North Castle and Westchester County a great promoter.*

**RICHARD MAASS, Westchester County Historian Emeritus:**

*My first contact with Dick Lander came in the old courthouse on Main Street in White Plains when Dick was, I believe, a deputy commissioner of jurors. He was so approachable and unbureaucratic that he made an immediate impression. When he became the commissioner of jurors he revised the office to the point where it was almost a pleasure to be called to jury duty.*

*But it was in his role as town and village historian that Dick really shone. He had studied, researched and written about the history of North Castle and the surrounding area and was delighted to share his knowledge with others. Anyone with a serious interest in the early history of the area could call on Dick with the assurance that an enthusiastic and intelligent response would be received.*

*He left us too early in his life, but he left us a legacy of learning for future generations.*

**THE REV. PAUL M. ALLEN, friend and long-time minister:**

*Dick Lander was a man of integrity. Not only the events, people, stories and buildings of the past attracted his interest, but the values, standards, and morals of our tradition gained his devotion. Ideals that he lived by were: integrity—a person's word is as good as his bond, a promise made is a promise kept; in a crisis of life's choice, integrity reveals the triumph of the real man or woman. A word like "probity," or simple honesty, which scorns deceit of any kind of cheating or the cutting of moral corners, was another watchword to Dick. The dog-eat-dog mentality was an anathema to him; the person*

who sought to achieve success at the expense of others' rights or reputations was the ultimate in deviltry.

The good neighborliness so often found among rural families enchanted him: the gathering of a community for a barn raising, stories of neighbors banding together to go from farm to farm harvesting their crops, the assembling of a "bee" of persons to help another recover from a calamity. In the telling of stories of good relationships in the community, his love of the historical came alive. He hungered to see the values of the past enshrined in the present practice of community life.

I'm pleased to join the citizens of the Town of North Castle in honoring the memory of Richard N. Lander for his lifelong dedication to keeping the historical record both accurate and alive.

**DORIS FINCH WATSON**, Trustee and former President of the North Castle Historical Society, and new Town Historian:

*Dick and I worked together for over thirty years on the Board of Directors of the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association, and the cemetery was one of his greatest interests. Also, we worked together in The North Castle Historical Society, where we were two of the original incorporators, as well as on innumerable historical projects and programs.*

*After Dick became ill, we shared our common interests through visits and by telephone calls right up to the time of his death. As difficult as it was for him to dial the phone, he would call me almost to the end. Dick was buried in his beloved cemetery on April 6th, the 257th anniversary of North Castle's first town meeting. I'm sure he wouldn't have had it any other way. I will miss Dick and his love of history, and I cherish the warm memories in my heart.*

**JOHN A. LOMBARDI**, Supervisor, Town of North Castle

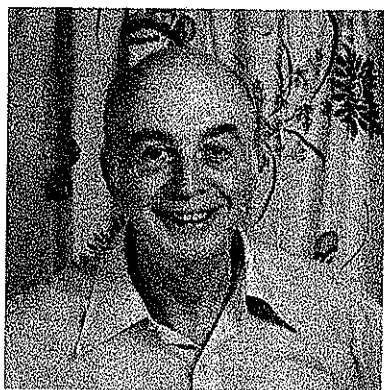
*Dick had a calming affect while on the town board. Whenever things heated up he would act as the appeaser. He was always composed and therefore respected by everyone, regardless of their political affiliation. I stayed in touch with him after he left the town board. His passing has created a void in our lives . . . We will sorely miss him!*

**OLIVER A. KNAPP**, Mount Kisco Village Historian:

*My initial contact with Dick Lander was during the time he was commissioner of jurors. His interest in local history consisted of a multitude of topics. I often visited Dick in his library when he enjoyed telling me the many stories on subjects such as how Byram (buy-rum) acquired its name from the Indians.*

*As sentinel of North Castle's history Dick gave me an insight into its famous waterways, local characters and ancient houses, as well as the Agnew, Meyer, Magee,*

*Siedenburg and other estates. The diverting tunnel connecting Wampus and Byram Lakes with Kensico Lake, the "Lost Village" of Kensico, the Catskill and Delaware aqueducts, Barrett Airways (Armonk Airport), the famous Log Cabin and Blue Gardens restaurants, and the Leatherman's cave, were all thoroughly familiar to this star player of historical records and made him invaluable to North Castle which is so rich in history.*



Old comrades:  
Gene Curry  
and  
Charles Elson



## ARTICLES AND BOOKS BY RICHARD N. LANDER

### NORTH CASTLE HISTORY:

Forgotten Roll of Honor: Vol. 1, 1974

Hugh MacKay, M.D.: Vol. 3, 1976

Smith's Tavern Revisited: Vol. 4, 1977

The Friend's Meetinghouse at North Castle: Vol. 5, 1978

Faces From the Past: Vol. 6, 1979

Sands' Mills: Vol. 7, 1980 (Reprinted from The Historian, Westchester Co. Historical Soc., Vol. 28, No. 4, Oct., 1952)

