

"HOW CRAIGVILLE CAME TO BE"

The origin & evolution of a 125-year-old American "camp meeting"

2848 8.5.97
ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L. Ellz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

While I wrote the following articles for this summer's ten issues of THE CRAIGVILLE CHRONICLE, I justify Thinksheeting them on the ground that the Craigville story may have a wider interest. Here's a small footnote in American religious history, but also a window on Christianity & culture.

June 26

As one dimension of this summer's Celebration of Craigville's 125th Anniversary, each of the weekly issues of the CHRONICLE will have an historical note prepared by Willis Elliott, chair of the Tabernacle (Worship and Education) Committee. The chief sources will be Marion Vuilleumier's CAPE COD'S CRAIGVILLE: THE VISION STILL ALIVE: A History of Craigville, Massachusetts (1994; available for \$5 at the Craigville Office or Craigville Post Office) & Willis' "Forgotten Legacy: The Historical Theology of the 'Christian' Component of the United Church of Christ" (HISTORICAL INTELLIGENCER, 1984; available for \$1 at the Craigville Office).

Do you think that people are still alive on earth till they're forgotten? We're always hearing about people who've gotten dead even though we hadn't been aware of their having been born. We don't know much, and forget most of what we know.

Take a moment, each week, to hear about those who were here on this land, this Craigville, before you.

First, of course, the Amerinds (Indians, American Indians, Native Americans). In 1664, Sachem Iyanough--whose statue was recently unveiled in Hyannis (named after him)--sold to English settlers the tract that was to become "Craigville" (named after the Rev. Austin Craig) in 1882, the year our post office was established and we needed a legal name.

In 1871, the New England Convention of Christian Churches voted to establish a Camp Meeting on the Perry Farm in the Town of Barnstable. What's a "camp meeting"? Tune in next week. What's a "Convention of Christian Churches"? Tune in the week after that.

July 3

Craigville's full name, and the name of the corporation owning all* land not owned by individuals, is the "Christian Camp Meeting Association" (CCMA).

If you think you don't know what "camp meeting" means, you're probably right. If you think you do know what "Christian" (in the name) means, you're probably wrong. Next CHRONICLE, we'll talk about what you're probably wrong about. This issue, here's the poop on "camp meeting" (Random House Dictionary, 2nd ed.: "a religious gathering held in a tent or in the open air," first use 1790-1800):

Throughout the 19th century, the camp meeting was the American Protestant main means of revival and expansion on the frontier, following the Great Awakening of the previous century. Where there was no town, it was the only show in town: when Lexington, Kentucky's largest town, had a pop. of 2,000, *ten times* that number showed up for the 1801 Cane Ridge camp meeting--to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to be an instant brief community, to court (looking toward marriage, as well as the eschatological Marriage Supper of the Lamb), to do something different, and to have fun.

Craigville is in that grand civilizing tradition. The Tabernacle is, in name and architecture, an 1872 biblical "tent." And people still come for the same mix of motives: to worship, to fellowship, for vacation, for recreation--even to marry.

*

Except the building called Seaside, which is owned by the national level of the United Church of Christ, the lineal descendant of Craigville's founding denomination, the Christian Connection Churches.

July 10

Last week we promised to tell you, this week, the meaning of "Christian" in the name of Craigville's corporate owners, the "Christian Camp Meeting Association" (CCMA).

Early in the last century, in various areas of what had been the British colonies, small groups of Christians began what we now call the ecumenical movement (American style). Under the twin impulses of Puritanism (which even secular historians credit with America's forward-looking spirit) & the frontier (with its can-

2848.2 do eagerness), they eschewed old church labels and called themselves simply "Christians."

When the churches they formed fell into "connectional" interrelationships, they widely identified their movement as "the Christian Connection." They abjured creeds on the ground of the sufficiency of the New Testament to provide guidance in faith and order, life and work. "Ahead of their times, they honored the leadership of women as well as men; founded educational institutions that were coeducational and interracial; and in 1808, established the first religious paper in America, The Herald of Gospel Liberty" (p1 of Marion Vuilleumier's history of Craigville, THE VISION STILL ALIVE).

And, yes, they founded Craigville. More on that next week.

July 17

"Primitivists" are what folks who don't like them call folks who call themselves "restorationists." The Churches of the Christian Connection, Craigville's founders, were biblicists, aiming to restore Christianity to its primitive (that is, most early) freedom, the unsystematic early Christian thinking preserved in the New Testament. While they hoped to transcend denominationalism, inevitably they developed a fellowship of their own with a family identity: a denomination (or communion) is a particular family of churches. Don't badmouth families!

