

# NORTH BRANCH VILLAGE AND ITS CHURCH, AT THE MILLENIUM

by Wayne Daniels



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# PREFACE

This narrative builds upon two admirable works. The *Semi-Centennial Address of Rev. P. M. Doolittle, DD*, 1906 is an essential primary source. Dr. Doolittle was an eyewitness to many of the events chronicled here, and the principle recorder of much early Church and Village history. *North Branch Village and its Church*, by Alice S. Thiele published by the North Branch Reformed Church in 1964 with its compilation of the first congregation of the North Branch Church and its reconstructed map of the central Village in 1856 contains outstanding examples of the researchers craft. Considerable material has also been researched from other primary sources and added to give both scope and finer definition to this regional history.

Over the past four decades, several people have focused their attention on the “nuts and bolts” history of North Branch Village and its Church since the work of Alice Thiele, undoubtedly influenced by it. Both historians and residents have inquired into how things worked in times past, how people lived, how they earned their living and how they interrelated in matters both great and small. It is both a fascinating and a humbling study, for it brings us closer to people long gone and closer to each other through our common experience of simply ... living.

Many have been eyewitness to the events of the past 36 years offering the chance to add a first person updates to the North Branch story. At the same time it is sad to see how many are recently gone who could have added much to this chronicle. In all it has been both a joy and a challenge to bring many loose ends together and to flesh out the bones of this story.

This book refers to the Church, the Village and the River with initial capital letters to designate the North Branch Reformed Church, North Branch Village and the North Branch River, to avoid confusion with any other places. I have tried to maintain a flow of the historical, economic, social and cultural events and landmarks that have brought the Village and the Church to this millennial year, touching upon each while maintaining a balance of topics. Still, there has been neither time nor space to include everything that I wished. And so I take comfort in the sure knowledge that when the Church bicentennial rolls around other hands and eyes will have had time to improve greatly upon what appears here by creating the 2025 edition of what could become the fourth volume of an ongoing historical record.

Many thanks are due. William Schleicher has been not only a source of sources but a welcome sounding board as this project developed in a matter of only a few months. Thanks to the Township of Branchburg, especially former Mayors Richard Walsh, Sr. and Michael Tenore who had the wisdom to create the Historic Preservation Commission, and Sue Winter and Robert Bouwmann, co-founders of the Historical Society. History cannot be preserved without vehicles to facilitate that preservation.

Belated gratitude goes to the late Harold and Ester Bird of the Village, whose thoughtfulness and sense of heritage saved many documents and objects that otherwise would have been forever lost. Thanks to Fred Heilich, Alice Thiele, Carolyn Zeek and others who contributed valuable historical material, and to dear Lynn Poinier who agreed to make what had to be a painful personal contribution.

A friendly chuckle goes to good neighbor Joe Bocchiaro's astonishment when I accepted this task . To the Church Anniversary Committee: Len Laich, chairman, Pastor Todd Buurstra, Pastor Louis LaFazia, Hillary Stauffer, Vice President of the Consistory, Joanne Jager, Kay Kinstler, and Joe Bocchiaro, for their patience. As the word count of this book climbed, more than once they must have wondered, "What in the world is he doing?"

Most especially to my dear and forbearing wife, Suzanne, my source of encouragement and copy reading, who has grown used to my unending "projects", my deep and abiding thanks.



Wayne Daniels, North Branch Village, AD 2000

# INTRODUCTION

With cordial welcome, we of North Branch, greet all from abroad, whose presence adds so much to the interest of this occasion - kindred, friends, and particularly those, now of other fields, who were once sheep of this pasture.

*Rev. Dr. Philip Doolittle's address at the celebration of his 50th anniversary as Pastor of the North  
Branch Reformed Church,  
July 25, 1906*

Few structures can be more emblematic of their place than a church. As we pass the North Branch Church in this its 175th year, we see a steepled Victorian structure, bustling during pre-school sessions and on Sundays and meeting nights. Otherwise the church appears a picture postcard symbol of stability waiting patiently for its people to come to its doors. That benign serenity is a cherished folk tale.

For the North Branch Reformed Church is the living result of 250 years of striving. The energy, love and commitment expended by thousands of folk over 25 generations through good times and bad, are an inseparable part of the church itself, as deeply imbedded in its fabric as a hand forged nail driven into an oak beam. All we need do is pause in our daily activities to take a closer look and marvel at what we find.

A church without a congregation cannot be. As the low fields and woods on both sides of the North Branch River gave way to homes, farms, cottage industries and businesses the process formed a community. That community felt the need for a church, and in 1825 took the steps to form one. We can never truly understand this church without knowing the story of the Village of North Branch, nor can we know North Branch without understanding the Church. The two are linked by forces as strong and as old as the history of mankind.

When the people of the village built and energized the Church, they created a great force for good and a focus of our efforts to better commune with the Divine Presence. All that the Church became has reflected back upon the community. Church and community, community and church, together finally creating a nearly ideal synergy that continues to work 'til this day and hopefully for another 175 years to come.

So this is a true tale of a village and its house of worship, both named North Branch, and of their people, trials, tribulations, failures and triumphs. To those who come after, take note: If you seek a future model for how a church and its community can be successfully one, then, Welcome! North ranch is a good place to start.

# NORTH BRANCH GENESIS

Ponderous and crushing, the giant sheet of ice covered much of the northern hemisphere for thousands of years. The year-round winter snows of the Ice Age deposited more and more of our planet's water on top of this immense glacier building it heavier, deeper and forcing it to move south, carving valleys into bed rock at its bottom cutting edge. When the planet began to warm again the torrential melt-off flowed down those carved valleys creating most of the river beds and flood planes in New Jersey. The valley of the North Branch River was borne this way.

As eons passed much of the Earth's water remained locked up in the great remaining polar ice cap, leaving exposed above the ocean's level a low land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska. It was across this land bridge that people first crossed to North America about 40,000 years ago.

In the centuries before Europeans came to North America, the native America peoples had formed into tribal structures, many of them complex and inter-related. Living as one with nature, they worshipped a supreme creator and respected his works, acknowledging the spirit within all living beings. These original Americans relied upon both hunting and their own very skilled and well managed agriculture. **1** They possessed a highly developed technology which made the most of their stone age materials and manufacturing techniques, creating beautiful razor-sharp cutting and scrapping tools, soft fired pottery, and a host of wood products from splint baskets to dug out canoes.

Indians of New Jersey named themselves the Lenape, a tribe of matrilineal clans bounded by the Hudson and Delaware Rivers. At first the coming of Europeans posed no problem. Europeans wanted to trade for beaver skins, like the ones found in the North Branch River's tributaries. They offered steel edged tools and heavy wool blankets, which the Lenape prized. Later, they wanted the Lenape land.

It was all very conventional by European standards. Deeds were made out in proper form, and payment tendered. But the Lenapes had no idea what their marks penned upon a deed meant. They had no concept of individual land ownership and so the payment of blankets and tools was like a puzzling but welcome gift. When settlers actually arrived, the awful truth dawned on them. By about 1725 most of the Lenapes had moved west to Pennsylvania, eventually ending up in Arizona in the late 1800's.

In 1664 an English fleet appeared in New York Harbor demanding possession of the Dutch Colony of New Netherland. The poorly defended Dutch colony was a thorn in the side to the English, who wanted an unbroken chain of colonies along the Atlantic coast. The Dutch gave up without firing a shot and New York and New Jersey were born as English colonies.

The first European land owners in Hunterdon and Somerset Counties were Scottish gentlemen of means who bought large parcels as an investment in new world land. Not a one of them ever visited his holdings. John Johnston of Monmouth County purchased Lot No. 52 on May 20, 1690 a 500 acre tract on the west bank of the North Branch River, north of present day Route 28, which he would sell to Mattys Ten Eyck. Lord Neil Campbell acquired the ell-shaped Lot. No. 55 of 1874 acres, which bounded Lot No. 52 on both the south and west. Between them these two lots encompassed most of what will become the North Branch area. **2**

The first permanent European residents were of predominately Dutch and Huguenot descent. By 1718 there were four Dutch Reformed Congregations in the area: Raritan (Raritan-Somerville in modern terms), Three-Mile Run, Six Mile Run and North Branch. There's a subtle clue here. These congregations were all named for bodies of water, usually the first geographic features to be named in any newly settled place. The age of hamlets and villages had barely begun.

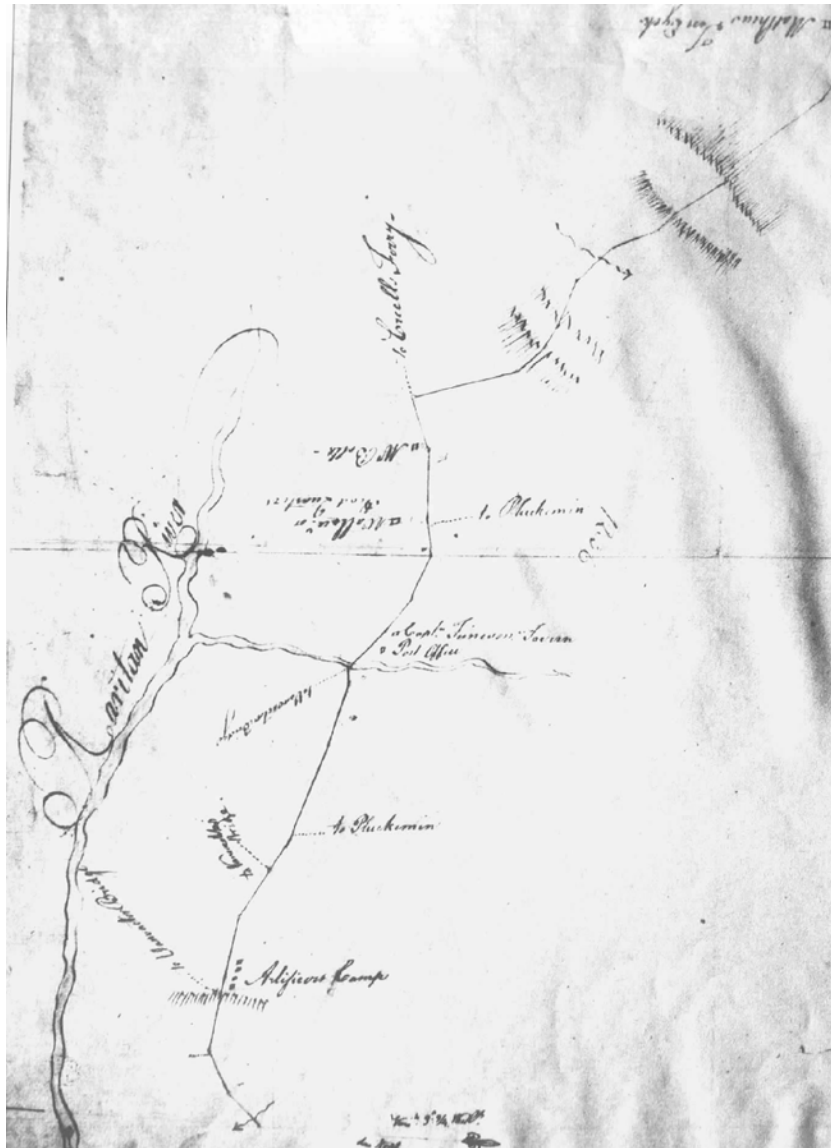
A call was sent to the Classis of Amsterdam for a minister to serve the four congregations as a circuit clergyman. Exactly which of the four congregations had buildings is vague, but the North Branch congregation, The "Kirk over the North Branch", built a log church in 1719 where that first minister, Theodorus J. Frelinghuysen<sup>2</sup> preached his first New Jersey sermon on February 21, 1720. The Log Church or North Branch Church was built three miles south of the present village at the confluence of the North Branch and South Branch Rivers where the Raritan River is formed. It stood just east of the junction of present day North Branch River Road and Old York Road.<sup>3</sup> After the Log Church burned in 1737, a new building was built three miles to the west at Readington, which became the Readington Reformed Church.

The Village of North Branch itself also begins with Dutch-American settlers. Jacob Ten Eyck of Hurley<sup>4</sup> in New York Colony buys 500 acre Lot 52, and founds a dynasty in the bargain. Family patriarch, Coenradt Ten Eyck, had come to New York City in 1650. His son Mattys Ten Eyck had moved to Hurley where Jacob was born in 1693. Jacob's 500 acres, bought from his father, Mattys, ran northward along the North Branch River from the present day Route 28 bridge. The area's rivers and streams remain geographically dominant. The Ten Eyck tract is the first building block of the Village to come.

