

***The following history was written in 1965 by Ruth (Mrs. Charles) Kissam, whose husband is the grandson of one of the founding fathers. A few additions were made by the committee which prepared this booklet.***

According to well authenticated records, the part of Suffolk County, township of Huntington known as Old Fields – now Greenlawn – did not have facilities for attending divine worship until this year 1872. Previously, the people had to travel to Northport, to Centerport, to Huntington, or to Dix Hills. The majority of the people were Presbyterians. Churches of this denomination existed in Huntington and in Northport. The formation of a church, suited to these peculiar creeds and views was a natural consequence that had been long wanting.

With the opening of the Long Island Railroad in 1867, there was a natural increase in inhabitants. Most of them came from cities and towns where churches were abundant. The need of a church was apparent immediately, but great difficulties were experienced before arriving at a successful conclusion. The community was not experienced in business activities and had never been involved in an undertaking where generous impulses and a community feeling was of primary importance.

A number of years previously, the Reverend Israel B. Smith was pastor of a Presbyterian church in Vernon Valley, currently in the East Northport area. After building up this church from a small beginning, he resigned for personal reasons and spent a brief time in Pennsylvania. On his return, he founded the First Presbyterian Church in Northport in the summer of 1860. This was a dedicated undertaking and its success reflected on him the greatest credit. On a salary of \$300, much of the cost of building the church came from his own funds. Many in the congregation were from Greenlawn.

When the building was dedicated, the deed was held by the pastor. This unusual irregularity caused immediate concern of the congregation. A faction occurred that criticized him severely and intimated that “he was securing to himself the peoples’ money and thereby enriching himself at their expense.” On this issue the congregation chose sides and lined up as his friends or enemies. An outcome was a petition to Presbytery to grant the combining of a small group with the people of Greenlawn for the purpose of establishing a new church. Since neither the Northport nor the Vernon Valley church was self-supporting, the decision was made to combine these two and to grant permission for the new church. This was signed on May 7, 1872. On August 30, 1872, the First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn was incorporated. Services were held for a while in a building near the railroad depot hired from P. H. Hoagland. The question of a new church was of primary importance, and unanimity of feeling prevailed briefly.

Quickly, difficulty arose over a decision as to a suitable site. Minor points of difference were “pertinaciously maintained.” Plans for a building were submitted by Mr. H Howarth and Mr. Wm Smith. These were approved by the congregation, but again a small faction opposed them as inadequate in size. The opposition was strong enough to delay active operations in both the purchase of the site and the progress on building plans.

Property was offered by Mr. Charles Kissam and agreed upon at a congregational meeting, but this too failed due to lack of unity. Note should be made here of possible error in recording of church session records. At that time, there was an Elisha Kissam, who lived and owned property in Greenlawn, and later in Centerport. A Charles Kissam was born in 1870 to Mr. and Mrs. Seabury Smith Kissam. They moved to Greenlawn around that time or a little later.

In the spring of 1873, a committee of six members of each faction was formed to effect a compromise. Representing the congregation were George Brush, Alexander Rae, Israel Smith, the pastor, Jonah Brown, Franklin Wicks and George Wm. Smith. Representing the opposition were H. Howarth, Henry Gates, Homer Pierson, Oscar Brush, A. H. Pausell, George W. Brown. Many descendants of these men still live in Greenlawn.

This committee met and finally decided on the property of Geo. W. Smith, the present location on Pulaski Road. The purchase price was \$200. The executive committee of the church (Mr. Rae, Mr. Howarth, Rev. Smith, and Mr. Pausell) was now able to proceed "with full authority to complete the building." The original church was built by Mr. George Brown. Mr. Brown had just built a home on Broadway, Greenlawn, which was subsequently sold to Mr. S. S. Kissam. It is still a Kissam residence.

During this period of delay, church services were held at the home of Rev. Smith. On May 8, 1876, the "Lords Supper was celebrated" in the new but unfinished building. In June, 1876, Re. Smith retired due to ill health.

*The following news item appeared in the Sept. 17, 1875 issue of The Long Islander:*

"The corner stone of the First Presbyterian Church at Greenlawn was laid on Wednesday of last week. The exercises were very interesting. The Rev. Mr. Woodruff of Northport, Rev. Mr. Israel b. Smith of Greenlawn, and Rev. Mr. W. W. Knox of this village (Huntington) officiated and addressed the audience in a series of interesting remarks. A collection was taken up and a large proportion of the expenses of the building subscribed for on the spot. It is the intention of the building committee to have the whole structure finished before the close of winter. The building will measure on the ground 34 feet wide by 54 feet deep with a tower on the front 10 feet wide and 65 feet high. The audience room will be 33 by 42 feet and 20 feet high. The design of the building is said to be beautiful" (The above copied from the original newspaper at the Huntington Historical Society)

*Before the original building was finished, it burned. The pulpit was all that was saved. A new building was soon started on the same foundation, similar to the first building, but without a balcony. It was dedicated in November, 1878. This building was in continuous use until its demolition in 1960 to make way for the present larger edifice.*

## History

In February 1954, The Rev. Leon Flanders came to Greenlawn as pastor. Membership at this time was 137. He is the current minister (written in 1965). The post-war population expansion was beginning to create severe stress and strain on the community of Greenlawn and the church. Two church services were inaugurated on Sunday mornings. Plans for a new Christian Education building were formulated. The cornerstone was laid on October, 1955 and the building was ready for use in January, 1956. It was immediately rented to School District #6 for use during the week over the next year and a half at \$500 per month. Policy was established that the use of the building be restricted for religious, charitable, educational, and civic purposes. Open house was held during February of that year and a dedication service later in the spring.

January 1959: Plans were started for the construction of a new church building. The Flood property was purchased for \$12,000 and two acres of land were bought from the adjoining Bartel farm at \$7,000. Smith-Hiller, architectural firm of New York, was hired to plan the new sanctuary at a cost of \$240,000.

Ground was broken for the new church in November 1960. The old building, which had been a landmark in the little community for more than eighty years, was demolished. This was to the distress of many of the older members many of whom had helped to preserve the old in expanding for the future. The cornerstone ceremony was held in May 1961. Sunday services were held in the Christian Education building until the fall of 1962 when the new church was sufficiently finished for use. The dedication service was held on December 2, 1962.

Submitted by Roger Kaufmann