The Brundage Blacksmith Shop: Vol. 8, 1981 (co-authored with Barbara S. Massi and Doris Finch Watson)

Addendum to The Brundage Blacksmith Shop: Vol. 8, 1981

The School That Endured: Vol. 9, 1982

James Woolsey, MD: Vol. 9, 1982

The Dayton House: Vol. 11, 1984

North Castle's First Subdivision: Vol. 12, 1985

The Lyon Family of North Castle: Vol. 13, 1986

The Lyon Cemetery: Vol. 13, 1986

Methodism at North Castle: Vol. 14, 1987 (Excerpted from a book written by R.N.L. for the Armonk United Methodist Church)

Sites From the Past: Vol. 15, 1988

The Old Post Road and Its Milestones in North Castle: Vol. 16, 1989 (co-authored with Richard M. Lederer)

Faces From the Past: Vol. 16, 1989

Dr. George Birch Clark: Vol 17, 1990

Faces From the Past: Vol. 17, 1990

Places From the Past: Vol. 17, 1990

Robert Harris, Founder of St. Stephen's Church: Vol. 19, 1992

Places From the Past: Vol. 19, 1992

AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY IN NORTH CASTLE: Published by the Town of North Castle, 1976:

Tories . . .and Patriots

**HISTORICAL RECORDS OF NORTH CASTLE: Vol. 2, 1986. Published by the  
Town of North Castle:**

**An Overview (co-authored with Barbara S. Massi and Doris Finch Watson)**

**Justices of the Peace and the Council of Appointment**

**Schools**

**Roads**

**Picture Captions**

**BOOKS:**

**David Brundage and His Descendants, 1961**

**A History of the Armonk Methodist Church, 1962**

**The Lander Family Genealogy, 1992**

**THE WESTCHESTER HISTORIAN (quarterly publication of The Westchester  
County Historical Society):**

**Tombstones Inscriptions: Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2, 1943**

**The Old Smith Tavern: Vol. 19, No. 3 & 4, 1943**

**Annual Pilgrimage: Vol. 22, No. 2 & 3, 1946**

**Joseph Silkman Hobby, Entrepreneur: Vol. 23, No. 1 & 2, 1947**

**The Middle Patent Methodist Church: Vol. 24, No. 1, 1948**

**The First Methodist Church of Pleasantville: Vol. 24, No. 2, 1948**

**Theodore Brundage, 1839-1907, North Castle Farmer: Vol. 25, No. 1, 1949**

**North Castle's Town Meetings and Meeting Places: Vol. 25, No. 3, 1949**

**The First Universalist Society of North Salem and Vicinity: Vol. 26, No. 3, 1950**

**Lost and Found: Vol. 26, No. 1, 1950**

**William Henry Creemer, 1829-1900: Vol. 28, No. 1, 2 & 3, 1952**

**Sands' Mills: Vol. 28, No. 4, 1952**

**The Tripp Sawmill on Byram River: Vol. 29, No. 2, 1953**

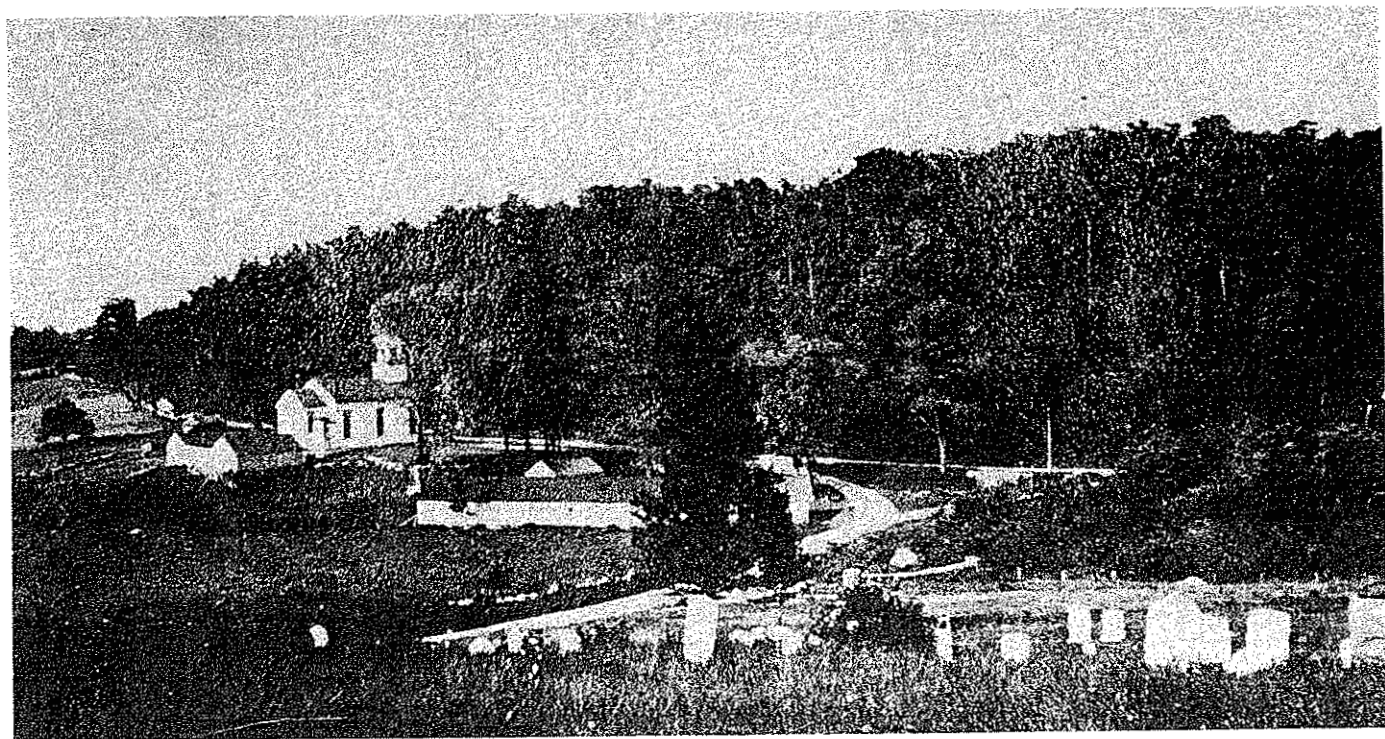
**John Howard Quinby, A Tardy Recognition: Vol. 29, No. 4, 1953**