Jacob's house was apparently a one story gable roofed house, perhaps in the style of those built in Hurley. "This structure was of Low Dutch style, and the upper part was used for a granary, in which were stored the products of the field."<sup>5</sup> As this is written Jacob's house is under examination to learn more about what it looked like before it was enlarged in 1792.

Jacob and his bride Jemima Van Nest of Somerville raised six children who in turn raised many more. One could hardly travel through Somerset County without passing a Ten Eyck house.

In 1748 a new road was laid out by the County Commissioners that forever changed the nature of the place. "We do lay out a four rod road as followeth from the Mills as the road lays: now to Ten Eyck's line, thence along the bank as the road goeth Two Rod on the bank and two rod below the Bank across the point to Ten Eyck's corner tree at the River, opposite the North Branch and so across ye main river to ye great Road."<sup>6</sup> The final laying out was delayed until 1759 when the village was connected eastward to Piscataway and New Brunswick by a relatively easy dirt county road with bridges. North Branch was becoming a definable populated community.



*Map of the North Branch area by Robert Erskine, Surveyor General of Washington's Continental Army. Erskine mapped much of New Jersey before his death during the Revolution.*

Still oriented north-south parallel to the length of Jacob Ten Eyck's land and the North Branch River, the new Village began at Burnt Mills on the Lamington River and extended south to the confluence of the North Branch and South Branch Rivers at the site of the Old Log Church. From the west at the Lamington Road it extended east to the old Pluckemin Rd. (Meadow Road) .

The perimeter of North Branch on both sides of the River was composed of large farms raising the livestock and produce necessary to the village. We do not see this easily today, for most of the farms and their buildings are now gone. Nevertheless these farms gave birth to the community and are an historically essential, inseparable part of its being. Along the road to New Brunswick the homes and enterprises of a central village were springing up .

Before the Revolution on the banks of the North Branch a mill was built at the west end of the bridge on the north side of the road. A combined grist mill and fulling mill, stood ready to turn the local grain into flour or process locally spun and woven wool into finished yard goods. South of the road was an Inn built by 1773 for travelers or village folk to rest or pass the time.<sup>7</sup> Though dates of construction and founding family names are a bit unclear, by the Revolution a small central village had been created .

By the time of the Revolution Jacob, son of Jacob the elder, was Captain of the North Branch Company of the First Somerset County Battalion of Militia. In New Jersey each County had one or two militia regiments or battalions depending on population. Each company within a battalion was regional, usually bearing the place name of its location. By 1775 North Branch was big enough to raise its own company.



*The original North Branch grist mill, which ground grain into flour for the Village for 150 years. The mill stood on its own mill race on the North branch River on the north side of present Route 28.*

The term “Cockpit of the Revolution”, once applied to New Jersey, has fallen from favor. Upon hearing it today most folks think of the flight cabin of a 747. We have forgotten that the circular it where sportsman and gamblers placed roosters to wage furious bloody battle was called a cockpit in the 18th and 19th centuries. New Jersey was and is the place between... between New England and the South, between New York and Philadelphia, between the Hudson and the Delaware. So of course there were more movements of troops, more guard posts, more winter encampments, more skirmishes, more raids and more battles of the War for Independence in New Jersey than any other state.

In 1775 New Jersey was politically divided. About one-third of her citizens favored redress of grievances with Mother England by force of arms if needed, one-third favored remaining unconditionally loyal to Crown and Government, and one-third straddled the fence waiting to see which way the wind blew. Committees of Correspondence and Safety had been formed everywhere, linking towns, counties and colonies in an information network. William Franklin, eldest son of Benjamin, and New Jersey Royal Governor for 20 years was arrested and exiled removing him as an obstacle to new elections, which created a pro-American rights New Jersey Colonial Assembly. In this New Jersey was united with the other colonies.

But the New Jersey loyalists had very valid arguments. As part of British America the English Constitution granted them more rights and freedoms than any other nation in Europe. They had serious doubts about the ability and even the right of Americans to found a workable government, defend a new nation, or create a viable economy. To abandon the right and might of England appeared to be an act of madness.



The Revolutionary War began to creep closer to North Branch in 1776. Usually militia companies saw limited action. They could be called to full time service for a few months, during which their traditional role was scouting and helping to built fortifications. But in New Jersey the militia quickly evolved into partisan forces, dealing with similar forces of Loyalists, scouting, ambushing and quickly becoming combat veterans on their own home ground. In the fall of 1776 as Washington's army reeled back in retreat from the defeats of the New York Campaign to Trenton, Captain Jacob Ten Eyck's North Branch Company and others of the Somerset County Militia guarded the thoroughfare over the Two Bridges near the old Log Church site. On December 8 a large party of mounted armed Loyalists attempted to cross to join the British who now occupied New Brunswick. In a sharp fight the Loyalists were turned back in the only major Revolutionary battle in North Branch.

As Washington's Army retreated across the Jerseys in the cold rains of autumn, so the British followed, occupying selected areas. Only loosely controlled by their officers, British and Hessian occupiers treated New Jersey civilians harshly, with little regard for their allegiance. Reports of theft, abuse, vandalism, arson and even rape rebounded around the state. And why not? The European tradition was to allow the soldiers a free hand with an occupied foe. To Crown soldiers all Americans were felonious rebels and to be treated as such. This dreadful blunder by the Crown forces quickly turned not only the undecided but even some stout Loyalists into opponents of England and her policies. The surprise attack and victories at Trenton and Princeton quite literally saved the cause of American Liberties and forced the Crown's troops back into a few eastern-most New Jersey cities. New Jersey settled into being the "neutral ground" controlled by neither side, but continually marched through and fought over.

## *The Brokaw-Sally Farm.*

*Tradition holds that General George Washington, Commander In Chief of the Continental Army visited North Branch. During the winter of 1779 Washington's headquarters was the Wallace House in Raritan (now Somerville). While there he visited the home of the widow of Capt. John Brokaw, who had been killed at the Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania. \* The Brokaw farm located on present day Milltown Road, Bridgewater, just 1/2 mile south of the church became the farm of Harry Sally, a well known North Branch dairyman of the early 20th century, who bottled and sold his milk under his own label. In 1997, Andrew Lohse found an intact bottle with raised letters proclaiming "Sallys Dairy, North Branch, N. J." in the backyard of his Village home, a silent testament to the forgotten dairymen of Somerset County.*

*Today Sally's herd and barn are gone. Only a solitary silo and a produce stand reminds us of its heritage. But the farmhouse remains, a one-story five bay brick dwelling whose style is reminiscent of both Dutch and Flemish styles in colonial America. No historical architectural survey has yet been made of this potentially very significant building.*

*\* Alice Thiele calls him Jacob Brokaw, but Snell states, "John Brokaw, lieutenant First Battalion [Somerset County Militia]; killed October 4, 1777 at Germantown.", in the campaign to prevent the capture of Philadelphia. Snell, p. 92.*

In 1775 the Continental Congress had asked New Jersey to raise two regiments as part of the Continental Line under General Washington. But by 1777 the Congress had gradually increased New Jersey's allotment to five regiments. This was more than New Jersey could provide.. With constant danger at home, New Jersey men became reluctant to join the Continental Army preferring to guard their homes as part of local militia companies. New Jersey couldn't find enough men to fill the ranks of Colonel Spence's Fifth Regiment. It became necessary to transfer New York troops to the 5th New Jersey Regiment to fill out their ranks.



*The 1779 gathering of the Jersey Brigade in the North Branch area, reenacted each year on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at North Branch Park by the 3<sup>rd</sup> New jersey regiment.*

Few New Jersey citizens had actually laid eyes upon the five regiments they raised for Washington's Continental Army. The spring of 1779 changed that for North Branch, when a major expedition was developing to be sent against the Iroquois Indian Nation who had put much of the frontier to the torch on the side of the English.

In his Journal, Lieutenant Samuel L. Shute of the 2nd New Jersey Regiment notes, " May 30 - Marched to the forks of the Raritan 16 miles and quartered in the neighboring houses. Captin Cummings and I with our company Quartered at the Widow Vrooms and were very hospitably entertained where we remained until the third of June, when we marched to Pitts Town." 8

Spencer's 5th Regiment joined the 2nd from Bound Brook and Middle Brook, "... and Quartered at the branch of Raritan. [May] 31st thear lay till wee Got our Clothing Cleane and Drew overalls and Shoes and Blankets and Arms and accoutrements that was Difishent. June 2nd Incamped in our Hutes at the North Branch, 3rd Marched throug Reading town to Pittsburgh [ Pitts Town ] " 9

The headquarters of the Clothier General who was supplying these soldiers was at Burnt Mills, at the far north end of the Village. Quite likely supply wagons trundled through the Village center carrying supplies to the camps

Did families venture near the large sprawling camp, which must have stretched to the Village's edge to gawk at the sight of hundreds of their own blue coated New Jersey soldiers? Did adventurous lads sneak out at night to watch soldiers moving about on their duties lit by a multitude of camp fires? It had to be one of the great sights ever to be seen from the Village.

One local Continental soldier was Samuel, who lived for a number of years in the Village in a rented house "...at the fork of the road". Samuel was a black slave owned by Casper Berger. Berger persuaded Samuel to serve in the military in his place. Samuel came to believe that at the conclusion of his service, he would be a free man. He endured the rigors and dangers of General Sullivan's 1779 Campaign against the Iroquois Nation in the wilderness of far northern New York. Surviving, he completed his enlistment, but on his return, Berger maintained that Samuel was still his property. Over the next 20 years Samuel was sold three more times before being permitted to purchase his own freedom. **10**

England grudgingly acknowledged the independence of her former American Colonies by the Treaty of Paris in 1784, and America was on her own. Today the population of New Jersey is about 4,000,000. Take that number and distribute them from Georgia through present day Maine and you have an idea of the thin population of America in 1790. The largest city was Philadelphia with a population estimated at 30,000 souls. The decades to follow were to become the most American of times in North Branch as the new republic blossomed.

As we depend upon gas stations and repair shops to keep our cars operating, so North Branch once needed hay and grain, saddlers, harness makers, and blacksmith/farriers. North Branch ran on horse power. Farmers of the Village produced the fodder. Artisans and craftsmen who lived and worked along the main road took care of the other needs. Here were found carpenters, house wrights and masons as well. North Branch was not only self sufficient but it could tend to the needs of those who passed through, including a stage line which came into being. Travelers from New Brunswick to Phillipsburg and points between rode the stage coaches called "flying machines" which could tear along the highway at a clip of several miles an hour, when the road was dry. "Lodging and entertainment" could be had at the Inn. **11**

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# *The New Jersey Turnpike*

By late 1809 The New Jersey Turnpike, chartered three years before, was open from New Brunswick to Phillipsburg, running right through the middle of North Branch. Of course this is not the New Jersey Turnpike of today, and the Village has not been obliterated by 12 lanes of concrete superhighway.

Turnpikes were chartered to corporations who built roads of superior quality, with straightened, elevated, drained, graded roadbeds. A toll applied to people, vehicles and livestock was charged for their use. The section through North Branch and all of Somerset County was straightened and graded. Sections east of the Village are straight as a string along several miles of present day Route 28. But the western part in Hunterdon and Sussex (now Warren) Counties was never brought up to standard and so no toll was charged there. \*

The Turnpike was a great influence on the Village of North Branch. Along the newly upgraded old 18th century road traffic increased, bringing new business opportunities for shop keepers, tradesmen and artisans. The Turnpike also permanently changes the orientation of the Village from north-south parallel to the River to east-west along the Turnpike.

A coach line operated on the turnpike, though just exactly which line is unclear. However in 1808 and 1809 the names Daniel Vail and Alexander Drake suddenly appear in the account books of an unnamed saddler and harness maker in North Branch.

With these accounts came new and different work for the artisan. Besides his usual small mending and harness and saddle making jobs for local folk, the unnamed saddler began to mend stage braces, hang a stage, make leather seats for a stage and mend stage curtains for Vail and Drake. Whether together or separately Vail and Drake were clearly operating a stage coach line through the Village and giving the artisan a considerable amount of repair work to perform.. Drake paid his debit of 2 pounds, 17 shillings and 6 pence in cash and "...by order on Daniel Vail...", but Vail left a debt of 7 shillings unpaid and there is no record as to whether the "order" was good. We can only speculate that they sold out, or went broke, leaving the harness maker stuck with an uncollectable tab. \*\*

The era of the New Jersey Turnpike brought a time of unequaled steady growth and prosperity to the Village, ushering in its golden age of the 19th century.

