

Morningdale Chapel

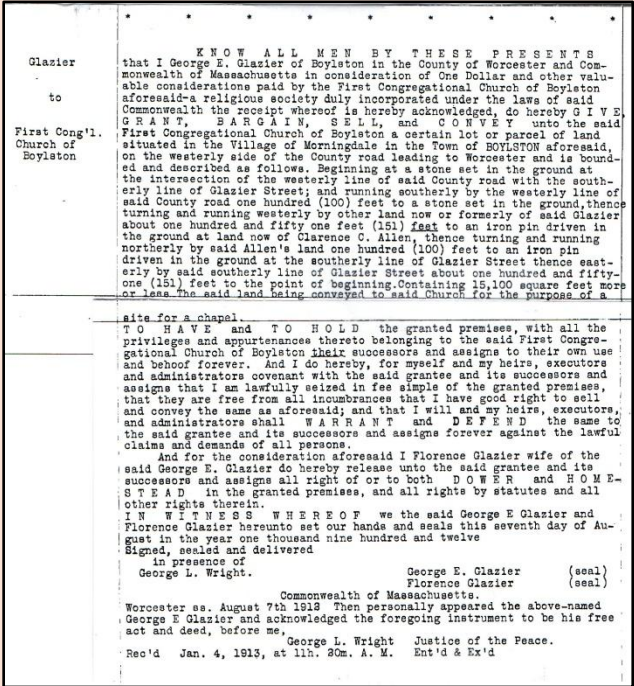
By Judy Haynes

For a newcomer to Boylston, one of the questions often asked is: “Morningdale, where is that?” Once it is understood that Morningdale is not a separate town, but a village of Boylston, located in the western part of the town, one is oriented. Some of the streets were named for and by the people who first settled in that part of town when it was growing around 1900, after the Wachusett Reservoir came into being causing farmers and families to move from the eastern end of Boylston to the newly growing ‘Morningdale’ area. You will notice the names Glazier and Cook as street names and again in the history of a building known as the Morningdale Chapel. That story follows.

It 1912, Reverend Dodge, pastor (1902 -1917) at the First Congregational Church in Boylston Center and his parishioners realized the growing need for a place of worship and religious education in the Village of Morningdale. There was an expansion of the Protestant population and the church’s Sunday School was flourishing.¹ At the time a Sunday School in Morningdale was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Allan Stevenson under the sponsorship of the South Church of Worcester.²

Groundbreaking

Both Reverend Dodge and Jane Cook, resident in the area, made it a mission to have a chapel built so that Sunday School could service the area children and not rely on sponsorship from a Worcester church.



Mr. George E. Glazier donated 15100 square feet of land on the corner of the Road to Worcester and Glazier Streets for the erection of a chapel.^{3,4,5} Jane Cook felt that religious education was so important she first gave \$1,000 to start a building fund, and shortly thereafter loaned a second \$1,000 to promote the building of the chapel. The second gift, a bond to the Congregational Church was not to be repaid to her unless she became “indigent” or in great need.⁶ Others followed suit and a fund was raised, enough that the building was started in 1912 and finished by end of the year, mortgage free.

LAND DEED

Glazier to First Congregational Church of Boylston
Book 2017 - Pages 18 & 19
Recorded January 4, 1913
Research by Boylston Historical Society 2025

“Ground was broken on the corner of Glazier and Main Streets by Deacon Lyman Walker...as [an honor to him since] he had just completed 35 years as a Deacon in the Boylston Congregational Church.” The historic event included Pastor Dodge, Mrs. Jane Cook, Mr. George E. Glazier, and Mrs. Gertrude Brown who played the baby organ while the assembly sang songs of praise. Once finished, the chapel dedication took place January 10, 1913 and two days later the first Sunday School session in the new building was held on January 12, 1913.⁷

According to Sverre Lund, the building planned was to be 28 feet by 41 feet with a hall in the basement. “George E. Glazier was given a vote of thanks for land.”⁸ It was constructed on land once owned by Clarence C. Allen and subsequently George E. Glazier.⁹ Though some drawings and notes indicate it also included a piece of land owned by Mable and Martin Flagg, with a notation ‘from L.A. Allen to Martin Flagg, Mable V.O. Flagg.’¹⁰ The land consisted of 15,100 square feet of land.

