

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of BOYLSTON
A MAGNIFICENT MUSICAL HISTORY
THE FULLER/ADAMS FAMILY MUSICAL LEGACIES

By
Gordon Hastings

From its earliest days at its original gathering in 1743 with construction of the First Meeting House, known as the North Parish Church, Boylston's First Congregational Community has had a heritage of outstanding choirs, organists, soloists, and performances that soared high above a community of its size. Over many decades on Sunday morning and at evening vespers hymnals came alive from the congregation's diverse voices and the soaring sounds of the church's organ and choir.

On Monday, February 4th, 1924 a disastrous fire silenced the organ and choir's musical echoes. In less than two hours the blaze destroyed the entire contents of the church which had stood at the top of the Town Common for eighty-nine years. The [Third Meeting House](#) had been erected in 1835. Services were held in the Town Hall at 7 Central Street until 1 February 1925. Beginning in February of 1925 worship services began again in the basement of the destroyed building. Once again, the church choir's voices soared over the town common.

Rebuilding continued and on November 6, 1927 the new and current Boylston First Congregational Church was dedicated. Walter Morill was the organist. The choir was directed by Mrs. Rebecca Garfield with the opening anthem *Send Out Thy Light*. The Morningdale Junior Choir under the direction of Alice Olson sang *Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us*.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
Dedicated November 6, 1927
Boylston, Massachusetts

The Flagg Memorial Organ

The sanctuary included a magnificent new instrument, the Flagg Memorial Organ. The organ was given to the church by George F. and Sybil H. (Flagg) Fuller of Worcester in loving memory of Montraville and Abbie Davis Flagg, Sybil Fuller's parents.

Sybil Flagg was born in Boylston on December 1, 1873. George F Fuller was born in Grafton Massachusetts on September 29, 1869. His rise to prominence was remarkable. He was only eighteen when his father died and young George assumed full responsibility for his widowed mother and sister. Forgoing his desire to go to college he took a job as an entry level accountant at the former Worcester Drop Forge Company which later became the Wyman Gordon Company, a world renown manufacturing company. In 1919 when the company founder Lyman Gordon died, George Fuller at age 50 was named president and CEO. He married Sybil Flagg in 1893. She died in 1955 and he died in 1962 at age 93. Together they founded the Fuller Foundation that to this day continues to support cultural, educational, health care and social service projects in Boylston and Worcester.



GEORGE FREEMAN FLAGG
1869-1962

Like much of the music program at the First Congregational church the Flagg Memorial Organ was far in excess of what was considered normal for a community the size of Boylston. The superb instrument was built by M.P. Muller of Hagerstown,

Maryland. The organ not only has abundant power, it is designed to get unusual tonal quality. Beside the usual organ tones the Flagg Organ includes flutes, reeds, and strings as well as English Horn, harp and chimes. It is not only a choir organ but a full concert instrument as well.



**FLAGG MEMORIAL ORGAN
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BOYLSTON**

Dedication

A special organ dedication recital took place on Monday, November 7, 1927 at the church featuring renowned organist Mr. W.A. Goldsworthy and vocalist Mr. John B. Cadieux. The organ after undergoing a complete modernization was re-dedicated on November 4, 1983 at a Dedicatory Recital. The featured artist was Carol (French) Gellert accompanied by her sister Virginia French Helton, organist.

The Flagg Memorial Organ was the beginning of a 100-year legacy of two Boylston families; the Fullers and the Adams's inextricably connected to music at the First Congregational Church. The Flagg Memorial Organ given by George and Sybil Fuller in 1926 underscores the century long legacy.

Musical Connections

George and Sybil Fuller had no children but his brother Willis Asa Fuller and his wife Eliza had three, one of which Ernest Metcalf Fuller, born in 1900, would carry on the First Congregational Church Fuller family legacy. Ernest who had become General Manager of Wyman Gordon Company married Hazel Durrell and the couple established a residence on Main Street in Boylston. He became a Deacon and a Trustee of the church. Ernest had three siblings who also established themselves in Boylston. Winifred, Loring and Merton. Loring established the school bus company that transported Boylston children for generations. Ernest and Hazel had two children, Russell and Wesley. Both Russell and Wesley Fuller sang in the Boylston Church choir in their youth. Wesley also played the Flagg Organ at numerous services. He went on to become internationally known in music circles as a graduate of the Oberlin College Conservatory in Ohio and as the head of the music department at Clark University. For a number of years, he was a resident composer at Tanglewood.

The musical talent in the Fuller family was not limited to Wesley. His older brother Russell abounded with a love of music and sang as a tenor in the choir for most of his adult life. He was also an entrepreneur, founding REFCO together with his wife, Joyce (Adams) Fuller a specialty supply company based in Boylston. Other choir members at the time that went on to professional music careers were Carol French and Calvin Hastings. Other regulars were John Fellows, Maude Keck, Marianna Hastings, Larry Hagstrom, Carol Garfield, and Ruth Coyle and of course, the Adams family members.

The Fuller/Adams had become a multigenerational Boylston Congregational Church musical connection!