\* Snell, p. 106-107. The never properly completed sections in Hunterdon Sussex (Warren) Counties ownership was returned to ..." the inhabitants of the several townships in said counties of Hunterdon and Warren through which the same passes", in 1838. As a public road it is renamed the Easton-New Brunswick Turnpike which is its official name to this day.

\*\* Manuscript Account Book, Unnamed North Branch Saddler and Harness maker, 1805-1828, Branchburg Historical Society, Ledger page 26.

Even though America had been independent for 33 years, our saddler/harness maker does all his

*business in the old English pounds, shillings and pence as do many. The new American dollar was the official money, but had yet to gain the confidence of trades people.*

*Snell, p. 756, Gives a biography of area resident, Edward Vail, in 1881, whose Great Uncle was Daniel Vail. Daniel was the son of John and grandson of Samuel and Abigail of Westchester, N.Y., and may well have been the Daniel Vail associated with the stage coach line.*

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The Revolution was 40 years in the past by 1825. John Quincy Adams, son of second President John Adams, was now the sixth President of the United States. The Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo had just opened. Growing and bustling, North Branch Village was ready for its own church. The Great Awakening of the 18th century gathered a force of evangelism, which gained momentum as it rolled into the 1800's. By 1821, "In one meeting alone, more than one thousand people attended a revival at the barn of Abraham Dumont, Sr. on the outskirts of the village." **10** On June 2, 1825 Andrew Van Pelt and his wife conveyed for one dollar a parcel of land on the high east side of the North Branch River to Abraham Quick to be held in trust "until the congregation is organized, which is to assemble in a church to be built on the following described premises." **13** This was the original lot, upon which the church still stands.

The time was right as summer waned. On September 10, 1825 James Ten Eyck, son of Captain Jacob hosted a group of dedicated Village citizens at his home on the west bank of the River. **14** This committee, appointed by the local governing body of the Reformed Church, the Classis of New Brunswick, following a sermon, ordained the first governing body of the North Branch Church :

Elders	Deacons
Jacob Ten Eyck	Ralph Van Pelt
John Van Derveer	Matthew Van Pelt
John Runk	James Staats
Abraham Quick, Sr.	James Ten Eyck

(signed)

John I. Zabriskie (Pastor of the Hillsborough Church, Millstone)

Jacob I. Schulz (Pastor of Churches of Rockaway in Whitehouse and Lebanon.)

The church was established by people largely already communicants of other Reformed Churches within about a five mile radius of North Branch Village: those at Readington, Raritan, Bedminster, and Whitehouse. **15** A significant clue to what has happened in North Branch is to be found in the names of the founders of the congregation.

AMMERMAN, Abraham and wife Margaret; Abraham A. and wife Henry  
BAILIS, [Baylis] Jacob, Mary Ann  
BERGEN, Cornelius and wife Nancy  
BULOCK, Benjamin  
COOPER, Jane, Sarah

COVART, Elizabeth  
 DE CAMP, Ellety Stryker  
 DOW, John D. and wife Catharine, John Van Nest  
 DUMONT, Abraham, Joanna, Peter B.  
 DUNN, June  
 ELMENDORF, Peter Z.  
 FIELD, Jeremiah and wife  
 FISHER, Catharine Ammerman  
 FRELINGHOUSEN, John  
 GEDDES, Andrew and his wife Margaret Bergen  
 HALL, Samuel  
 HOAGLAND, Kelly  
 HOWEL, Andrew  
 KLINE, John  
 LANE, Ellizibeth, Tunis  
 LIDDLE, Cathewrine, John, Robert  
 McCULLOW, Lucce  
 MILLER, John and wife Rebecca Williams  
 QUICK, Abraham, Jr., Abraham Sr., and wife  
 RUNK, John and Wife Mary, R \_ \_ \_  
 SCHANK, Arthur and wife Hannah  
 SMITH, Catherine Cooper  
 STAATS, James and wife Elizabeth  
 STILLWELL, Jane  
 STRYKER, Margaret  
 SUYDAM, Charley  
 TENEYCK, Abraham, Andrew A., Esibelluh, Jacob and wife Jane, Jacob, Jr.  
 Jacob T., James and wife Easter, Jemimah, John, Margaret, Sarah  
  
 TINBROOK, Garret and wife Margaret  
 VANDERVEER, Cornelius, Ferdanand, John, Jr., John, Sr., Sarah  
 VAN DOREN, William and wife Dorcus Dumont  
 VANLUE, Marriah  
 VAN NEST, Abraham, John, John G, .....  
 VAN PELT, Abraham, Elletty, Maryah, Matthew and wife Marya,  
 Philip and wife Catherine, Ralph  
 VOORHEES, Ralph  
 VROOME, Hendrick and wife Sarah Lane, Peter D.  
 WHITEHEAD, Daniels and wife Sarah  
 WORTMAN, Peter and wife Gertrude

**“Blacks in the bounds of Congregation”**

CUFFY, Blackman of Abrm. Quick  
 SUSAN, Blackwoman of Sarah Vanderveer  
 THOMAS Blackman of Dennis Stryker

Among the first congregants are many traditionally Dutch names: Ten Eyck, Vanderveer, Staats, and Voorhees; surnames Abraham, Ellety, Hendrick, Jacob and Cornelius. There are Huguenot names as well: Dumont and Decamp. But there are also German surnames: Kline and Elmendorf; Irish or Scots/Irish names: McCulloch and Dunn and Kelley ; and English names: Field and Hall and Stillwell. **16**

By 1825 the area around the Confluence of the North Branch and South Branch Rivers had become an ethnic and cultural melting pot. If the diversity of names will not satisfy this statement then the diversity of building styles must. The Village area now contained low gable roofed Dutch-style homes, a Dutch Colonial gambrel roofed house, Dutch barns, a New England-style Cape Cod, and a highly significant hybrid barn , the only surviving one to combine both the Dutch and English styles. This barn is unique in America today. The culture of North Branch contained combinations and produced variations of material culture not found anywhere else.

To the north, in Bergen County, a Dutch/Huguenot/Barbadoan population had formed a separate definable culture known for many years as Hackensack Valley Dutch. In like manner the people around the confluence of the Raritan River also developed a subculture , which is coming to be called, Raritan Valley Dutch.

The people of North Branch stayed with their familiar comfortable Dutch Reformed religion and their dialect of the Dutch language. The Dutch Reformed Church had a reputation for being a creed short on intolerance and long on compassion. Like Christianity itself and so many of its denominations, the Dutch Reformed Church was born out of the pain of violent oppression and persecution. At the height of its power in the age of exploration, mighty Spain had seized present day Belgium and the Netherlands turning them into a colony, the Spanish Netherlands. Along with the heavy rule of an occupying nation had come a less-than-gentle state sanctioned church and the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition.

In an unparalleled spontaneous act of iconoclastic rebellion, congregations throughout the Netherlands had risen up and smashed the statues and icons of worship in their churches. A full-fledged rebellion against Spain would be led to victory by William of Orange, and the Dutch would restructure their domestic lives in reaction to the repression they had suffered.

Learning a bitter lesson from its affliction the new religion, the Dutch Reformed Church, foreswore icons and altars, instead constructing octagonal or square churches whose center was the pulpit and its Bible, placing the word of God as the focus of the congregation. Extraordinarily tolerant of others, the Dutch government and the Reformed Church permitted a Jewish congregation to settle in their colonial capital city of New Amsterdam, later New York, in the early 1600's.

In America this devout yet tolerant religion set well with many over the years so a new Reformed Church at North Branch suited the needs of the Villagers, and work began quickly. In short order the church was incorporated as "The Reformed Dutch Church of North Branch" by a special act of the State legislature. The building was begun and the first minister was appointed. When he came to the Village on Dec. 1, 1825, the Rev. George H. Fisher was described as, "...above medium height, refined in manner, impressive, impulsive and under excitement a little incisive; a man of scholarly habits and a fluent speaker." **17**

Construction of the new brick church measuring 46' x 52' began apace. There is no mention of the date the church was completed, but pews were sold on March 1, 1827. Though nearly square in the older Dutch manner, its plan follows the English style with the altar at the back as do most American churches after 1790. The Church's gable end faces the road crowned by a neo-classic steeple and belfry. Within is a vestibule across the front, a center aisle, two side aisles and a "wine glass" style pulpit at the back. At the same time a parsonage for Rev. Fisher was begun on land bought from Samuel Hall in exchange for a \$104.00 pew, and built at a cost of \$1,090.75, being completed in 1828.

18

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## The Church of 1825

*It was of brick, with massive walls and superior workmanship, as found when it was demolished in 1863. (Tradition says the bricks were made two-and-one-half miles west of this place on the farm so long owned by Mr. John Kline). The building was 46 x 52 feet at the base, with well proportioned height, surmounted by a cupola, in which swung one of Meneely's first-class amalgam bells. It weighed only about 450 pounds, but its peals were sweet-toned and reached much farther than the ponderous steel affair does the present service.*



*The 1825 brick North Branch Dutch Reformed Church taken sometime before this building was taken down in 1863.*

*The building was a quaint structure. A vestibule across the south end, six feet wide, left the auditorium square. There was very broad aisle in the middle, and narrower ones along the side-walls. Half way down, there were side doors, which gave convenient egress, (there being only one door at the front), and fine ventilation.*

*Galleries ran along the east and west sides and the south end,, the main panel boards of which appear in this house; they were perfectly plain in those days, the moldings have been added since. The pulpit was at the north end, very high and commanding; its platform was reached by winding stairs at either side. A balustrade passed from the foot of one stairs to the foot of the other, curving about the platform. The level section at the top was curtained with heavy green silk brocade, liberally shirred. (This was finally cut up for keep-sakes. I saw one of them not long ago- still much prized).*

*We are not informed of the cost of the old church nor of the dedicatory services. \**

*\* Doolittle, pp. 6 and 7. Rev. Doolittle's description is printed here intact, , so not to detract from its charm or detail. .*

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The Church soon acquired its own cemetery, the family graveyard of Jacob Ten Eyck, the elder, on the west side of the North Branch River, near a little cove in the river bank.

The Rev. Dr. Abraham D. Wilson came to the pulpit of the Church 11 years later. Wilson was the second in a series of pastors illustrating a curious situation- none of the first pastors of the North Branch Dutch Reformed Church have Dutch names, nor will they until after World War II. It seems to be another link in the chain of the special diversity of North Branch..

Dr. Wilson lived the traditional life of an American country pastor. He divided his time between the Church and operating a subsistence farm as so many clergymen of the century past had done. A sower and nurturer he surely was, for Dr. Wilson took a congregation of 69 and increased them to 84. "One of his old parishioners remarked ... that no one ever had any fault to find with Dominie Wilson, except that he moved away from North Branch." **19**

Seated on the box of the stage coach next to the driver rode a tall, commanding figure, forsaking the shelter of the coach for a better view of the countryside. Scottish by birth, the Rev. James K. Campbell saw in the rolling hills and valleys reminders of his birthplace and he decided to stay awhile. By 1838 he had accepted the pulpit of the Church.

52

Jas. E. Gore, print.

*To all People to whom these Presents shall come,*

**GREETING:**

NOW YE, That we, the Minister, Elders and Deacons of the Reformed Dutch Church of North Branch, for and in consideration of the sum of *sixty two Dollars* ~~twenty five~~ *cents* to us in hand paid by ~~William Liddle~~ *John Liddle*, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have given, granted, bargained and sold, and by these presents do give, grant, bargain and sell, unto the said ~~William Liddle~~ *John Liddle* - — his heirs and assigns forever, all that Pew in the Reformed Dutch Church aforesaid, situate on the ~~lower~~ *lower* floor, and known by the name of Number *52* To HAVE AND TO HOLD, the said Pew, with its usual privileges and appurtenances, unto him the said ~~William Liddle~~ *John Liddle* his heirs and assigns forever; subject to such rules and regulations as the majority of the heads of families of said Congregation shall direct and establish.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have caused the seal of the Corporation to be hereunto affixed, and the name of ~~the Pres~~ *Abraham D. Wilson* our President, to be subscribed. *This 16 Day of June 1832*

ATTESTED BY

*Abraham D. Wilson*  
1832

*1832 Certificate, showing the sale of the use of pew no. 52 in the original North Branch Church for sixty-two dollars and twenty five cents to John Liddle.  
The document is signed by Rev. Abraham Wilson.*

Formerly a Presbyterian missionary to India, "He was journeying at leisure for rest and comfort, after a sore domestic affliction". 20 Very different from Dr. Wilson, the portly courtly Rev Campbell was definitely a 19th century man. and seems to have become very popular with the congregation. Capturing the eyes of the ladies they soon had him dressed in a clerical gown and bands, the traditional black clerical robe and neck cloth with twin tabs, when he presided from the pulpit. When he departed the Church, he had increased the congregation to 102.

