

Commemoration 1817-2018
in celebration of Christ Church, Guilford, Vermont

Ellen McCulloch-Lovell

Think of two hundred years. A span beyond lifetimes. Think of great-great grandmothers and fathers. You may know their names. Lucy Carpenter of Carpenter Hill who married Joseph Allen Lovell.

Recall this brave mountain state in 1817, another war just over, part of the Union only 26 years, after self-reliance as a Republic, fought over by Yorkers and New Hampshire grantees. Guilford:

the largest and richest town: valley farmlands, slate quarries, mills on fast rivers, not yet bypassed by the railroad, surpassed by towns nearer the Connecticut River highway.

Look up and around. We breathe inside a house that holds generations of prayers, celebrations, confessions, psalms. They enfolded each others' sorrows and opened their mouths in song:

*Praise God, from whom all blessing flow.
Praise Him, all creatures here below.*

They surround us. Hear the names: Ephraim Gale, Nahum Cutler, Calvin Harris, Stephen Gregory, Artemus Gale, whose hands with others raised what they declared: "a suitable house of worship." Women unrecorded, but present:

That it may please thee to preserve all who travel by land or by water, all women in the perils of childbirth, all sick persons, and young children, and to show thy pity upon prisoners and captives: We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Think of this knoll, forested. Planks and pews, sawn at Levi Boyden's mill on Broad Brook. These beams hewn on site, cellar of local slate, laid up and set with brick from Houghton's yard. No stark white inside. They craved color, these forebears: nave painted violet, pews a shade of mustard.

Tired bodies on straight-backed benches, seeking the spirit, wrapped in winter, sweltered in summer's long services, murmuring from memory words to mark marriages, baptisms, burials. To ask deliverance:

In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek succor, but of Thee? Hard times, the Depression: led by John C. Gale, Christ Church saved from Mrs. Webb's Museum, adopted by St. Michael's Church, restored by those moved by beauty and music.

Praise them, and us, ready to be transported by the spirit in this sanctuary, raised and saved; for what is music if not that which cannot be expressed in any other way?

May we hallow this place and all those who sought succor here; who gathered together, exchanged vows, wept over old and young; who two-hundred years later climb this Guilford hill to enter sacred space.