**The Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association: Vol. 33, No. 4, 1957**

**Chestnut Ridge Methodist Chapel: Vol. 51, No. 1, 1975**

**The Beginnings of Methodism in North Castle: Vol. 63, No. 4, 1987**

**In Memoriam: Mildred Earle Haight Struble: Vol. 63, No. 1, 1987**



The Middle Patent United Methodist Church probably around 1910 taken from the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery. Note the horse sheds and barns are still standing. From the collection of R.N.L. Photographer unknown.



## A HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE PATENT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

By Richard N. Lander

On Christmas Eve, 1825, at a meeting held in the house of Captain James Banks, the Middle Patent Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. Presiding at this meeting were the circuit pastors, Peter C. Bussing as chairman and Thomas Mason as the clerk. At this time, agreeable "to the legal notice, of fifteen days previously given," the trustees were elected. These pioneers of early Methodism were as follows: Reverend Peter C. Bussing, John Ferris, Ezekiel Finch, William Finch and Jacob Johnson. Other prominent members of the new congregation were Enos Hobby, Allen Hobby and Captain James Banks.

The Society at Middle Patent was an offshoot of the old North Castle Methodist Episcopal Church, located some five miles to the west. This society, now known as the Armonk United Methodist Church, was established in 1787 and was the mother church of Methodism in this whole area of mid-Westchester County. For many years Methodists from Middle Patent traveled to the parent church, but as the faithful itinerant pastors of the church expanded their circuits, classes were held in the valley of the Mianus and finally services in the old Middle Patent Schoolhouse about half a mile south of the site of the present church. As the congregation grew, the desirability of traveling to Armonk for services decreased, so the Christmas Eve meeting was arranged to organize the church. As soon as they had organized, the trustees made plans to erect a church.

On April 5, 1826, Joshua Knapp and Charity, his wife, in consideration of one dollar, deeded to the trustees of the society thirty-five rods of land upon which they were to build a Methodist Episcopal church. This deed contained a trust clause stating that if the land ceased to be used for church purposes, it should revert to the Knapp family. Thereafter, the trustees erected a church, which was named Wesley Chapel, in honor of the founder of Methodism (Liber 26 of Deeds, page 422).

This church, which was typical of the early Methodist meeting houses without tower or adornment, was evidently finished by the spring of 1826. Of its interior, we know not, as no tradition has come down to us of its inside accommodations or arrangements, but it was to be the home of the society for the next twenty years.

Methodism prospered at Middle Patent, and by 1833 the congregation was one of the largest of the eleven preaching places remaining on the Bedford

Circuit of the New York Conference. Contributions for that year amounted to the sum of eighty-two dollars and seventeen cents for the support of the circuit preachers, by far one of the largest sums of money given.

It is evident that by the 1840s the growing congregation was crowded in Wesley Chapel, and it was deemed necessary to build a larger and more commodious church. This new church was to be more in keeping with other church edifices which were being built in nearby communities, and so the decision we celebrate was made. In the fall of 1846, or the early spring of 1847, the congregation began to build the present church edifice nearly on the ancient boundary of the Middle and West Patents in the Mianus valley.