In the Village, only taxpayers and voters were affected by the partitioning of the new Township of Branchburg in 1845. This western most part of the sprawling Township of Bridgewater had felt a need to create their own town for some time. The west banks of the North Branch and South Branch Rivers became the eastern borders of Branchburg, with Hunterdon county on the west border. The creation of Branchburg technically divided the Village between Bridgewater and Branchburg, but had little effect on the Village as a community.

Garrett Stryker, large landowner in North Branch, had his land on the Turnpike eastward from the Depot (Station) Road surveyed to subdivide into four building lots on Dec. 24, 1844. The houses built here, alone among those in the central Village, all have their north or Turnpike sides in perfect alignment. 21

Nineteenth century railroads were usually built in connected segments, each section chartered by the State of New Jersey, and having its own corporate name. So it was that the Elizabeth and Somerville Railroad pushed its way west towards Phillipsburg in the 1840's. The big attraction was the anthracite coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania. Every New Jersey railroad is headed in that direction, each by its own route. With the railroad came the expectation of new business and growth for the Village, as it became clear that the tracks would pass just one-half mile to the south.

Building the impressive five arch sandstone viaduct to carry the railroad over the North Branch River must have been a sight to see in 1847. 22 It seems a depot was built as well although there is no known illustration of it. The road from the Village begins to be called the Depot Road.

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## *The Viaduct and Depot at North Branch*

*To build the North Branch Viaduct four stone footings and two abutments were built on dry land as the bridge with its five Syrian arches of red sandstone rose, two tracks wide. When the Viaduct was completed in 1847 the course of the River was diverted westward to flow under it. The North Branch Viaduct may well be the oldest intact railroad bridge in New Jersey. It is in splendid condition, and presently carries 12 passenger trains each day. The area around the depot grew at a rapid clip, becoming a new hamlet, North Branch Depot (later, North Branch Station).*

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In 1849 James Ten Eyck wrote a letter recorded in the Church minutes that must have exploded like a bombshell. Ten Eyck stated that he would take over operation of the family graveyard, which he had sold to the Church in 1829. He stated that the Church had let the graveyard deteriorate and further, that the lease he had given the Church had been altered since the original transactions, and so was no longer valid.

Both the Church and Ten Eyck consulted attorneys to determine who in fact owned the graveyard, but apparently no agreement could be reached. The Church took John Ten Eyck, son of the late James, to court, for, "...forcibly breaking the gate and entering into the burying ground in the possession of the plaintiffs [church members]." 23 John Ten Eyck defended that the land belonged to his father because of the invalid deed. The jury found for the Ten Eyck's whereupon the Church appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of New Jersey in the case, *The Reformed Dutch Church of North Branch v. John Ten Eyck*, June 1855. The Supreme Court reversed the lower court decision and called for a new trial.



*James Ten Eyck, a founding member of the North Branch Church in 1825 and perpetuator of the graveyard controversy.*

The matter had become entirely partisan, passing beyond settlement. Bitterness and rankling pervading to the point where differing factions presented petitions concerning not only how to resolve ownership of the graveyard, but also how to determine who had the right to vote on the matter. Several Church members refused to pay their dues and at least one elder refused to take communion. At last two elders and a deacon took the dispute to the Classis of New Brunswick, seeking a settlement within Reformed Church authority. The squabbling had so degenerated that the original issue of the disagreement was lost. Now the election of elders and deacons was disputed. The turbulence was finally settled, with much bad feeling, by the election of a new consistory.

These disagreements occurred during the ministry of the Rev. James Campbell whose winning personality may have had at least some calming effect for, despite the tumult starting with the graveyard controversy, when he departed this pulpit in 1855 he had managed to increase his congregants to 102.



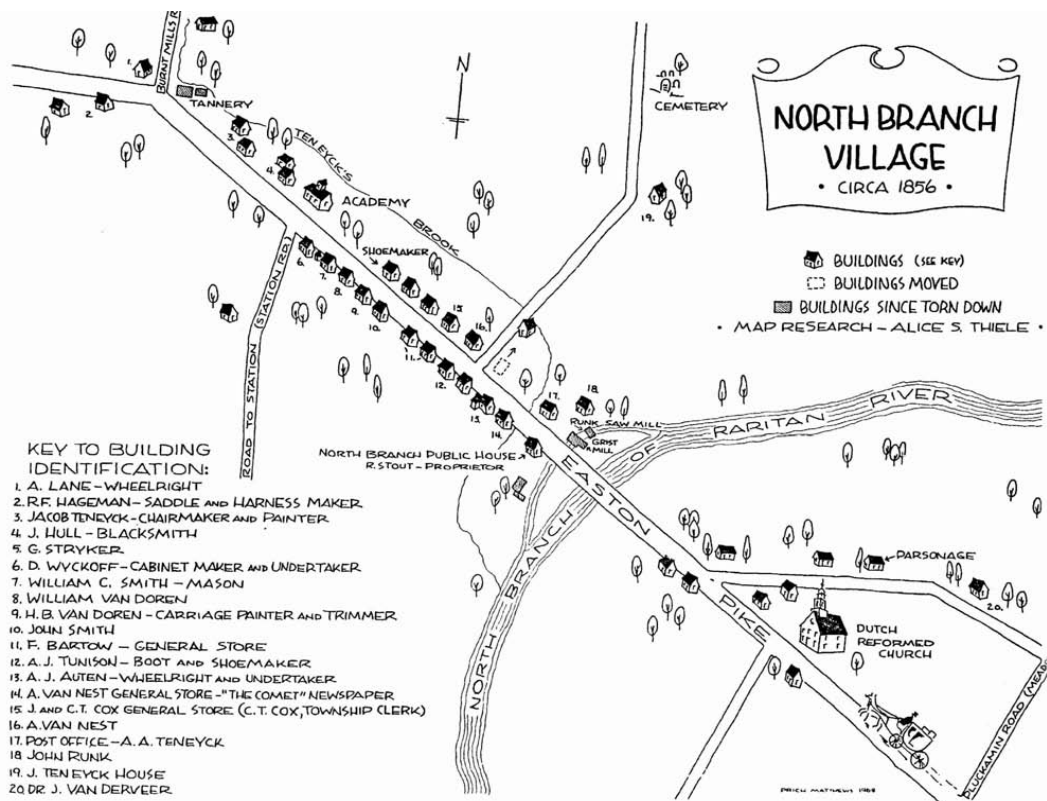
*Rev. Dr. Philip M. Doolittle,  
in 1906, his 50th year as pastor of the church*

# A GOLDEN AGE

In 1856 the Rev. Dr. Philip M. Doolittle came to the church "...with a pet theory of staying about five years, to get used to the work, accumulate a stock of sermons, gather experience for the correction of mistakes, and move on to a more permanent settlement." Pastor Doolittle overshot his mark by 45 years, staying from 1856 to 1906. He, the Church and the Village were so intertwined as to be one. He married Anna Ludlow, daughter of Dr. Gabriel Ludlow of the Neshanic Station Reformed Church sixth months after his ordination. They moved into the Parsonage in February 1857.

The Doolittle's were witness to such a vibrant time in the lives of Church and Village. In 1906 Doolittle noted,

Fifty years ago this was much MORE OF A BUSINESS PLACE than at present. In the village there were three stores in general trade, two shoemaker shops, two blacksmith shops, two wheelwright shops, a chair maker and turning shop, a tannery, one harness shop, one cabinetmaker, one printing and newspaper office, and two undertakers. These have mostly disappeared, under more recent modes of trade and industrial production. The old mill, however, still grinds away, a venerable monument of the past and does what it can to supply present need." 24



Villagers of this special time saw both the height of the age of the individual tradesman and the artisan/craftsman, and their decline of that as larger industries and mass marketing began to emerge and dominate.

With completion of a railroad bridge over the Delaware to Easton and passenger and freight car ferries across the Hudson to New York City, the Central RR of New Jersey had become a through route for passengers and freight cargoes. Anthracite, lower in sulfur and cleaner burning than bituminous soft coal, is eagerly sought in the 19th and early 20th centuries when America is powered by coal.

The first nation-wide epidemic, typhoid fever in 1859-61, which did much to populate graveyards elsewhere, touched the Village but lightly. More disturbing is the internal tension over slavery and state's rights, which was tearing the nation apart, plunging us into the terrible Civil War. By 1862 a local militia company, the North Branch Rifles, had been formed and was enlisted into Company A, 30th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers seeing service at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and mustered out on June 27, 1864. **25**

By 1863 the Church felt the need for a larger building. Demolition of the first brick Church began on October 5, 1863, the day after its last service was held. The new frame church rose on the old foundation, 46' wide but extended 22' deeper to 78'. Asa R. Diltz of Raritan built a Church in the popular Italianate style with appropriately ecclesiastical Gothic side windows. The new tall-spired Church was dedicated October 13, 1864. But all was not well.

"After only ten years, the flooring, the sills, joists {floor beams}, and some of the main posts were far gone in decay. The spire tip was canted four or five feet out of plumb. The side frames were sprung in and out by their weight of brick filling, much too heavy for the frame." **26**

Michael Kinsley, architect and builder then living in North Branch, was hired to rebuild the Church.

The entire mass was raised on blocking. All decayed parts were replaced with the best of Georgia pine, the brick filling removed, and the whole frame sheathed with hemlock from sills to plates. Many hundreds of feet of bracing were introduced, even up to the spire. The sprung timbers were straightened so that every window worked freely. The foundation was leveled anew. ... The work was not ended until a new pulpit had been constructed, and wood trimmings applied...and the whole painted and grained. The house was rededicated March 9, 1875..." **27**

The country had gone through a post-Civil War depression. While the 1863 building had been paid for by subscription of the parishioners, the cost of rebuilding was a sore burden only ten years later.

The rebuilding had cost \$6,765, over \$700 more than the original cost. This time, however, the church was not able to raise all the money. The struggle to pay off the debt was to consume many years. Times were so hard that in 1878 Rev. Doolittle took a voluntary reduction in salary of 20 per cent (from \$1,000 to \$800) for one year. It might be added that when the minister asked to have his salary restored six years later, it was decided to make the reduction permanent. **28**



*J.E.Glaser built the store shown here, a home, a creamery and a lumber and coal yard at North Branch Depot, during the last half of the 1800's. The house and a second masonry building of the creamery still stand near on Station Road where it crosses the railroad tracks.*

The area from the depot south rapidly grows into a new hamlet, North Branch Station. As the years pass, the Glasser family builds a handsome Victorian house, a general store a creamery and a coal and lumber business with its own railroad siding. The central village grew but little. Only three buildings were built there after the Civil War plus F. C. Williams's Store (the North Branch General Store) in about 1905. The railroad Central Railroad of New Jersey established Somerville as the area boom town. The downtown depot, freight yards, engine house, car shops and the South Branch Railroad (Flemington Branch) all add bustle to the little county seat, which grows by leaps and bounds.

29 The railroad has actually put the brakes on the once steady growth of North Branch Village.

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## *Remains of the Brick Church*

*What became of all that brick when the first Church building was demolished? Some of it went right back into the second (1863) structure in the form of filler for insulation between the upright posts of the building. Sometimes called nogging, this use of brick is common in the Raritan River Valley. Indeed I have seen nogging used in the walls of houses in Branchburg. In frame houses it is usually salmon brick, pale in color and incompletely fired having been too far from the heat during firing, but that is less likely in the case of bricks from the Church. Salmon brick will eventually crumble when exposed to rain.*

*But there is a local tradition that surplus brick from the first Church building went to local Villagers who built smoke houses, two of which are still standing and a third recently damaged. A fourth is an archaeological foundation.*





*Smokehouse along the old Turnpike now Route 28, reported to have been built of bricks from the 1825 Church.*

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The first public school in North Branch was built in 1871, one of five in Branchburg, a splendid Victorian building with an impressive bell tower. By 1881 it had 183 students between the ages of five and eighteen years. Within the central Village in the same year were The River View Hotel, (much enlarged from the original the Inn), a post office, store, grist-mill, school-house, blacksmith shop, wagon shop, two wheelwrights and 120 residents.. **30**



*The North Branch School, built circa 1871, was a particularly stylish Victorian structure complete with belfry serving all elementary grades of Village children. As a part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century system of individual school districts it eventually passed to Branchburg Township's School Board, and was made obsolete by new school construction after World War II. It then was converted into the Firehouse of the North Branch Volunteer Fire Company and still stands as an almost unrecognizable part of the Kangaroo Kids pre-school and early learning facility.*

The Church and its remarkable pastor continued on. The cemetery was enlarged in 1885 by purchase. As the century drew to a close a pleasant surprise arrived in 1898, in the form of an anonymous donation to build a chapel behind the existing sanctuary at the back of the church. Long desired, members of the congregation looked back on their past indebtedness and decided to design the chapel themselves, even digging the footings for the foundation. The donor remained unknown to any save Dr. James D. Vander Veer, Church Treasurer, even at the dedication service on Christmas Day. Just before the prayer of dedication in response to the Reverend's call treasurer, Dr. James D. Vander Veer, strode to the pulpit handing Rev. Doolittle a sealed envelope. Vander Veer had strongly urged the donor to reveal himself. Rev. Doolittle opened the envelope, read its contents and announced that the donor was Mrs. Anna A. Elliot.