Ralph W. Adams and his wife Ruth (Hesselton) Adams made their home in the Straw Hollow section of Boylston. Both were members of the First Congregational Church of Boylston and were instrumental voices in the church choir. Ruth sang in the alto section and Ralph was a tenor. Ralph was a prominent soloist taking a leading part in the musical celebration of the church's Bicentennial Celebration in October of 1943 plus leading roles in Easter and Christmas services.

During the church's Bicentennial week in 1943 Boylston's two musical families came together. Ralph Adams and Russell Fuller sang the tenor duet, "*Love Devine*." Both the senior and junior choirs also performed under Clifton Hosmer, organist and choir director and Esther Boyden, junior choir director.

Ralph and Ruth Adams had three children, Dana, Donald and Joyce. All of them had inherited their musical talents from their parents. Dana W. Adams was for several years the organist and choir director at the First Congregational Church of Boylston and sang in the choir for many years thereafter. His brother Donald was also a thirty-year member of the church choir as a baritone soloist.

When Russell Fuller was singing the sacred duet "*Love Devine*" with Ralph Adams at the Bicentennial Celebration could it be that Russell was thinking of the Adam's beautiful daughter Joyce Adams, a sister of Dana and Donald? Perhaps so because two years later in 1945 they were married at the Boylston Congregational Church. Now Boylston's two famous musical families had become one through marriage. Joyce and Russell became a legendary couple both in the church's musical tradition and in the community at large.



JUNIOR CHOIR
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BOYLSTON
1962

(rear row, left to right) Craig Gates, Robert Brigham, Jennifer Smith, Bruce Spear
 (center row, left to right) Diane Chase, Marsh Coker, Jody Jarvis, Patty Kimball,
 Gwynne Peterson, Janice Thurston
 (front row, left to right) Judy Murdock, Bobby Gail Kimball, Cindy Shankle

In addition to Sunday religious traditions, the Music Committee of the church broadened the reach of the choirs' talents to create community entertainment at "YE TOWNE MEETING HOUSE." In the early 1950s members of the Boylston Congregational Church presented its first of such programs a spoof titled "*De Greate Concerte*" "performed by "YE VILLAGE SINGERS" made up of talent from the church choir. The spoof program set the performance date a hundred years earlier in 1851. The singers now with *Ye Olde Names* included Lucentini Hakala, soprano; Judith Stanton alto; Resolution (Cal) Hastings, tenor; Philemon Skimmerhorn (John) Fellows, bass. Other choir members joined the chorus including Rachel Flagg, Judith Reed (Janet), Helitrope Garfield (Carol), Jacob Isaac Fuller (Russell), Nancy Coyle (Ruth), Jerusha Adams (Ruth), Robin Warren, Lucretia French (Carol), Mehitabel Colebrook (Ginny), Ainsworth Adams, (Ralph), Tabitha Hager and Larry Hagstrom. The *Concerte* Director was none other than Hilkiah Augustus Souci (Harry) a name also enshrined in Boylston musical history.

Review of 1952

"*De Greate Concert*" was the forerunner of the famous "*REVIEW OF 1952*" produced by Harry Souci and held before sold out audiences for two nights at the Boylston Town House. The show was directed by Russell Fuller with his wife Joyce as Musical Director. Much of the *De Greate Concert* cast returned including Janet Reed, Carol Garfield, Betty Brooks, Jane Millen, Cal Hastings, Marianna Hastings, Carol French, Dana and Donald Adams. Other Boylston cast members included Esther Christenson, David Warren, Carolyn Nelson and Walter Flagg.



CHURCH CHOIR
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BOYLSTON
2026

(rear left to right): Dave Ludt, Charles Nwachukwu (Music Director), Mark Fuller
 (front left to right): Gigi Zepp, Janet Altenburg, Vicky Triolo, Jan Fuller, Riani Amar,
 Haylee Sue Girouard, Abby Borchelt.
 (not shown): Ray LaChance, Dayna Stahl and Linnea Lyerly

The Fuller/ Adams musical tradition lives on at The First Congregational of Boylston. Mark Fuller who sings in the choir is the great-great nephew of George and Sybil Fuller, whose gift of the Flagg Organ approaches the celebration of its 100th Anniversary in 2027. Mark is also the grandson of Ralph and Ruth Adams and the son of Joyce (Adams) Fuller and Russell Fuller. Among the current choir members Gigi Adams Zepp is the granddaughter of Ralph and Ruth Adams. Dayna Stahl is the daughter of Gigi Zepp. Haylee Sue Girouard is Gigi's granddaughter. Mark's wife Jan (Thurston) Fuller is the daughter of Dorothy and Anthony Thurston. Dorothy was a long-time member of the church choir.

Mark Fuller followed his father Russell Fuller and grandfather Ernest Fuller as Chairman and Treasurer of the George F. and Sybil Fuller Foundation and as a Boylston Congregational Church Trustee. Janice Fuller is the Vice-Chairman of the Fuller Foundation. Jan has served as the Boylston Congregational Church volunteer Treasurer for 20 years and is the current Chairperson of the Board of Trustees.

Acknowledgements:

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