Think of it this way: as a community is a family of families, so is the ecumenical movement a family of church-families. It's in the spirit of Craigville's founders that at 9:45 summer Sunday mornings we hold "ecumenical worship." Do you have a good excuse for not joining with us in praise and thanks to God?

Last week we promised to tell you this week how the Christian Connection churches came to found Craigville. "In early 1871 clergy and laity of the Christian [Connection] Churches of New England envisioned the concept of a summer religious meeting combined with vacation homes in a camp meeting setting and established a committee to find a suitable location" (p3, Vuilleumier). A former Civil War chaplain took the lead. "The 160 acre tract between Hyannis and Centerville called Strawberry Hill was chosen." The hill proper, Craigville's highest point on which the "Tabernacle" tent was erected the next summer, they named "Christian Hill" when they named the whole area "Camp Christian." Reverse the last two words and you have our official name, "Christian Camp Meeting Association."

Whence then the name "Craigville"? In 1881, when we got our post office, the USPO required a place-name. The great scholar-leader, the Rev. Austin Craig, had just died--thus the patronymic. More about him next week.

July 24

"Craigville" is the collective namesake of a Christian Connection clergyman-scholar, the Rev. Austin Craig, whose last name was appropriated when (as noted last week), in 1881, he died and the Craigville Post Office was born.

Craig was the first president of the Christian Connection's only theological seminary (which later joined with a Unitarian seminary to form the present Meadville Seminary, University of Chicago). So dedicated to the text of the New Testament was he that in order to keep his pastor-graduates active with the original (Greek) New Testament, he wrote letters to them in Greek and expected them to reciprocate in kind!

Horace Mann, often called the father of American public education, asked Craig to succeed him as president of Antioch College, and Craig accepted.

The Connectionalists were fervent not only for Christian unity but also for world unity. As churches should avoid the rigidity of sectarianism, nations should avoid the stupidity of chauvinistic jingoism. This enlightened spirit pervaded Craig's eight lectures on ethnography, given in the Tabernacle the year he died. His overall text was Acts of the Apostles 17:24-31, which subsumes all races and cultures under the divine creation and God's self-giving in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Next week: While this year is Craigville's 125th, it is also the centennial of the first conversations leading finally, in 1957, to the formation of Craigville's host denomination, the United Church of Christ. In which of our "cottages" did those conversations take place?

July 31

In 1897--just 100 years ago--in the home of the

2848.3 Rev. Martyn Summerbell (now the home of John and Judy Troy), what was to become the United Church of Christ was conceived. Looking toward the possibility of a union between his Christian Connectionists and the Congregationalists (the 1620 Mayflower spiritual descendants)--a union consummated in 1929-31--Summerbell invited leading figures of the two communions to meet in his livingroom, which from the Midway you can still see through to Lake Elizabeth.

Which "cottage" is that? Formerly we identified it as the one with the log porch-posts. Now we know it as the one with the beautiful new stone wall facing Lake Elizabeth on Lake Elizabeth Drive. The building had been approaching demolition stage when the Troys undertook radical structural improvements (without changing the basic appearance of this historic home). The work was completed just in time for the centennial, of which they were unaware.

The Congregational and Christian Churches, as the resulting denomination was called, merged in 1957 with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, which itself had been a merger, in 1934, of two Germanic churches which had formed themselves in the USA.

In the spirit of its founding communion, "Craigville was Christian-ecumenical from the start, early meetings including in leadership--besides Connectionists--Roman Catholic bishops, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Unitarians. No wonder that the first meeting toward what was to become the United Church of Christ was held" here, "or that the 'Craigville Proposal' is the earliest item in the documentary history of the United Church of Christ" (Willis Elliott in the fall/84 HISTORICAL INTELLIGENCER, an article available at the Craigville Office for \$1).

August 7

Have you ever heard of "Big Sunday"? It's a Craigville historical term for each summer's high, special Sunday. This summer, it's this coming Sunday, beginning with a 9:30am hymn sing. And of course, this year's Big Sunday is featuring Craigville's 125th Anniversary. Craigville is "a ministry for all people in all seasons." We hope to see at 9:30am Sunday some Craigville folk who don't regularly worship summer Sundays in the Tabernacle, along with the regulars.