Neither wealthy nor a long time congregant, she and her late husband had come to North Branch from Brooklyn. She was very infirm, and had taken a seat far back in the congregation. Indeed this dedication would be her last attendance at public worship. The chapel became her memorial when she passed away shortly after the dedication.

The Rev. Doolittle had led his church for fifty years of its eighty-one years... He piloted his flock through many joys and sorrows. Rev. Doolittle was more than a minister; he was, also, an historian. He was solely responsible for preserving original church books and for keeping meticulous records of his pastorate. When he retired [1906] the church had 155 members. Three short months after his celebration, the Rev. Philip Melancthon Doolittle, D.D., drifted into eternal sleep. This man was truly a great minister, for he had taken a faltering, young church and had brought it to maturity. He had built a solid foundation, which would weather future storms. **31**

Rev. Doolittle death was unexpected and peaceful at the age of 73. Appropriately he is buried in the cemetery of the Church, according to his wishes.

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## North Branch Depot

*The area around the depot grew at a rapid clip, becoming a new hamlet, North Branch Depot (later, North Branch Station).*

*The Central Railroad of New Jersey upgraded many of its facilities along its commuter district in the 1890's. New depots were constructed at Raritan, North Branch, Whitehouse and Ludlow-Asbury. In about 1891 architect Branford Gilbert designed a harmonious park-like setting for the area from the North Branch River to Chambers Brook.*

*Echoing the shape of the 1847 Viaduct, Gilbert created architectural features built of stone blocks with brick arches. His plan included a single span Romanesque two track railroad viaduct over Chambers Brook, the new Railroad*

*Station and the Station Road bridge echoing the design and materials of the earlier North Branch Viaduct.*

*Gilbert's Richardson Romanesque style hexagonal railroad station stood atop the south (upstream) side of the Chambers Brook Viaduct . Its first floor of large random stones was punctuated by a large half circle arch containing the framed waiting room doorway. The second floor was also hexagonal in plan, wood framed, shingle sheathed, with lozenge shaped decorative shingle panels in its walls. Windows were double hung sashes with the upper half of the top sash diamond pattern mullions. The roof was slate.*



*The second station at North Branch, a sandstone, brick and frame structure built circa 1905 was destroyed by fire in 1972. It was also the last independent North Branch Post Office.*

*Between 1900 and the First World War business boomed at North Branch Station. Glasser's coal and lumber yard received strings of 5 ton wood CRR of NJ coal jimmies, to be replaced after the War by new all steel 50 ton coal hoppers. Arch roofed ice cooled milk cars picked up processed milk cans from the creamery and lumber arrived by the boxcar load. Crossing gates and a warning bell were installed operated from a manned watchman's tower, and a cross-over track from the westbound to the eastbound mains facilitated switching out the sidings at the lumber yard.*



*A cut of freight cars at Glasser's Coal and Lumber yard (out of sight at the right) photographed from the North Branch River Road overpass, probably taken between 1900 and 1915. Here are older wood coal jimmies, an arch roof milk car and box cars, with the Station Road crossing and the depot in the distance.*

*And then the Vanderveer family sued the railroad. It seems that when the North Branch River was diverted to pass under the new Viaduct in 1847, the original River bed ended up on the Bridgewater side. Land onto which the River had been diverted became an uncompensated loss of land to a Branchburg landowner. The 1895 scale evidentiary map of the site presented in court was ten feet long! Though plaintiff failed to make his case, the suit was a cause celebre for some time. \**

*\* Manuscript collection, Branchburg Historical Society, gift of Harold and Ester Bird.*

## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



*At the Riverview Hotel, looking East along the Turnpike towards the old iron truss bridge with the Church in the left foreground, circa 1910.*

The halcyon days of the early twentieth century saw the Village turning back into a farming and residential community. A baseball team played regularly “... in the field behind the hotel and Harry William’s Ice Cream store.” James Flynn now shod horses at the blacksmith shop, and North Branch School graduates were able to take the train from the depot to High School in Somerville. **32**

Rev. Charles Corwin succeeded Dr. Doolittle in 1907, remaining until 1915. He seems to have been a competent minister, but overshadowed by his father, Rev. Dr. Edward T. Corwin, who had pastored the Millstone Church for 50 years. A warm and sincere man, Dr. Corwin was also a respected scholar and historian, and author of the *Manual of the Reformed Church in America*, the first book of its kind.

His place was taken by [Rev.] Lewis F. Sauerbrunn in 1916. This man was quite a controversial figure. He was well educated but apparently quite dissatisfied with his life. He was a man who could give a prayer at the beginning of a service that would last half an hour and later say that he had always wanted to be a lawyer. **33**

Rev. Sauerbrunn chose to come as “supply” for one year, pending a call at the end of that time, if, as he phrased it, “... the relations of pastor and people are then entirely harmonious.”

The year Rev. Sauerbrunn arrived, a German U-boat torpedoed *RMS Lusitania* , taking the lives of American passengers in the process. War with Germany and the Central Powers became inevitable. America was ill prepared. Some of our fleet was quite new and very powerful, but we had only a small standing army and nothing like the equipment necessary for an American Expeditionary Force. Still, the nation managed to send one million men into France, Belgium and Italy, ten percent of whom would become casualties in arguably the most dreadful war in history.

On the home front, while Village doughboys were otherwise occupied at places like Chateau Thierry or the Meuse-Argonne Rivers, one night in 1918 a terrible wind storm rose up, so strong and violent that it toppled the 124 foot Church spire.



*The Riverview Hotel, as it was circa 1910, was originally the North branch Inn built before the Revolution. The long section at the left burned at an undetermined date and was rebuilt as a smaller structure. The section at the right still stands, minus the Victorian gingerbread of the bargeboard on the gable end.*

World War I has become a forgotten war. Its survivors have nearly all passed beyond and it has receded far from public attention. It should not be surprising to learn that we know little of the Villages contribution to that awful effort. About all we have found to date is that following the War a dinner was given on September 5, 1919 for the returning boys, at the North Branch Hotel with a menu entirely in French.

The end of the war brought hard times. Veterans of the trenches and the blue Atlantic returned to find there were no jobs for them. In the decade that followed the Armistice world economies headed inexorably towards the Great Depression ... money became tight, businesses failed, no jobs were to be had.



There were other changes as well. The North Branch Fire Company was established, eventually occupying the old North Branch District School. Automobiles became common with traffic through the Village increasing. The circa 1856 horse sheds behind the Church were removed by 1929. The Easton Turnpike had electric power lines strung along it, and a few Villagers electrify their homes. The Central Railroad's illustrious train *Queen of the Valley* plied between New York and Allentown through North Branch. But this express didn't stop at North Branch Station.

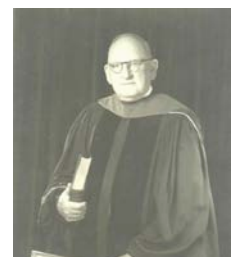
Bypassing the Village as well was newly built State Route 29 (now Route 22), in 1942 diverting through traffic out of the village. Most North Branch businesses quietly disappeared, and the Village began to turn in on itself becoming an isolated remnant of times past.

The Great Depression began in 1929 and it's effects continued until the end of World War II. It hit ordinary folk the hardest. Rev. Sauerbrunn left the Church and was not replaced until 1936 by Rev. Albert J. Knoll, whose salary was an unlivable \$1,140. Rev. Knoll volunteered to look for a job the following year, working during the week and ministering to the flock part time on weekends for a salary of \$480. In 1940 Rev. Knoll was called into the Army and the Church was then ministered to by student ministers, Herbert J. Guth and Richard Vos. Rev. Knoll never returned to the Church, tendering his resignation in 1943 to a congregation now reduced to 95 members. **34**

Few knew it but World War II was the beginning of the age of rapid change in America. Jobs were still scarce yet new war industries were springing up. Chrysler Motors began to build tanks while sewing machine companies were converted to build anti-tank guns. Companies from Ford to Lionel Trains immediately dropped what they were making and concentrated totally on war production. You had a serious problem if your old car was on its last legs, and your children wouldn't see a new toy train under the Christmas tree until 1946.

Gasoline and critical foods including meat and butter were strictly rationed. If you had an "A" ration sticker on your car you just might be able to buy enough gas to get to work that week. Reactions to war in Europe and Asia differed on the home front, but Pearl Harbor horrified the nation and forged a steely resolve to persevere against our enemies no matter what. Volunteers and draftees went off to war daily. High Schools and Colleges emptied their graduating classes directly into the military. If your church was seeking an at-liberty clergyman, forget it. They had all become Chaplains. **35**

Church annual income had dwindled to \$2,464 during the war years. Not surprisingly, a minister was not found until 1947, in the person of **Dr. Gerrit D. Van Peursem**, a many-faceted clergyman who came to North Branch not at the beginning but at the end of his career, postponing his retirement to become interim pastor.



Raised on a farm in Maurice, Iowa, Van Peursem recognized that he did not have the makings of a farmer. He entered Grinnell College to study law, but transferred the following year to Hope College to study for the ministry, entering Princeton Theological Seminary in 1907. Upon graduation he became a missionary to Arabia. Sailing to Bahrain he met a Swiss-borne missionary nurse, Josephine Spaeth. They became engaged and were married in Bagdad in 1912. For 36 years the Van Peursem's diligently carried on their mission to Arabia, apparently becoming well thought of for Rev. Van Peursem was the first Christian missionary to be invited by the Arabian Government to tour the interior of Saudi Arabia. When Van Peursem returned to the United States in 1946 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by his alma mater, Hope College.

And that might have been the end of a happy, exciting and productive career, except that Dr. Van Peursem accepted temporarily the call of a church much in need. His timing was fortunate. Postwar 1947 saw a time, not of depression and unemployment, but growth, jobs and the first baby boom. For better or worse both government and industry had embarked upon a consumer based economy, and the nation thrived. Dr. Van Peursem's new flock were the determined survivors of very hard times and a congregation eager to work with their pastor towards the future. "It proved to be a happy integration, with services for God and humanity in one community, North Branch became a people's church." **36** Prosperity returned and new worshipers came to the modest church in North Branch. By the time Dr. Van Peursem could finally retire from this successful post-war ministry, the congregation has grown back to 157 members.



**Rev. Robert W. Henninges**

came to the Church as pastor in 1955 , relieving interim pastor Dr. Van Peursem.

## *A Village of Lights*

*I first saw the Village of North Branch in that year of 1955. I was pursuing my hobby of observing everything I could of local architecture and construction of early American buildings by traveling the highways and byways on weekends, looking for surviving buildings of earlier times. Though I remembered the Village of 1955 well, it would wait many years before I fully appreciated what was there.*

*In 1979 my wife and I were house hunting. Priorities called for an early house, located a bit closer to my work in Sussex County, but not too far from hers in southern Somerset County. On our way to a living history program we detoured onto the old Turnoike through the Village and fell in love with it. Here was a surprisingly well preserved village center, with its church and old store intact. Within a few months we had closed on the Dennis Wyckhoff house and moved in.*

*From the start I was taken by the lights of North Branch. How splendid and refreshing were the tall clear glass windows of the North Branch Church softly glowing from within during an evening service. Nearly every house in the Village had glass panes around its doors. Built in a time before electricity or glass paned doors, the side lights, placed vertically at both sides of the doors, and the transom lights placed over the doors gave illumination to an otherwise dark spot within. And each house was a bit different. Some with wide and some with narrow sidelights, one with an obviously boarded over transom light begging to be restored, one with a decorative cast metal fan-shaped transom light over the doors. Cheerful light coming in by day, soft comforting light glowing out at night, both saying, here is a place with a heritage lived in by people who love this place and its places.*



Mrs. Carolyn Zeek quietly began a little nursery school for 12 pre-kindergarten children at the Church in 1956. It's the sort of thoughtful sweet thing that folks do for children, in itself loving and uncomplicated. A year later the back yard of the Parsonage would become the nursery school playground under the supervision of Barbara Henniges.