The author is now of the opinion that the old Wesley Chapel was moved northward from the church lot to new foundations on lands belonging to Samuel Knapp, the son of Joshua, who gave the original land in 1826. What transactions there were between the trustees and Knapp are lost. Tradition has told us repeatedly that the old house north of the church was the original Wesley Chapel. Indeed, everyone who was in a position to know had heard the same from their sires and grandsires. But in 1847 the trustees purchased no new land and the old original church lot of thirty-five rods was too small to accommodate two such buildings. Other land surrounding the church was not purchased by the trustees until 1876. It is also interesting to note that on May 3, 1848, Samuel Knapp and Patience, his wife, sold the land next door, consisting of about an acre, to Edward F. Palmer (Liber 128 of Deeds, page 448), indicating perhaps the existence for the first time of the house being on the property.

The new church was completed in May of 1847 and formed a striking contrast to the old building. A handsome church of wood, complete with tower and gallery, was consecrated to the worship of Almighty God. Gone forever to posterity are its cost, the names of the building committee and the name of the builder.

In that time, the church was still a part of the Bedford Circuit served by two or more itinerant clergymen. In 1856 the Bedford Circuit was broken up and Middle Patent was given a regular clergyman in conjunction with the Bedford and Chestnut Ridge Methodist Churches. By this time many of the original founders and leaders were deceased and their places filled by new leaders, among whom were Jonathan Hobby, Elnathan Finch, Alpheus Meritt, William Worden, Samuel C. Finch, Marvin N. Finch, Charles E. Brundage and Allen Palmer.

The residence of the minister on this charge must have changed several times, from Middle Patent to Bedford. In April of 1859, we find the trustees

purchasing a parcel of ground, ten acres in extent, from John S. Carpenter and his wife for \$1,300. Here, it is reported, the minister serving the charge lived until March of 1867, when the trustees sold the farm parsonage for \$1,700. Why this change, history does not record, but members of the Finch family recall that it was used as a parsonage. This house stood exactly at the entrance to the present Daniel Gray Fishing Club property and was torn down in the early 1930 era simply because it had been neglected. Those who recall it say it was a handsome structure.

In 1869 the church was added to when the entire wall of the building was opened and the choir and back entrance of the church were added. Again, there are no details of the cost, the names of any building committee, or who the builder was. The author surmises the enterprise may have been the idea of Dr. Ralph B. Griswold who joined the church in the early 1860s and who, history says, was the leader of the musical program in the church for many years.

By the 1870s, the church lot, with the building and one horse shed, was becoming crowded with the wagons and carriages which transported the faithful to church. Accordingly, on October 20, 1876, the trustees purchased an adjoining quarter acre in the valley below the church on the south and west for the sum of \$100. The seller was Joseph Niess and his wife of New York City, who for a short time owned the old farm of Joshua Knapp (who gave the trustees the original church lot back in 1826). Tradition says that this land was purchased with money raised by the church's women's society (Liber 923 of Deeds, page 83).

After the sale of the Middle Patent parsonage, the minister lived at Bedford, and for a short time in the 1870s, was shared with Armonk. Where the pastor lived during those two years we know not, but it must have been rented quarters, for the Armonk church had no parsonage. By the late 1880s new trustees and leaders had come into the church. These new men were Theodore Brundage, William J. Brundage, Shadrach R. Close, Theodore E. Close, William S. Finch, Ralph B. Griswold, Lorenzo Mead, Hiram Mead, Ezekiel Reynolds and Richard Smith.

On October 1, 1891, this group was instrumental in purchasing from Lizzie Crespo of New York City, the well-known Octagon House in Banksville. This now famous residence was built in the early 1860s by Dr. Griswold, who lived in it for many years before moving to a larger house. Mrs. Crespo, the seller, was using it for a summer residence when the trustees purchased it for \$1,300 (Liber 1246 of Deeds, page 469). The house described in the deed as the "Round House" was situated on three-quarters of an acre of ground with appropriate outbuildings. It became the scene of many happy occasions,

especially weddings and sociables. The first pastor who lived in it was the Reverend William Willcocks during the last two years of the church's being on a charge with Bedford.

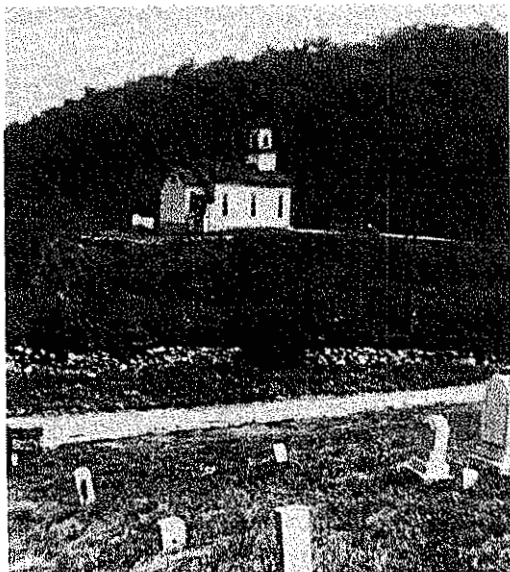
In 1896, the Reverend Jonas A. Inman was called to the pastorate. Through the efforts of this excellent minister, a physical and spiritual revival of the old church took place. The membership increased and the property was entirely remodeled. A new organ was purchased along with new pulpit, pews and carpets. The old gallery was removed and the church entirely repainted. New stained glass windows took the place of the older clear-glass panes, and a furnace was installed in place of the old stoves. After an entire summer of work, the church was reopened on Sunday, October 3, 1897, with two former ministers taking part. The Reverend George W. Knapp (1848) preached the morning service and the Reverend James H. Hawkshurst (1869-1871) officiated in the evening. Also present as a guest was the Reverend Nathaniel S. Tuthill, a former pastor (1863-1865).