¹ Longley, Lena, *A Record of the Ladies' Benevolent Society from 1840 to 1940*, 1940.
² Newsclip, Mary French Scrapbook collection: *50th Anniversary of the Morningdale Chapel*, 1963.
³ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce Filgate, 2012
⁴ Deed Index, Massachusetts Land Records, 1913, Boylston, Worcester County, Book 2017 Page 18
⁵ Deed, Assessors of Boylston, Boylston Town Office, Boylston, Massachusetts
⁶ Newsclip, Mary French Scrapbook collection: *50th Anniversary of the Morningdale Chapel*, 1963.
⁷ Ibid. Newsclip, 1963
⁸ “*For Morningdale Chapel, Exercises As Soil is Broken by Deacon Walker in Boylston*, Special to The Telegram. July 16, 1912.
⁹ Newsclip titled “For Morningdale Chapel” Special to the *Telegram*, July 16, 1912.
¹⁰ Tainter, E.E., *Plan Showing Land of Morningdale Chapel, 3-27-74 & notes re: Title Search of 1930*

Bell in the Belfry

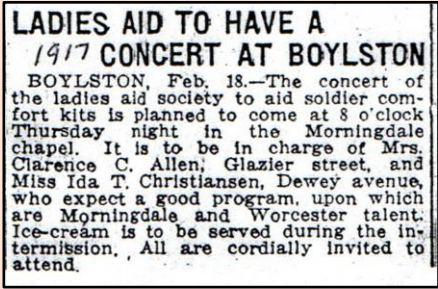
When the building was nearly ready, a 1000-pound bell was placed in the belfry of the chapel.¹¹ Placed in the chapel just days before the dedication by workers: Munson Flagg, George Glazier, Andrew Hanson (carpenter), Axel Johnson, Frank Flagg, and Merton E. Stone. Following that, 150 chairs were set up for the ceremony. Though the building still stands, the bell no longer hangs in the building’s belfry but was taken to the sponsor church and stored behind the First Congregational Church in Boylston center.¹²



MORNINGDALE CHAPEL
Richard L. Snyder, Pastor
Photograph Courtesy of Mark Fuller

Behind the scenes

Over the fifty most active years, the care of the chapel was diligently carried out and overseen by the Morningdale Ladies Aid Society, who were thus thanked and feted fifty years later, in 1963, with a special supper. Also thanked was Mr. Anderson who served as janitor for many years. The Morningdale Society was created with the help of Mrs. Dodge in 1914. The Morningdale ladies often entertained the sponsoring First Congregational Church members, particularly the Ladies Benevolent Society at their May parties. On the 25th Anniversary year the Morningdale Ladies Aide Society received a silver teapot in 1939; also, they were given a silver tray with the inscription “Ladies Aid Society from L.B.S., May 12, 1939, Morningdale.”



LADIES AID CONCERT – 1917
Scrapbook Collection
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.



SILVER TRAY
Etched “Ladies Aid Society from L.B.S., May 12, 1939, Morningdale.”
Photograph by Chloe Nehme

Community Center

The Sabbath School was an early “flourishing” success. The news article of the 50th Anniversary, 1963, indicated that in February, 1912 there were 39 members meeting for religious education, likely in the Stevenson home on Cook Street, but a few years later the group meeting in the chapel

¹¹ “Bell Weighing 1000 Pounds Put in Place, special to *The Telegram*, January 6, 1913
¹² Mark Fuller oral interview and photograph, June, 2025.

averaged 56. George H. Boyden was superintendent of the Sunday School for 21 years. Then, Mr. Ralph W. Hager, assisted by a group of loyal teachers, was Superintendent, eventually followed

by other dedicated leaders of religious education. Sixty-four children were registered for Sunday School in 1985, but by 1980 only the preschool class continued to be held in the Morningdale Chapel.

Over the active years, in addition to its prime purpose of hosting a Sabbath School, the Chapel held numerous special events: Lenten suppers, Valentine Parties, an annual May party, concerts, plays, weddings, and working parties. The local Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Brownies all held meetings there, and the occasional civic group also found the chapel convenient, including the dance classes led by Judy Backholm.¹³ This structure provided religious education as well as contributed in other ways to the community social life. Many wonderful activities and memories are associated with the Morningdale Chapel.