Craigville's first Sunday (1872) was also its first Big Sunday. From all over New England people came, filled the Tabernacle tent, and sat three deep on the ground all around the building, which had a substantial frame but was canvas-covered (the present wood-covering coming some years later, with the tent-flap-sides design retained).

In addition to sixty-one Christian Connection ministers, some clergy of other denominations participated in this first worship, which began the ten-day Camp Meeting (services morning, afternoon, and evening every day).

On the third day, the Rev. Mrs. Ellen Gustin (the records say) "preached a powerful sermon, after which the congregation filed to the [ocean] shore," where four converts were "baptized [a Greek word meaning "immersed"] in a most impressive service." The ocean wasn't just for swimming!

Next week, something about our being born barbarians.

August 14

Historians of culture often remark that each generation of humanity is only one generation away from barbarism. We are born barbarians, and our becoming civilized depends on assiduous cultivation by our parents, teachers, clergy, and other mentors along the way of our life-long learning.

Craigville's founders, the Christian Connection churches, were powerfully anti-barbarian in their vision for Craigville. Our charter (1872) states our reason for being as "to hold, and encourage others to hold, religious and educational conferences and religious services...." While they were, in their religious convictions, biblical-orthodox Christians (what we today might call "evangelicals" but not fundamentalists), they were conscious heirs of the Enlightenment (what we today might call "liberals").

For both reasons--as evangelicals and as liberals--they stressed individual responsibility for choosing one's life direction and relationships. For this reason, they refused to baptize barbarians (that is, babies): baptism was for "confessors" only, that is, for those who, having reached "the age of discretion," chose to be Christians--to repent of their sins and give themselves to God through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

2843.4 While some United Church of Christ congregations of Christian Connection origin continue the practice of baptismal limitation ("believer's baptism"), most of our UCC congregations baptize both infants and believers who were not baptized as infants.

As for adult barbarians, who famously invaded all of America's camp meetings and contributed their uncouthness to the proceedings, the Connectionalist management was acid to them. As late as July 25, 1925, THE CRAIGVILLE VISITOR (predecessor of THE CRAIGVILLE CHRONICLE) had this to say: "If at home you spit on the floor, do so here: we want you to feel at home."

August 21

Some folks think that the spirit of a place oozes up through your soles into your soul. Craigville lends some weight to the idea. Dick Eggers, our immediate past director, often spoke of (as he's quoted on p54 of Vuilleumier) "the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that crosses all religious lines," an "inclusiveness...infused into the community's blood by its founders."

By conviction, Craigville has never had any real-estate restrictive covenant (property owners' protective association) excluding non-"Christians" or non-Christians. Its Christianity has always been latitudinarian, liberty in unity. As Craigville's Dr. Craig put it, "We fellowship the Christian heart of all; leaving the head of the Christian, in any particular case, to be flat, broad, or round as the case may be. [A member of a Christian Connection church] may be Trinitarian or Unitarian, Calvinist, Arminian, or Universalist."

To this *freedom*, the balancing *order* was the Bible as (again in Craig's words) "our divine and only creed"; "Father, Son, and Spirit should be interconnected according to the freedom of the New Testament."

Balance: no runaway order into dogma and tyranny, no runaway freedom into anything-goes anarchy. No dominance of laity by clergy or clergy by laity, or of females by males or males by females. No race- or class-based prejudice, but honor to each for what each may contribute to all. No educational requirement to preach or otherwise lead, though the Connectionalists vigorously promoted education at all levels and of both laity and clergy.

August 28

Psychiatrically, nostalgia is inability to live anywhere other than in the past. We hope these ten articles aren't nostalgic! And amnesia is inability even to visit the past. We hope these articles help you to increased appreciation of, and gratitude to God for, Craigville's past.

And also to increased appreciation as Craigville looks to its future--"its past preserved and its future provided for," as one of our promo phrases puts it. "The founding vision was to create a place to serve the religious, intellectual, and recreational needs of individuals and families" (p54, Vuilleumier). To continue the vision will take prayer, hours, and dollars.

Yes, you come here summers "to get away from it all." But Craigville is here because our predecessors, in dreaming-planning-coming, didn't intend to get away from their responsibility to create and sustain Craigville as community, as activities, and as property. Should we do less?

Yes, come next summer to rest and recreate. But if each of you volunteers a little time on necessary Craigville tasks, a lot will get done. And we'll all have Craigville not just to remember, but to look forward to year after year.

A good "off season" to you all!

The Lord's blessing be upon you and yours.