The idea seems to have come from Carolyn Zeek and help was not far away. The Young Ladies Missionary Society, an organization from another age, was energized and given new purpose with the encouragement of Dr. Van Peursem, becoming the source of the nursery school's first teachers, with Mrs. Zeek at the helm. Jody Vanderveer and Mrs. Zeek even to night college courses to elevate standards for the nursery school.

But by 1959 the idea had grown to major proportions. The Church committed itself to a new Christian Education program involving the largest addition in the Church's history. A major commitment to the community and to Church growth, the project cost \$70,000. Ground was broken on Palm Sunday, and Rev. Robert Henniges dedicated the completed wing in a service held on Sept. 27.

**37**

Carolyn Zeek had to step down as director in 1962 and Glenna McKnight came forward, putting her plans for a career as a math teacher behind her to become the new director of the nursery school.

## **SINCE 1964**

"Time works changes in all things, and in none so rapidly as in the population of a small Community." **38**

The ordinary but revealing matters of daily life don't happen in tidy chronological order. I know of one Village house that did not have central heat until as late as 1953, yet in the 1970's and 1980's some houses added new high efficiency wood stoves for supplemental heat and for ambiance. By 1980 all Village homes had long since installed electricity yet many maintained and used their own wells. . But today, most have changed to Elizabethtown water. When you sell a house, all the New People want to know is, "Does it have all public utilities??"

Competition from automobiles and trucks, and the death of the coal market had slid the Central Railroad of New Jersey into bankruptcy. Passenger service to North Branch Station had been cut back to Raritan. But in the 1960's the newly expanded New Jersey Department of Transportation began supplementing the cost of New York bound commuter service on the line. When Conrail was formed, The Old Jersey Central is tucked under that rail umbrella and commuter operations ceded over to the New Jersey Transit division of NJDOT. And lo and behold, rail service returns to North Branch in 1972 ! NJ Transit purchases new General Motors F-40PH locomotives and comfortable state-of-the-art Comet II passenger cars, reroutes their lines and introduces direct service into Penn Station, New York via Newark's Penn Station . To add icing to the cake, New Jersey Transit restores passenger service all the way to High Bridge. By 1999 the service is sufficiently popular to be increased to six

New York bound and six High Bridge bound trains each week day.

Today each weekday morning on the 7:10 train alone, you can see two dozen passengers board at North Branch Station, avoiding the ugly hassle of driving to New York City.

By 1976, its 20th year, the Church Nursery School had grown to 180 children, and was unquestionably a vital link between church and community, and a model for other nursery schools. Before long it would take on the newly popular name of pre-school.

Positive events tend to alternate with negative happenings. This is especially true in the Village during the last decades of the 20th century.

North Branch faced a modern challenge in the 1980's - suburban sprawl. Farmland in the flood plane of the River is protected from new construction by new State laws. But higher ground on both sides of the River is not. The State also requires periodic review of Bridgewater's and Branchburg's Master Plans. When proposed high density housing came before the Branchburg Planning Board many residents object strenuously and a grass roots movement, "Keep Branchburg Country" coalesced into a civic organization Citizens' Alliance for Branchburg (CAB). Many of the high density zones are approved by the Planning Board, but the public was alerted. The Branchburg side of the Village was zoned Village-Residential and redefined.

Preservation Commission, empowered to overview changes to the exteriors of Village houses. Bridgewater took no such action, but did approve high density housing for the area facing the Church on Milltown Road.

Rev. Henninges was an excellent preacher. Older church members tell me that his sermons were vibrant and fascinating, often allowing room to examine the social issues of the day. Yet these same sermons somehow managed to never exceed 15 minutes. During his tenure, with his wife, Barbara, as an active partner the Church was evolving from that of a sleepy country village to a more suburban atmosphere. But in 1981 an unreconciled difference arose over the proposed sale of the Parsonage and its replacement with a housing allowance. The Henninges answered another call and were sorely missed by many of the 377 congregants he left behind. **39**

The Administrative Secretary, of the Division of Discipleship at the New York City headquarters of the Reformed Church in America, Rev. Bert E. Van Soest, came to the Church as its new pastor in October 1982. Van Soest has ministered to congregations in cities, towns and villages across America, and brought a wealth of experience. So why does he leave an executive church position to accept a call to a New Jersey country church?

It is known that at this time the Reformed Church in America enacted sweeping staff lay-offs in response to a budget short fall, and that Rev. Van Soest was one of many to suddenly find himself jobless. It is also said that no less a figure than Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, a personal friend, advised Van Soest to accept the North Branch call. Rev. Van Soest was told when he came that there were some thorny issues with which he must deal. "Thorns don't hurt if you grab them firmly." he responded, and he followed this philosophy. **40**

Some architectural styles age well... others just get old. So it was with the bell tower cupola

that covered the steeple of the Church since the 1863 steeple had blown down in a terrible storm in 1918. In fairness, the 1918 cupola never could have worked. It was quite stylistically incompatible with the 1863 Victorian church with its original tall steeple symbolically pointing heavenward. **41**

Kathryn Dumont Greenaway was descended from Church founders. She was baptized, confirmed and married there. When she passed away in March, 1983 she was laid to rest in the North Branch Church Cemetery. Her devoted husband, George, felt that both her memory and the church as ...” a vital part of her heritage and her life”, would be well served by a replacement of the belfry with a copy of the 1863 steeple. With the enthusiastic approval of the congregation the project was undertaken by an engineer who supervised both the design and installation, to be built by a Kentucky firm, of modern weatherproof, bat proof materials.



On a chilly December Wednesday night, the prefabricated steeple suspended from a crane rose up, over the Christmas wreath on the door, over the gable, above the steeple base to rest like a hand in a glove atop the church. The North Branch Church had returned to the beauty and integrity of its lost historic design by the hand of its loving members. **42**

Special built-in lighting first illuminated the Kathryn Greenaway Memorial Steeple on Christmas Eve, 1983, making it visible for miles.

On the west side of the Church stands a charming old house, believed to have been built ca. 1780. When it became available, in 1983, a new opportunity for community involvement presented itself. Katherine Rue, chair of the Church committee on shared housing summed up the idea. “We wanted to have a use for it that would be of service to the church and to the community. It’s really like five people getting together to rent a house and sharing it, except that we’re going to provide some services”. The Church saw it as a singular opportunity for housing for senior citizens who want to retain their independence without living alone. And so Kirkside was borne.

A host of Church volunteers flocked to the project. “I’ve never seen so much team spirit in my life.” said Florence Levine, director of senior and youth ministry. “It all stems from an awareness on the part of the congregation of the need for services for the community”.

Modifications and code upgrades, done almost entirely by Church volunteers, created five single bedrooms for senior residents with bathrooms and shared parlor and kitchen space.

Direct elder services include five main meals each week, food shopping, and a full-time supervisor included in a target monthly rental of \$500.00 per resident. Residents provide light housekeeping and prepare the remainder of their meals. When completed in 1984 Kirkside was among

only three other shared housing facilities in all of New Jersey. The concept gains slow acceptance among senior citizens and has become a pattern for many other similar residences. **43**

The old 1918 belfry, removed to make way for the steeple restoration had not been discarded. In a remarkably wise and far sighted move, it was removed intact to serve as a ground level pergola or gazebo for the residents of Kirkside.



*Kirkside, the senior citizens residence in the background  
with the 1918 belfry, now a gazebo at the right*



Spiritually as well, the Church was alive and progressive. At the invitation of **Rev. Bert Van Soest**, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale addressed a packed Church, October 21, 1985, inaugurating the “Live Alive with Faith” five-week sessions by Rev. Van Soest.

Regrettably, Rev. Van Soest’s wife Barbara contracted cancer and it became necessary for the Van Soests to leave the congregation. The Church membership had increased to 462.

**Rev. Peter Nordstrom**, another truly great preacher next came to the Church as more residents moved to the area. His stimulating sermons and exciting classes increased the congregation considerably, so much so that the Education Wing, especially the nursery, overflowed. Soon the Church rallied to build a \$1 million second story to the Education Wing.

The Church had long wished to establish a larger facility especially for the Church School and for it’s Pre-school which were bulging at the seams. In 1990 this became a reality with several 60’ modular classrooms serving for that first year. **44** It was a big project.



The cellar was enlarged to accommodate an expanded first floor with a second story added to the whole.

Multifaceted, this Christian Education Building now included three upstairs classrooms a Church School area also dividable into a general meeting and dining area, two large rooms for nursery and kindergarten classes, three upstairs classrooms and a pastor's study. In the Pre-school alone there are now 254 children with a staff of 22 certified teachers, many still members of the congregation. directed by Gail Burgess and Janice Davenhall.

The music ministry had flourished as well under the leadership of Helene Catalina introducing new voice and bell choirs. **45**

Amid all these positive activities of growth and outreach, in August of 1987 the Church's sets of handbells, an essential part of the choir were mysteriously stolen. The following Sunday, leading a congregational prayer, Rev. Peter Nordstrom asked for their return. That very night the thief phoned the Bridgewater Police to confess and lead them to the hiding place of the bells. This troubled young man had seen the cased bells during a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, assumed them to be guitars, and had stolen them on the spur of the moment.

Younger families coming into the Church lowered the congregation's mean age with the influx of more children and young people. Andre Daly was called as Associate Pastor to help with growing responsibilities and after he is called away Louis LaFazia takes his place concentrating on youth and education while he finishes his studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. He will become Reverend LaFazia when he is ordained at the North Branch Church in 1998.

Creeping suburbia and the construction of Interstate 78 stretched the ability of local roads to bear the traffic, which eventually reached the point where people were in harms way. A local boy, Brian Federowitz was riding his bicycle along Lamington Road when he was killed by a vehicle in a 40 mile per hour zone.

The people of the Village were deeply distressed. Traffic through the Village has increased sharply over the past decade, and many of the newer Villagers are families with children. They lobby for a speed reduction on both Lamington Road and Route 28. Since the early 1980's Villagers, individually and in groups, have spoken many times at Branchburg Township Committee meetings asking for the speed to be lowered. They were referred to the Somerset County Department of Transportation who has jurisdiction over the two County Roads

The response from the County was not only negative, but infuriating. Villagers were told that the business of the Department of Transportation is to keep the traffic moving. One County representative, who has young children, is asked, "If you lived in the Village, would you lower the speed limit to protect your kids?" Astonishingly, his answer is, "No."

Largely due to Brian's death a token speed reduction is made to 35 miles per hour on the two roads. It does nothing to slow traffic, which continues to drive at 40 miles per hour or more.

A woman riding a bike is struck and seriously injured on Route 28. A young girl is hit by a car and spends a year in a lower body cast, and still nothing substantive is done.

In a late afternoon of March 2, 1993 the quiet is shattered by wailing sirens and flashing lights as police cars and the Rescue Squad ambulance converged on North Branch. Villagers rushed from their homes to find out what had happened. Young Miles Poinier had been struck by a car while crossing Route 28 in front of his home. In just minutes a medivac helicopter is hovering overhead to rush Miles to the hospital. What everyone feared for years had happened. A seven year old child has been killed, not by a speeder, but by an excessive speed limit.

The Church responds at once with personal visitation to the stricken family, a memorial service in the sanctuary and church hall, and ongoing support and counseling for a whole Village in grief.

But it takes a year and continuing effort by a champion of human safety within County government before the new 25 mile per hour speed limit signs went up. Branchburg Police cars were stationed at the Firehouse to enforce the new law. A pedestrian controlled traffic light was installed on Route 28 at Vanderveer Road. Branchburg memorialized Miles Poinier's name in Brandywine Park. If you see the plaque, you can appreciate why it is there.

After Rev. Nordstom left the Church, with a membership of 552, interim pastor, Everett L. Zabriskie, III comes to North Branch. Zabriskie is the first pastor to be formally trained specifically as an interim minister and is an exceptionally musically knowledgeable man.



As a permanent minister, **Rev. Peter Paulsen** comes to the Church. An excellent administrator, he brought skills as former Executive Secretary of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics. He also challenged the congregation to pay off the debt of the Education Wing. Because of that great effort the Education Wing mortgage will be burned as part of the observance of this, the Church's 175th year. **46**

Thursday, September 16, 1999 brought a black time to the Village. The rains began before dawn. We watched the northward movement of Hurricane Floyd on the Weather Channel, prayerfully hoping it might veer out to sea. But Floyd, a massive storm, moved directly over Somerset County producing heavy rain. By 10 a.m. Villagers closest to the River were moving furniture upstairs and battening things down. By 1 p.m. the wind driven rain was torrential and the North Branch River rose out of its banks and into the Village. By 8 p.m. even westerly-most villagers surrendered to the inevitable, shut off their electric power and left the last of their homes. Save for its Church, the lights had gone out in the Village.