In January, 1901, the belfry, which had remained vacant since the building of the church, was equipped with a very fine bell, the gift of Mrs. Odle Knapp. The bell was hung with Shadrach Close and Ezekiel Reynolds superintending the work. On January 20, 1901, "the bell called the congregation to worship for the first time," so states Theodore Brundage, trustee of the church and a line-a-day diarist.

For some years after the Inman pastorate the church began to wane, and in the early part of the twentieth century the surrounding country underwent a great change. Many of the older members of the church had died; as a result many of the old farms and smaller homes were incorporated into large estates which were then in vogue. Many younger members also sold their homes and moved away to larger villages and towns nearby, especially since small farming became unprofitable. This trend continued until 1918 when the members notified the New York Conference they could no longer support a minister and the last incumbent pastor, Reverend Glenville C. Morse, vacated the pulpit.

After the closing of the church, the former members scattered to other churches, but their loyalty to the old church was strong and they returned once each year in the summer to hold a service with a visiting pastor, and to transact necessary business. Principal among this group of stalwarts were Shadrach Close, Lucius A. Close, Soren Jensen and William J. Paine.

In February 1925, the trustees sold the parsonage for \$3,250 and the wonderful old "Round House" passed out of the church's hands. As the church deteriorated, the upper belfry was removed since it was thought to be near collapse and dangerous. The bell was sent to the Castle Heights Methodist



Picture dated 1935 showing the church after the horse sheds and barns were taken down. Note the upper bell tower is still in place. From the collection of R.N.L. Photographer unknown.

**BELOW:** June 16, 1946. Notice that the upper bell tower is no longer on the church. From the collection of R.N.L. Photographer unknown.



Church in North White Plains, where it still continues to call the faithful to worship.

By 1938 the building was in such a state of ill repair it was thought unsafe, and a meeting of the survivors of the old congregation and interested persons was held in the open on July 10th of that year. At that time there was a general feeling that the church would have to be permanently closed. Before any action could be taken "A Good Kind Man" offered to give the money to repair the church in memory of Theodore Brundage, Dr. Ralph B. Griswold and other older members. Trustees Lucius A. Close, William B. Adams and William J. Paine voted to accept the offer. With Mr. Paine as the go-between, the trustees completely refurbished, repainted and redecorated the church inside and out. New concrete piers were placed under the sagging building, new floors were laid, a new roof constructed, and as the bills were presented, the anonymous donor paid them all.

The church was reopened and rededicated at a special service held on July 9, 1939, with the Reverend C. Wesley Christman, Jr., pastor of the Armonk Methodist Church, conducting the service. From 1945, the church has been under the care and oversight of the pastor at Armonk, with occasional guest pastors assisting. Since 1939, the church has generally been open four Sundays each summer; many of the services being held in the evening by lamplight under the beautiful original oil chandelier and lamps. During the years 1943 and 1944 only one service was held due to wartime restrictions on traveling and gas.

A continuing group of faithful persons minister to the church's physical needs. Since 1939, the exterior has been repainted twice, totally by volunteers. Special mention should here be made of Mrs. Marian Brundage, who for many years furnished the summer music program, and also Clinton A. Ferris who, after the refurbishing, cared for the church property and tended the lamps.

In 1947 the church completed one hundred years since its erection and the trustees, together with an anniversary committee, celebrated the event with a special service and printed an anniversary booklet. The special service was held on Sunday, June 29, 1947, with the pastor, Reverend C. Wesley Christman, Jr., in charge and the venerable Bishop Herbert Welch preaching the sermon to a large congregation, which overflowed the sanctuary.

At the present time, the trustees are sponsoring five services yearly: four in the summer and one at the beginning of Advent, ushering in the Christmas season. Throughout the summer, persons from all denominations come from miles around to attend services but the Advent Service has been the most popular — the church being crowded to the doors with standing room only. On Sunday, September 12, 1971, Bishop Lloyd C. Wicke, resident bishop of the

New York area, preached, marking the second time in the church's history that the pulpit has been occupied by a bishop of the Methodist Church.