Gazette Photo

Grace Hedlund, right, and Gertrude Viner look through clothes at the Morningdale Chapel thrift store.

Morningdale Chapel Sustained By Thrift Store

1980

By EDWARD B. WIRT
Gazette Boylston Correspondent

BOYLSTON — The Morningdale Chapel will be around for a good long time if Virginia Felch has anything to say about it.

Three-and-a-half years ago, the future of the chapel on Route 70 was dim. The trustees of the Boylston Congregational Church thought the chapel was a luxury the church could not afford. The cost of maintaining the chapel was prohibitive and it was not being used very much.

The first Save the Chapel Committee's term had expired and the members had been unable to come up with a solution to the problem.

Mrs. Felch, of 164 Central St., was among the many native residents who felt strongly that the chapel should be saved.

"When I was a kid, I came to Sunday school here," she said. "My grandmother was one of the Ladies Aid members who put on suppers here. My aunt was one of the first ones married here. It's got a lot of fond memories for me and I don't want to see it gone."

Volunteers for Committee

She and her husband Jef volunteered for the second Save the Chapel

Committee. One day, while working on a church clothing drive, she had an idea. She was visiting a church in Grafton to see how it ran its clothing drive. She said, "I started asking questions and found they ran their whole church from a thrift store. So I figured if we had a thrift store, we could save the chapel."

The thrift store in the basement of the Morningdale Chapel has been a busy place since it opened in June 1977. By offering quality merchandise for sale, mostly clothing donated by local residents, the chapel has been able to raise \$1,600 a year to cover the cost of chapel maintenance and repairs.

The store has a basic staff of four people — Mrs. Felch, her mother, Grace Hedlund, Mabel Flagg and Gertrude Viner. "The biggest problem is getting people to cover when we can't work," Mrs. Felch said.

The chapel is still used only on a limited basis, aside from the thrift store. Preschool children are bused there from the Congregational Church in the center of town for Sunday school and the Girl Scouts and Brownies are expected to use it again this year.

But the chapel should be around for a good long time. Mrs. Felch will do her best to see that it is.

MORNINGDALE THRIFT STORE - 1980
GRACE HEDLUND AND GERTRUDE VINER
LOOKING THROUGH ITEMS

Scrapbook Collection
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.

Ladies' Aid Society Fair Boylston Event This Week



MORNINGDALE CHAPEL

(Special Correspondence to The Gazette)

BOYLSTON, Nov. 2.—The annual fair of the Ladies' Aid Society will be in the chapel Thursday, beginning at 4 o'clock. Extensive repairing and redecorating have been done on the building the past few months and work is still in progress.

Boylston Aid Society Plans Lenten Supper

BOYLSTON, Friday.—The regular meeting of the Morningdale Ladies Aid Society was held yesterday at the home of Mrs. Arthur Nylin. Committees were named at the meeting to supervise the first of the Lenten suppers, which will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 11, in the chapel.

Those named were Mrs. Arthur Nylin, Mrs. T. Vernon Butler and Mrs. Charles W. Hager. Also, during the meeting, Mrs. Carl Harmon, on behalf of the society presented a lace tablecloth to Mrs. Nylin, who is retiring president, and to Mrs. George Bell for her many years of faithful service as secretary. The hostess was assisted by Mrs. Florence Stowe.

Mrs. Alfred J. Brousseau, treasurer, announced that \$568.77 has been paid on repairs the past three months. The new steel ceiling is a gift from the Morningdale Sunday school.

The booths will be decorated in Nile green, orchid and white and will be in charge of the following: Gifts and fancy work, Mrs. Peter Stewart, Mrs. William H. Brown; candy, Mrs. Alfred L. Brown, Harold Stowe; mystery, Mrs. Hector F. McRae, Donald L. McRae; ice cream, Mrs. John Jeffrey, Mrs. Mary S. Flagg; dolls and toys, Mrs. Fred W. Young, Mrs. Carmille H. Rogers; food, Mrs. Stuart McCausland, Mrs. Charles S. Montzer; tickets, Mrs. Clifford H. Stuart; chicken supper, Mrs. Clarence C. Allen, chairman; Mrs. Claus O. Johnson, Mrs. August F. Christenson, Mrs. Frank L. Butterfield and Mrs. Ralph C. White.