I had seen the flood of 1984 and knew where it crested. But Floyd just continued to pump rain into the valley, exceeding 1984 by 30 inches, cresting at about midnight. It was the worst flood in the recorded history of Somerset County.

By 4 a.m. on the 17th, the water was gone, the roiling river again within its banks. The cinder block garage at the North Branch Inn had been swept out from under its roof by the force of the brown flood. The smoke house on Vanderveer Avenue, built of bricks from the 1828 Church had two of its walls toppled. It is believed as this is written in the spring that four historic buildings in the Village will be demolished including the historic North Branch Inn. Clean-up and the agony of discarding furniture, destroyed keepsakes and appliances began, and many have been laboring stubbornly for months to repair and restore the damage.

The Church found a key role in this tragedy, reaching out to Villagers, helping to provide food, clothing, lodging and services to those in need, regardless of their affiliation. Rev. Paulsen created a North Branch Flood Relief Committee. Inspired by this example and by conscience, neighbors and former Villagers extended every help to those whose lives had been torn apart.

In the midst of the furor of activity, **Rev. Todd Buurstra**, Church's new pastor, was installed on Sunday, September 19, 1999 and began at once to lend his efforts to the relief of the Village.

Over the past twenty years a new sort of spirit has grown and is abroad in this Village. People live here today not for the profit of trade, nor the convenience of transportation, but rather because they love the historic roots of the place. Unlike so many newer yet benighted places, the Village is a true community.

Those who have never been fortunate enough to experience the feeling of a real functioning community have trouble understanding it. North Branch has not been turned into a village of shops and boutiques where people no longer live. Its residents know each other, socialize and work together towards good ends. Nowhere is this spirit better personified than in the North Branch Church. All that has transpired... the creation of Kirkside, the restoration of the steeple, reaching out to the victims of Floyd are concrete manifestations of a spirit abroad in this little village of lights.

While our farms disappear, the green spaces of Somerset County fill with condominiums and expensive houses on too-small lots, while the media complains about a loss of social values, responsibility and human compassion, the Village of North Branch and its Church have gone against all of those trends.

Perhaps they have gained simply this... an understanding of what a community traditionally was and still can be in all its rich and varied aspects.

"In looking over this assemblage I see the faces of many who have never resided in our midst, but who have come to-day to help us celebrate this anniversary. We are very glad to have them with us, and wish to take this occasion to express our appreciation of their kindly interest and friendship thus manifested, and our hope that we shall enjoy their sympathy and regard in an even greater manner in the years to come."

*Closing remarks of John T. Vander Veer, Esq. at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Rev. Doolittle as Pastor of the North Branch Reformed Church., July 25, 1906.*



# 175<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OBSERVANCES of the NORTH BRANCH REFORMED CHURCH

October 8 Sunday Services,  
Rev. Bert Van Soest,

preacher

October 15 Sunday Services  
Rev. Peter Nordstrom,  
Andre Daley.,

preacher  
liturgist

October 22 Sunday Services  
Rev. Robert Henninges,  
Rev. Peter Paulson,

preacher  
liturgist

October 29 Sunday Services  
Renewal of vows by the Congregation for the next 175 years.  
Rev, Todd Buurstra  
Rev. Louis LaFazia

preacher  
liturgist

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## FOOTNOTES

1 Many journals of soldiers of the 1779 Sullivan Expedition against the Iroquois Nation comment on the remarkable quantity and quality of the vegetables from Indian gardens.

2 Snell, James P. , *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties*, New Jersey, pp. 760 - 761.

3 The exact location is subject to debate. One reasoning is that it stood on an obvious rise of land overlooking the confluence now occupied by an early 19th century dwelling. No effort has been made to explore the area archaeologically.

4 In the event of possible confusion, hereafter the first Jacob is referred to as the elder, for clarity. Hurley in Ulster County is perhaps the most Dutch of all surviving Hudson River Valley villages. Here the oldest houses are built of native gray stone, one-story with a gable roof. A visit to this town and its surrounding area on their Stone House Day ( usually the 2nd Saturday in July) is a real experience in Dutch Colonial culture. - W.D.

5 Snell, p. 769. "Low Dutch" refers to the Netherlands or Holland, while high Dutch usually refers to German speaking nations to the north.

6 Snell, p. 765, from the "Old Book", p.15, record of roads, Somerset County Clerk's Office. This description has confused more than a few people. The part quoted seems to describe a section starting at the Burnt Mills on the Lamington River running south generally along the bank of the North Bridge, perhaps by way of present day Burnt Mills Road or possibly Vanderveer Avenue, then east on present day Route 28 to Milltown Road and then south to the Great Road. The phrase,... "from the Mills as the road lays..." implies an existing north-south road which might have started as an Indian trail.

7 Snell, p. 766.

8 Sullivan's Expedition, Journal of Lieut. Samuel M. Shute, 2nd New Jersey Regiment.  
Widow Vroom's house was adjacent to the White Oak Tavern on the Old York Road in Branchburg. Pitts Town is in Hunterdon County. - W.D.

9 *ibid.*,

10 Manuscript, unpublished, by William Schleicher and Sue Winter. Samuel's case is not unusual. Many other slaves experienced the same deception. Washington's Continental Army was not segregated although the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment had exclusively black soldiers with white officers. Excepting the southern states, which did not accept blacks into their ranks, about 15% of the Army, were black men.

11 "Entertainment" referred to bed space, often shared, for travelers and stable space for their horses and food for both, but definitely not amusements. - W.D.

12 Theile, Alice S., *North Branch Village and its Church*, 1964, p. 7. Located on the west side of Station Road between Route 22 and the railroad, now demolished. The barn must have been packed to the rafters with people spilling out into the barnyard! The Dumonts were a significant Village family of French Huguenot-Dutch descent, one of several diverse cultural elements that made the place special.

13 Conveyance by Andrew Van Pelt, et ux, Clerk's Office, Somerset County. Van Pelt bears a Dutch Surname with a decidedly Scottish given name, a hint as to the merging diversity in North Branch.

14 The original 1735 home of Jacob Ten Eyck the elder, it had been extensively rebuilt in 1792 from its early Dutch style, into a larger two story 5 bay sandstone house with a frame 2 bay wing. With the pent roof on the gable ends it now resembles a style from the Delaware Valley or eastern Pennsylvania. - W.D.

- 15 Thiele, p. 8
- 16 *ibid.* Alice Thiele explains at length the careful scholarship she used in compiling this list.
- 17 Doolittle, P. M., DD, *1856-1906 Semi-Centennial*, Rev. P. M. Doolittle, D.D., North Branch, N.J., p. 8.
- 18 Doolittle, p. 8. The parsonage stands where it was built, on a road to Pluckemin (Church Road), which joins the larger Pluckemin Road ( Meadow Road). These older road names appear as late as 1873 in the Beers *Atlas* causing no end of confusion to local historians. The parsonage was sold off in the 1981.
- 19 Doolittle, p. 9. Dominie is the old Dutch word for pastor, still used formally in some Dutch Reformed Churches.-W.D.
- 20 Doolittle, p. 9.
- 21 Snell, p. 766. Snell states, "North Branch, situated on the North Branch of the Raritan, was laid out on Dec. 25, 1844, by Joseph Thompson, at the request of Garret Stryker, on whose land it was." This appears to be an overstatement. The land surveyed by Thompson was a small portion of that belonging to Stryker. It lay on the south side of the Turnpike, bounded by the Depot (Station) Road, and was surveyed for subdivision into four building lots, all of which contained houses by 1856. Perhaps because these were the last four dwelling places built on the south side of the Turnpike within the Village center, it was misconstrued by Snell, but the 1844 survey was in no way the laying out of the Village, which had already existed for more than a century. - W.D.
- 22 Cunningham, John t., *The Railroads of New Jersey* , Afton Press, Andover, N.J., 1997, pp. 62-76, and Crater, Warren, B., *New Jersey Central Album*, 1963.  
Beers *Atlas*, 1873 shows a depot and names the road Depot Road.
- 23 25 N.J.L. 40 (Superior Court 1855).
- 24 Doolittle, p. 13. Many Village houses still bear evidence of business that was carried on. Additions that were retail shops, a former walk-in meat locker at the back of the William C. Smith House, etc.- W.D.
- 25 Doolittle, p. 19 & 20, and Thiele, p. 13. Alice Thiele states, "Thirty-one sons of North Branch Church families joined this company."  
Since the desired strength of Union companies was 100, presumably the Company's ranks contained many non-congregants. Captain Arthur S. Ten Eyck, commander, James D. van Der Veer, Lieutenant of Co. A. ( later became Captain of Co. B). As Villagers today are largely of the Republican Party, through the 19th century New Jersey was one of the few northern Democrat Party states. Whatever the reason, many later New Jersey Volunteer Regiments served as two-year regiments, often in reserve or in rear echelon posts. Of the 31 Church members in Co. A, two died in service, of sickness. - W.D.
- 26 Doolittle, p. 15
- 27 Doolittle, p. 15.
- 28 Doolittle, p.16
- 29 Crater, Warren B., *New Jersey Central Album*, 1963 and Cunningham, John T., *The Railroads of New Jersey* , Afton Publishing Co., Andover, N.J., 1997, pp. 62-76.  
Beers *Atlas*, 1873 shows a depot and names the road Depot Road.
- 30 Snell, p. 766.
- 31 Thiele, p. 15.
- 32 Thiele, pp. 15- & 20.
- 33 Thiele, p. 20..
- 34 *ibid.*

- 35 From the perspective of the year 2000, many military historians feel that World War I and World War II were really Rounds One and Two of the same conflict. World War II was certainly the most all consuming endeavor of the 20th century. As a youthful eyewitness I can attest that it permeated every part of daily life here at home. Relief from the emotional tension came when we broke the Japanese Navy at the Battle of Midway in 1943, and secured the beachhead at Normandy on D-Day., 1944. Despite the miles of film and mountains of eye witness accounts of this most documented of wars, it has taken Stephen Spielberg's 1998 film, *Saving Private Ryan*, to make World War II a national icon for generations who were born after it's end. - W.D.
- 36 Thiele, p. 27. Letter from Rev. Dr. Gerrit D. Van Peurse, July 1, 1964.
- 37 *The Church Herald*, Dec. 4, 1959, p. 1.
- 38 John T. Vander Veer, Esq., closing remarks, Doolittle, p. 44
- 39 Memo from Rev. Todd Buurstra, 2000.
- 40 loc. cit.
- 41 The 1863 church is in the Italianate style, the most popular of Victorian designs. The bell tower cupola was in the Gothic Revival style seen through the eyes of 1918. see: McAlester, Virginia & Lee, *A Field Guide to American House*, pp. 196-210 and also pp. 300-308, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1990.
- 42 *Somerset Messenger-Gazette*, December 29, 1983.
- 43 Courier News article, contained within an undated clipping in the Church's Kirkside scrap book., and *Somerset Messenger-Gazette*, May 17, 1984, p. C-4.
- 44 Interview with the Lohse family whose son Jonathan attended pre-school in 1990.
- 45 Memo from Rev. Todd Buurstra, 2000.