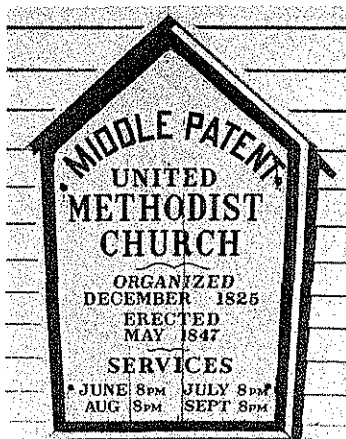
Twenty-five years ago [1947] when the author prepared the first history of the church, the story closed with wondering about its future. In that quarter of a century devoted hands have preserved a lovely local landmark for another generation to see and to appreciate, and still wonder about its future as we again ponder the same words:

*What the future of the Middle Patent Methodist Church is to be, no one knows. Whether the present building continues to house a worshipping congregation or not, this much is sure: the Middle Patent Methodist Church is more than a building! It is a fellowship embracing time and eternity, bound together by a love of God and Christ, a fellowship whose influence for God and His Kingdom shall never end as long as here or there one soul remains to love and serve and praise His Name.*

NOTES: The Sunday School at Middle Patent was founded and prospered under the guidance of Ralph B. Griswold, M.D., of Banksville. Dr. Griswold was known and beloved by all for miles around the area, and was family physician to over three hundred families. He was active in all civic affairs and was for over fifty years a zealous Methodist layman serving this church. Upon his retirement from the superintendency, he was succeeded by Shadrach R. Close, who carried on Dr. Griswold's work until its closing.

From this congregation came the Hon. Charles G. Banks, well-known lawyer and public official, later to be Mayor of New Rochelle, N.Y.

No less than four persons connected with the society in their youth entered the ministry of the Methodist Church. Reverend Peter C. Bussing, who was present at the organizational meeting of the society, was for some years an itinerant pastor but located early in life. Reverend William H. Ferris (1815-1887), son of John Ferris, one of the founding trustees, was for some years one of the most eminent pastors of the New York Conference. Lastly, came the father and son combination of Reverend Henry Brown Mead (1820-1906) and Reverend George Banks Mead (1853-1946), both of whom spent all or part of their boyhood at Middle Patent.



February, 1992. Picture taken by Mary Milo.

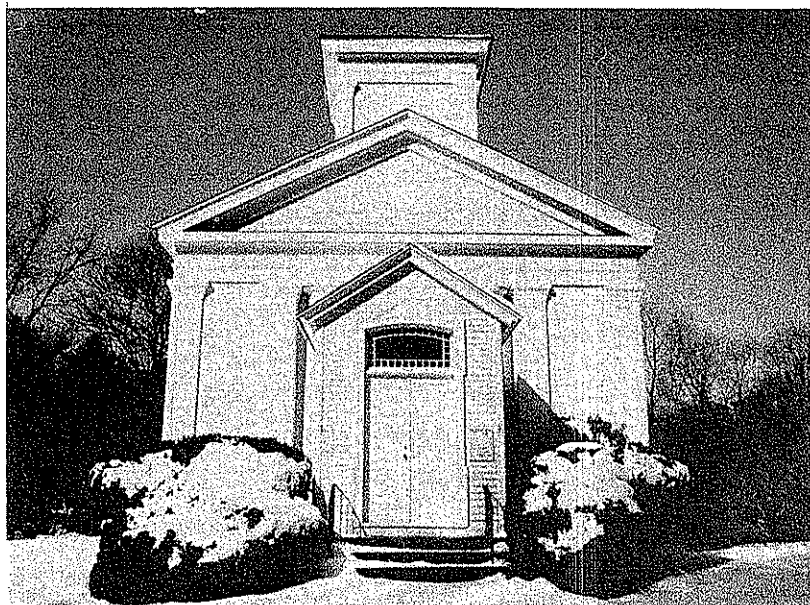
# THE MIDDLE PATENT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1972-1993

by Jean H. Lander  
President, Church Board of Trustees

On June 11, 1972, the Middle Patent United Methodist Church held a special service to celebrate its 125th anniversary. At this time there was an updating and reprinting of the history of the church written in 1947 for the 100th anniversary by Richard N. Lander, town historian of North Castle and a trustee of the church. Both of these histories ended with a question and an anticipation for the future of the church: "What the future of the Middle Patent United Methodist Church is to be no one knows. Whether the present building continues to house a worshipping congregation or not..." (see previous article).

Yet this beautiful and historic church still remained a landmark of Methodism in the Banksville community of North Castle. Friends and neighbors of the community continued to support its upkeep and maintenance with financial contributions. The Board of Trustees devotedly oversaw the upkeep of the grounds and buildings, giving freely of their time and talents to perform



February, 1992, two months before the fire. Picture taken by Mary Milo.



