

On March 25th 1837 a call went out to organize a body of Christian men and women in this district who were Baptists, members of the First Baptist church at Piper's Corners, into a church of their own at Burgessville. Accordingly a council was called to institute such an organization; and delegates were sent from different churches as follows: from First church in Townsend: Elder John Harris, Brothers Moses Barber and James Curless: from the First Oxford church: Elder Simon Mabee; from the First Norwich church: Jesse Woodard. The First Baptist church in Norwich was located at Springfield; the church in Burgessville was called the Second Baptist church in Norwich.

The charter members of the Second church are listed in the minutes as follows: Lewis Mott, Samuel H. Mabee, David Nichols, Nathaniel Throop, Joseph Thompson, John Thompson, Sarah Throop, Catherine Hilliker, Abigail Nichols, Rebeckah Mott, Mariah Sackrider, Eve Dennis, Margaret Dennis, Esther Throop, Jane Dickson, Jane Thompson, Waytie Briggs, Catherine Briggs, Olive Condon.

The first clerk was Nathaniel Throop. Those who succeeded him down to the present were Henry Hawley, James Dennis (Robert Dennis's son), Stephen Stevens, S.S. Burtis, E. Snyder, Edward Dennis, John Sims (whose grandfather, John Muir, was a deacon in the East Oxford church and later a member for many years in the Norwich church), William H. Kneale, Kenneth Sly and James Dennis.

It is not clear where the first meetings were held, but we suppose that they were held at a place called the Dennis school, which is mentioned several times in the old minutes. It was not until 1849 that the first chapel was built on the site of the present building.

A vote was taken on December 30, 1848, confirming a former vote of March 21 as to the site for the meeting house, and John Dennis, Michael Lolard and George Emigh were appointed trustees. The building committee were to be Jonathan Emigh, Hiram Sprague, Platt Dennis and Henry Emigh. Elder Howie was to draft the subscription list. On the 25th of November, 1849 the new chapel was opened for Divine worship. Brother George, of West Oxford, preached from Jeremiah, chapter 7, verse 2, followed by Elder I. Howey. The church then voted to continue the meeting for several days. On December 15 following, several candidates for baptism were received namely: Mary Cole, Catherine Dickson, Mary O'Neal, Timothy Stevens, James Colson, Mary Ann Colson, Martha McLees, James McLees, Hiram Thompson, Rachel Thompson, Mary Pollard and James Woodrow, the first members received in the new church building.

It is generally believed that the first land was donated for the church and cemetery by different families, the Snyders, the Dennises and the Emighs; Deacon Crossthwaite is regarded as one of them but he afterwards had his reservation transferred to new land when the next addition was made.

There have been 26 pastors in charge of the Burgessville church since it was organized in 1837. The first appears to have been Elder Elliott, grandfather of the present minister at Beachville. He served the church at intervals till 1846 and later on helped out at times when there was no regular pastor. The financial arrangements made with him are interesting. One year the church agreed to give him 60 bushels of wheat if he preached one Sabbath a month for the year. The record reads: "He commenced in January 1843, lost three Sabbaths, finished his time agreeable to contract, March 1844, received his payment part in wheat and part in cash; settled with him March 15, 1844.

He was succeeded in 1846 by Rev. Ira Howey. It was during Elder Howey's pastorate that the first chapel was built in 1849 and the first mention was made of plans for the East Oxford church which was organized 10 years later. He remained pastor until his death in 1852. The account of his funeral which lasted two days, is one of the most impressive minutes in the records. In reading it one realizes the deep affection which had prompted the church two years before, in spite of financial straits which led them to consider applying for aid to the New York Mission Board, to vote "to sustain Elder Howey for all time."

The story of the funeral is as follows:

"Elder Ira Howey departed this mortal life on Wednesday, the third day of March between one and two o'clock in the afternoon 1852, aged 42 years, 4 months and 20 days. His funeral commenced on Saturday the sixth; met at his late residence in East Oxford; at 10 o'clock a short session of singing, and prayer by Elder Winterbotam; whence a great concourse of people moved forward to Norwich; arrived at the Baptist Chapel at 40 minutes past 12 o'clock. At 1 o'clock Elder Winterbotam commenced the exercises by the use of the 1115 hymn, one verse of which reads: "What though the arm of conquering death Does God's own house invade!

What though our teacher and our friend Is numbered with the dead!

Elder William Freeman then read the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians, followed by prayer; Elder Winterbotam then preached a short but feeling and interesting discourse from 2nd Corinthians, 13. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, of good comfort; be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Then Elder Berdsall closed the exercises by reading and singing hymn 1117, and prayer.

"Pastor, thou art from us taken  
In the glory of thy years,  
As the oak by tempest shaken,  
Falls ere time its verdure sears."

Then the body was consigned to the grave amidst a crowded and weeping concourse of people. Elder Winterbotam renewed the exercises the next day by the use of the 14th chapter, 13th verse of Revelations: "And I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea sayeth the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."