These members of the T. T. T. class of the Morningdale Sunday school will wait on table: Misses Ethel L. Johnson, Katherine M. Banker, Ruth E. McCausland, Dora H. Rogers, Mary K. and Ruth L. Stewart, Grace E. Dean, Alice and Ruth LeRoy, Marie H. Johanson, Alice O. Olsen, Vera M. and Blanche M. Carlson.

Entertainment will be in charge of Miss Margaret Olsen.

BOYLSTON AID SOCIETY LENTEN SUPPER
& LADIES AID SOCIETY FAIR -1926

Scrapbook Collection
Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.

Thrift Shop Opened

By the mid- 1970s, Virginia Felch had been hearing comments that “the cost of maintaining the chapel was prohibitive and it was not being used very much.” She started a “Save the Chapel Committee,” but no immediate solution arrived.¹⁴

She subsequently learned that in Grafton a thrift store brought in enough money to maintain their church; thus, she adopted this plan and learned how to run a shop. The thrift shop opened in the basement of the chapel in June 1977 with a basic staff of Mrs. Felch, her mother, Grace Hedlund, Mabel Flagg and Gertrude Viner.

By 1980 preschool children were bused to the Morningdale Chapel from the center church for Sunday School and the Girl Scouts and Brownies still met there.

The End of an Era

It was only a few more years when Mrs. Felch had to face the inevitable: the cost of heat, light, insurance, custodial care, etc. greatly exceeded the money derived from the Thrift Shop, and a tight budget by the sponsor church indicated it was time to consider what to do with the building. Needed upgrades estimated at \$20,000 surpassed what could be afforded. It was determined by the Trustees at the 1985 Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church that they would like authorization to sell the chapel and land. Many desired to keep it as had sentimental reasons attached, but a ballot was taken (59 yes votes and 17 no votes) with the resulting decision to approve the sale.¹⁵

¹³ Interview Jan Fuller, June 2025
¹⁴ *Morningdale Chapel Sustained by Thrift Store*, by Edward B. Wirt, Gazette Boylston Correspondent, 1980.
¹⁵ *Minutes of the Annual Meeting, First Congregation Church, January 20, 1985.*

On 12 February 1985, at a special meeting of the Board of Trustees/Directors a vote was taken and it was unanimously accepted: That Mark Fuller, trustee, be ...authorized ...on behalf of said corporation, First Congregational Church of Boylston, to complete the transaction of sale of the property to Roy C. and Wendy P. Stephenson.¹⁶ The sale was completed for a total of \$79, 900 on 12 July 1985.¹⁷ The members of the First Congregational Church would be reunited in service, activities, and education in the town’ center at the top of the Boylston Common.

One hundred and thirteen years later we are left with a few questions resulting from our exploration into these historical papers; that is, are these owners, the Stephensons of 1985 any relation to the Mrs. Allen Stevenson, who ran a religious education school in her home on Cook Street back in 1912? Could the purchase indicate some familial attachment?

A question that many have asked over the years is this: how did Morningdale get its name? This question was asked by Louisa Allen as she recalled the history of the chapel. Mr. Glazier gave this version:

“Whoever named it must have been like the Indians who, on the birth of a son would step out of his wigwam and the first thing he saw would be the name of his son. Somebody must have looked out and saw the morning Sun.”

“Esther Christenson said that often she had heard her mother say that they were so happy in their new home, that every morning as they looked out and saw the beautiful sun rise, the flowers and trees, and living in a dale, they decided to call it MORNINGDALE.” However it was named, the appellation is still used to this very day.¹⁸

It has been discovered that Jacob Wilbur, was a developer who purchased land from Jane and Donald Cook in the early 1900’s. He claimed that Jane Cook told him Morningdale was a pleasant-sounding term, so Wilbur used the name Morningdale on his promotional advertisements and on legal documents when he divided the land into house lots.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Certificate of Vote, First Congregational Church of Boylston*, February 12, 1985.

¹⁷ Copy of letter to Mark Fuller from offices of Fletcher, Tilton & Whipple, P.C., July 15, 1985.

¹⁸ Allen, Louisa A. History of *The Chapel Morningdale*, January 12, 1963

¹⁹ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce Filgate, 2012

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