Inside, just before the fire. Picture taken by Mary Jane Watson.

the many tasks. With the help of the pastor serving the Armonk United Methodist Church, the board organized and conducted four monthly summer services in June, July, August and September, and ushered in the Christmas season to an overflowing congregation at the Advent Service on the first Sunday of December as twilight came.

During the spring of 1990 the interior of the church was painted, using monies raised from donations. By the fall of 1990 the exterior of the church was in extreme need of paint, and funds large enough for this task were not yet raised. The building was painted by William Decker Painting of Armonk, with a "handshake" agreement that as the funds became available our commitment to him would be executed, regardless of time. The "Paint Can" Fund continued to grow, and in the spring of 1992, the bill was paid in full. Through this period of time the church was frequently used for weddings and baptisms of people in the surrounding community.

#### — Tragedy Strikes —

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the question asked in 1947 and again in 1972 regarding the future of the church became paramount. On Saturday evening, April 4, 1992 at approximately 6:45 p.m. the interior of the church was set ablaze by a young man suffering from a mental disorder. Horrified citizens watched as

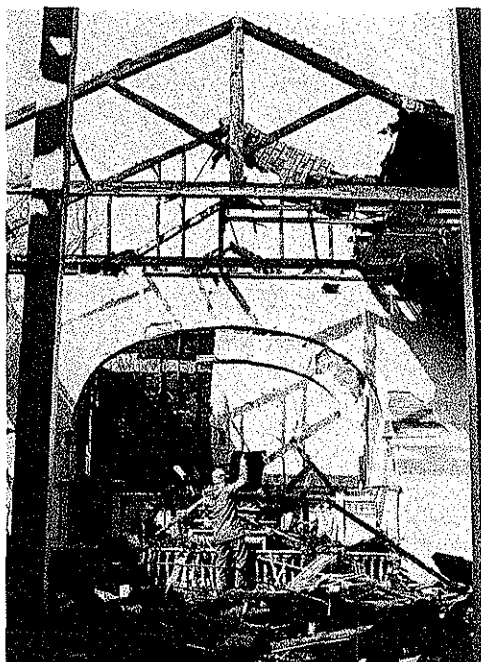


**The fire. This picture was copied from the front page of the Reporter Dispatch (the original picture could not be located by the newspaper). Original picture taken by Frank Becorerra.**

**Outside, after the fire. Picture taken by Richard Koenig.**



the dark evening sky filled with crimson whips of flame lashing up and through the roof of this old wooden structure, filling the countryside with acrid smoke. The prompt and immediate response of the Banksville Fire Department was assisted by the Armonk Fire Department and equipment from the Mount Kisco Fire Department. The valiant and heroic men fought to control the fire and save the building. Before the night was over the fire was out, but the roof was gone and the building gutted. Yet the outer walls remained standing and the narthex was intact.



**Trustee Robert Farquhar looking over the interior damage. Picture taken by Richard Koenig.**

On Sunday afternoon, April 5th 1992, the pastor and the trustees met in the home of Jean H. Lander. Now, the often asked question had an answer. The immediate outcry of the community, both moral and financial, was to be the board's direction. Through the wise planning of the board of trustees, an excellent insurance policy was held with Rand Brotherhood and Higley Insurance, agents for the United Methodist Local Church Insurance Program. This, along with the many contributions received from friends, prompted the board to vote unanimously to rebuild this historic landmark.

### — The Rebuilding —

The process began under the leadership of Trustee Howard Pinchbeck. The burned steeple was removed so cleanup could commence. Careful sorting and sifting of every inch of the charred remains allowed for the salvaging of many of the antique original interior parts. Eventually, John S. Madzula of JSM Associates of Newtown, Connecticut was hired as architect and general construction manager to guide the board through reconstruction. Throughout the summer of 1992 preparations were made. In November 1992 the long and meticulous reconstruction commenced, under the daily supervision of Trustee Pinchbeck. The original oil lamps were restored and the original pulpit was delicately rebuilt by Mr. Pinchbeck. Many of the original stained-glass windows were reused. The ornate center ceiling design was remolded and recast of plaster to duplicate the original, the broken pieces having been saved and laid out on the empty floor to establish the exact size and design pattern. A replacement organ was found in Virginia by a former trustee and organist of the church—an exact duplicate of the 1896 organ that had been destroyed.

By the summer of 1993 the church was reaching its final stages of reconstruction. Painting was completed, new flooring finished, antique chairs re-caned, the entrance rebuilt and the grounds redressed — all new, yet old, at a completion cost of \$320,000. The trustees had answered the question.



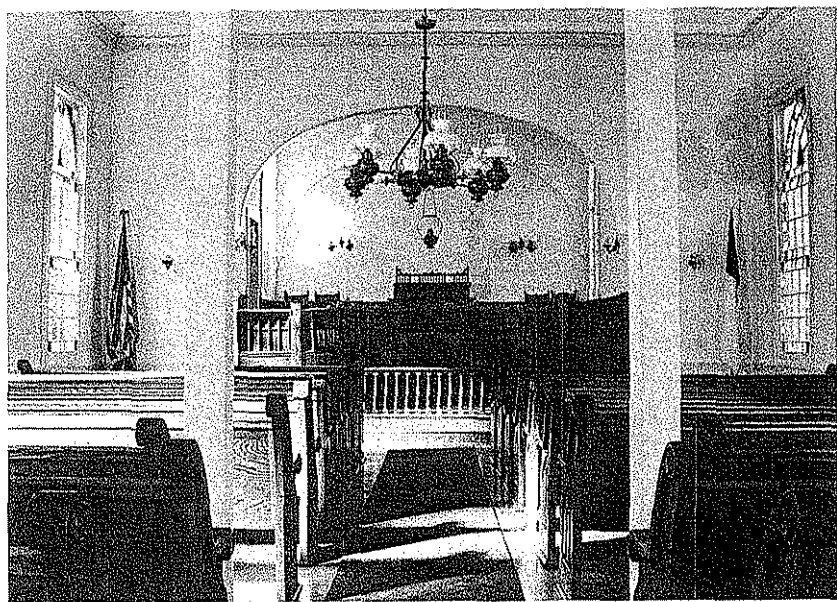
Outside, after restoration. Picture taken by Richard Koenig.

— Reconsecration —

On Sunday, September 12, 1993 the pastor, Reverend Eric Fjeldal, and trustees, once again opened the doors of the Middle Patent United Methodist Church at a special service of reconsecration for all those past and present who have considered this historic edifice a part of their lives.

So again we close a history of the Middle Patent United Methodist Church with the words of Richard N. Lander written in 1947 and used again in 1972:

*What the future of the Middle Patent Methodist Church is to be, no one knows. Whether the present building continues to house a worshipping congregation or not, this much is sure: the Middle Patent Methodist Church is more than a building! It is a fellowship whose influence for God and His Kingdom shall never end as long as here or there one soul remains to love and serve and praise His name.*



Inside, after restoration. Picture taken by Richard Koenig.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF  
THE MIDDLE PATENT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
AT THE TIME OF RECONSTRUCTION

President, Jean H. Lander; Vice President and Reconstruction Chairperson, Howard Pinchbeck; Secretary, Ellen Baer; Treasurer, Marie Worden; Reconstruction Treasurer, Shirley Pinchbeck; R. Eugene Curry, Robert Farquhar, Phyllis Dale (organist), William MacAllister, Orrin Husted (honorary), Richard N. Lander (deceased).

## ALBERT E. SMOROL

March 13, 1940 – January 18, 1993

Al Smorol was a trustee and former treasurer of The North Castle Historical Society. He was also treasurer of other organizations in North Castle, always giving his time to help whenever asked. As a CPA he generously shared his expertise wherever he was needed in the best and most productive way he could.

Al died suddenly at age 52 on January 18, 1993 while playing tennis—a sport he loved and in which he frequently participated. He was also an avid follower of lacrosse, a sport that he excelled in while at college.

He was devoted to his wife, Herta, and daughters Kristina and Raissa.

We are most fortunate to have known Al, and grateful for his contributions to the North Castle Historical Society. He will be sorely missed!

Albert E. Smorol, Jr., a certified public accountant and Armonk resident, died of cardiac arrest Monday in Greenwich (Conn.) Hospital. He was 52.

Mr. Smorol was employed as the vice president of finance for Tramz Hotels in Warren, New Jersey, for the past seven months. Previously, he was treasurer for Turner Construction in Manhattan for nearly 19 years.

Among the professional groups to which he belonged were the New York City chapter of Construction Financial Management Association, Workers Compensation Research Institute in Cambridge Mass., and Hipp Waters Inc., in Greenwich.

He was born March 13, 1940, to Albert Sr. and Isabel Swietonowski Smorol in Syracuse, New York, where he was raised and educated. In 1965, he graduated from Syracuse University.

Mr. Smorol moved to Armonk 16 years ago.

In 1969, he married Herta Kluser in Switzerland.

Mr. Smorol put his professional skills to use for the North Castle and Armonk communities. He served as treasurer for the Friends of North Castle Library for the past five years, as treasurer for the Armonk Lions Club for the past nine years.

He was a member of the Hillside Missionary Alliance Church in Armonk.

In addition to his wife of Armonk, he is survived by two daughters, Kristina and Raissa Smorol, both of Armonk; two sisters, Joy S. Gregg and M.J. Smorol, both of Syracuse; a brother Robert Smorol of Syracuse and several nieces and nephews.

The family has established a high school scholarship in Mr. Smorol's name. Contributions can be made to the Albert E. Smorol, Jr. Community Development Fund, c/o Byram Hills High School, 12 Tripp Lane, Armonk, NY 10504.

Arrangements are being handled by Cassidy-Flynn Funeral Home Inc. in Mt. Kisco.



# THE NORTH CASTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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as of April 6, 1993

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