# CHRONOLOGY OF THE NORTH BRANCH REFORMED CHURCH

- 1825, June 2, Andrew Van Pelt and his wife  
conveyed for one dollar a parcel of land on the high east side of the North Branch River to  
Abraham Quick to be held in trust "until the congregation is organized, which is to assemble in a  
church to be built on the following described premises." This was the original lot, upon which the  
church still stands.
- 1825 September 10, Committee of the Classis of  
New Brunswick organizes The Reformed Dutch Church of North Branch ordaining its first Elders  
and Deacons.  
Construction of the new brick church measuring 46' x 52' begins.
- 1825, Dec. 1 to 1830.  
Rev. George H. Fisher, Congregation increases from 25 to 69.
- 1827, Pews were sold on March 1.  
Parsonage for Rev. Fisher begun on land bought for \$104.00 , costing \$1,090.75, completed in  
1828.  
Family graveyard of Jacob Ten Eyck, the elder, on the west side of the North Branch River,  
acquired as a Church cemetery, prior to 1836.
- 1838, Rev. Dr. Abraham D. Wilson , increases congregation to 84, by the time of his departure  
in.1840's west wing added to the Parsonage.
- 1838 to 1854, Rev. James K. Campbell  
Increases congregation to 102.
- 1856 to 1906, Rev. Dr. Philip M. Doolittle.  
Mortgage debt of \$1,000. retired, 1856 or 57.  
The Church lot is enlarged by purchase from John A Schenk, extending it back to the Pluckemin  
(Church) Road providing a place for tying horses and a horse shed.  
The Church and ten others set off from the 1859, May, Classis of New Brunswick into the new  
Particular Synod of Raritan.
- 1865, Aug. 25, Consistory votes for new 1000 pound iron bell.
- 1869 and 1879. General overhauling" of the Parsonage.
- 1863, Oct. 5, Demolition of first church and  
construction of the second church begins, by Asa R. Dilts of Raritan at a cost of \$5,250.00.
- 1864, Oct. 13, Second Church building dedicated. Ladies of the congregation provide the furniture for  
\$460.00.
- 1874, the Second Church is found to be badly weakened by rot, and is elevated, new structural  
materials added and the building lowered, by Michael Kinsley, architect and builder of North  
Branch, at a cost of \$6,765.00
- 1885, Church cemetery enlarged by purchase.  
1898, New chapel added to the rear of the building by anonymous donation, complete  
with organ, heat and lighting, and pulpit. The congregation plans the addition and excavates the  
footings themselves. Dedicated Christmas at a cost of \$1,500.00
- 1907, Rev. Charles Corwin succeeds Dr. Doolittle remaining until 1915.
- 1916, Rev. Lewis F. Sauerbrunn becomes pastor until 1933.  
1918, The 1863 steeple of the second church building is toppled in a violent storm, to be replaced  
by a belfry.

Rev. Sauerbrunn leaves the Church and is not replaced until 1936 by Rev. Albert J. Knoll, serves as a weekend pastor from 1936 to 1940 when he becomes an Army Chaplain. The Church is ministered to by student ministers, Herbert J. Guth and Richard Vos. The congregation is now reduced to 95 members.

1947, Dr. Gerrit D. Van Peursem, former

missionary to Arabia, comes to the Church as interim pastor . When he departs in 1955 the congregation has increased to 157.

1954, first nursery school of 12 children.

1955 Rev. Robert W. Henniges becomes pastor

1959 the Church commits itself to a new Christian Education program involving a major addition to the Church. The project costs \$70,000. Rev. Robert Henniges dedicates the new wing in a service held on Sept. 27.

1964, The Church observes the centennial of the building, rededicating it at a service and publishing Alice Thiele's *North Branch Village and its Church*. A new sanctuary chancel is built. 1964 is the same year as the Tercentenary of New Jersey.

1981, Rev. Henniges leaves and the Parsonage is sold.

1983, Dec. Reproduction of the 1863 Church spire built and installed in memory of Kathryn Dumont Greenaway.

1982, Oct. 10. Rev. Bert E. Van Soest installed as pastor.

1985, Oct. 21. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale address a packed church inaugurating the "Live Alive with Faith" five-week sessions by Rev. Van Soest.

1982. The project to create Kirkside, a residence for senior citizens who want to retain their independence without living alone is begun.

1987, Aug. The Church's Handbells are stolen. They are returned following a congregational prayer for their recovery.

1990, The second story addition to the Christian Education building is begun, completed on time and on budget in 1991.

1999, The carillon was added to the steeple.

1999, September 19, Rev. Todd Buurstra installed as Pastor.

## **History of the North Branch Reformed Church (NBRC)**

### **Updated - 1999 to 2018**

#### **Pastors of North Branch Reformed Church**

- Dr. Todd Buurstra - Pastor of Worship & Witness - Installed 1999
  - Mark Swart - Pastor of Discipleship - Installed 2007
  - Edward Staats – Seminary Intern – Engaged 2013
  - Joy Carroll - Pastor of Discipleship - 2003-2007
  - Lou LaFazia – Pastor of Discipleship - 1993-2001
- Peter Paulsen - 1997-1999
- Everitt L. Zabriske, III - Interim Pastor – 1995 -1996
- Peter Nordstorm - 1987 - 1994
- Bert E. Van Soest - 1982 – 1987
- Dr. Vernon Kooy – Interim Pastor – 1981 - 1982
- Robert Henninges - 1955 - 1981
- Dr. Gerrit D. Van Peursen - 1947 - 1955
- Herbert J. Guth and Richard Vos - Student Ministers - 1940-1947
- Albert J. Knoll - Weekend Pastor - 1936 - 1940
- Lewis F. Sauerbrunn - 1916 - 1933 (No designated pastor from 1934 to 1936)
- Charles Corwin - 1907 - 1915
- Dr. Philip M. Doolittle - 1856 to 1906 (Fifty years as pastor)
- James K. Campbell – 1838 to 1854
- Dr. Abraham D. Wilson - ~1832 - ~1838
- George Fisher - 1825 - ~1836

## **NBRC Fun Facts from September 1999 to Present**

### **“Joy to our NBRC World!”**

- Active membership in 1999 was 479, and 432 in 2018.
- There have been 197 baptisms.
- 79 member wedding ceremonies, along with many more non-member weddings.
- 65 births have been reported since 2004, the year this statistic was first recorded.

### **NBRC’s Call, Vision and Mission Statement**

- 2014 The church released updated statements on its Vision and Mission.
- 2018 The church added a call statement.

**Call Statement:** God calls North Branch to lift up the poor and poor in spirit in Bridgewater and beyond.

**Vision Statement:** Overflowing with God’s blessings, our hearts and hands reach out to the world.

The North Branch Reformed Church is committed to live out God’s vision through:

**Vibrant Worship** that glorifies God by inspiring praise, generosity, and service through biblical teaching, prayer, and music.

**Warm Community** that reflects Jesus’ love and embraces all people in an expanding diverse fellowship.

**Grateful Service** that reaches outward so our neighbors know us as the church that serves in Jesus’ name.

**Family Centered Ministry** that supports individuals and families of all ages through prayer, education, and community as they navigate the demands of life in an ever-changing world.

**Empowering Leadership** that promotes a culture where young and old are mentored and encouraged to develop and utilize their gifts to the glory of God.

## **A Brief History**

### **Building and Grounds and Cemetery**

- **1825** - The lot on which our present church stands was purchased for \$1 by Andrew Van Pelt and his wife. The original church was brick and measured 46' x 52'.  
Congregation Size: 25 active members, including members of the DuMont and Staats families. Some of their descendants are still active in the church today.
- **1827** - The family graveyard of Jacob Ten Eyck was acquired, becoming the North Branch Reformed Church Cemetery.
- **1856** - The mortgage of \$1,000 was retired, and more property was purchased to provide a horse shed.
- **1863 to 1865** - the old church was demolished and a new, second church was built, costing \$5,250 and measuring 46' by 78'. A 1,000 pound iron bell was purchased for the steeple.
- **1874** - Major structural improvements were completed to the second church at a cost of \$6,765.
- **1885** - The church cemetery was enlarged.
- **1898** - Through an anonymous donation a new chapel was added at a cost of \$1,500, with an organ, heat, lighting and pulpit. This historic addition is noted with a cornerstone by the preschool office entrance.
- **1918** - The 1863 church steeple toppled in a violent storm and was replaced with a belfry.
- **1959** - A one-story Christian education wing was added at a cost of \$70,000.
- **1983** - A reproduction of the 1863 spire was built and installed in honor of Kathryn Greenway, a descendant of original church founders. The belfry became the church gazebo.
- **1984** - The church acquired Kirkside to house NBRC's senior ministry, which was one of only three shared housing facilities in New Jersey.
- **1990** - A second story was added to the Christian education wing. During a two year period, the cemetery plots of the Ten Eyck family and the reverends Campbell and Doolittle were restored.
- **2000** - The 1990 mortgage for the Christian education building was burned during ceremonies celebrating the 175th Anniversary of NBRC.
- **2002** - The church acquired the Sunrise House property - the house and 1.8 acres for \$350,000. Sunrise House is now home to NBRC's ministry to homeless women and children. The sanctuary was restored at a cost of \$330,000 and included new windows, pews, lighting, carpeting and paint.

Congregation Size: 480 active members



- **2008** - The church acquired the Hope House property: the house and three acres for \$450,000. The majority of the funding was provided by private donations from church members. The roof of Fellowship Hall was replaced, and the cemetery grew by an acre through a donation of land from Arthur & James Sutton.

Congregation Size: 524 active members

- **2009** - New playground equipment was purchased & installed.
- **2010** - The church began the process to change to an alternative electrical energy provider with significant cost savings, and entered into the New Jersey Clean Energy program (paid for in part with a \$47,000 NJ Clean Energy Grant), allowing the church to upgrade to high efficiency lighting, install room occupancy switches, and replace HVAC units. Kirkside was redecorated through contractor and volunteer efforts with purchased and donated materials.
- **2012** - Roofs were replaced on the church's main building and two bell towers.
- **2013** - An improved security system was installed for the church and preschool with cameras at key locations. Door entrance codes and keys were changed. The resurfacing of all paved areas around the church with new pavement markings was completed.
- **2014 – 2015** - The main focus has been the Church's Parking Lot. Old railroad ties were removed, a new underground electrical conduit system was installed, and a survey was obtained to establish a grading, curb, and sidewalk plan for the parking lot. Paving of the parking lot with the initial two inches of blacktop was completed, and the church worked with Bridgewater Township to pave Church Road from Route 28 to the parking lot.
- **2015** – replaced all windows in the Education Building with new Energy Star compliant windows while receiving a NJ Clean Energy grant to replace our 5 large HVAC units for a saving of about \$70,000.
- **2016** – managed a \$45,000 grant from Somerset County for a new furnace and hot water heater, bathroom improvements and the insulation at the Sunrise House, all the while finishing the second coat on the church parking lot.
- **2017** – managed a \$22,500 grant from Somerset County for new windows and doors at the Sunrise House.
- **2018** – obtained a NJ Clean Energy grant to pay 60% of new LED lighting at the church.

Congregation Size: 432 active members.

### **Christian Education**

Christian Education is responsible for Rally Day and Graduation Sunday celebrations, outreach programs and special seminars for church and community families, and for oversight of the church school, preschool, Vacation Bible School, youth groups including Surveyors, and small groups.

- **1956** - The nursery school began with 12 children with the parsonage backyard serving as the playground.

Congregation size: 157 active members

- **1976** - The nursery school served 180 children as it celebrated its 20th year. Shortly after, it became known as the North Branch Reformed Church Preschool.
- **1999** – This was the 43<sup>rd</sup> year that NBRC offered one of the few preschool programs in Somerset County, serving 254 youngsters with a staff of 30. This continues to be one of the largest and most visible missions of the church. Volunteers finished cataloging all the adult books in the church library and the new children's library was opened. For adult education there were five to seven active groups studying Christian topics promoting spiritual growth and the mission of the church.
- **2006** – The preschool celebrated its 50th year of service to children and their families, serving 131 children with a staff of 14 state certified professionals.
- **2001** – Small groups were initiated, allowing attendees to connect in a deeper way outside of Sunday morning with increased emphasis on Bible study, short-term groups, inviting neighbors, and serving those from outside the church.
- **2014** - The number of small groups grew to 18. An average of 63 children attended church school. Over 170 children from the community attended Vacation Bible School. The preschool served over 100 children with a staff of 17, as over the years a significant number of new preschool / child day care programs opened throughout Somerset County.
- **2015** – A One Room Schoolhouse was initiated for children sixth grade and younger during the later worship service. The main church school program remains aligned with the earlier contemporary worship service.
- **2016** – 12 high schoolers made their confirmation through the Surveyors ministry.
- **2017** – the junior high and senior high youth groups were combined and the Christian Education Team was reconstituted in preparation for a new, denominational learning community on discipleship.

## **Christian Mission**

The Christian Mission Team supports seven ministry teams: Church Plant, Interfaith Hospitality Network, Kirkside, Global Missions, First Step Counseling, Basic Needs, and Local Service Teams.

- **1984** – The church began its continuing ministry to provide affordable housing for seniors in a shared living model emphasizing caring and self-reliance. To date 44 seniors have called Kirkside home.
- **2002** -The church began its ministry to homeless women and children in the Sunrise House in partnership with the Interfaith Hospitality Network.
- **2008 – 2012** – The church co-sponsored the Peter Mayer holiday concerts at the United Reformed Church in Somerville.
- **2008** – NBRC received a major endowment from the Ethel Kienz Endowment Fund that included a Statement of Intention for an NBRC Counseling Initiative that has become the First Step Counseling Program, which offers affordable counseling to church members and the community. This ministry is based in Hope House, and now includes twelve Somerset County licensed therapists.
- **1999 – 2015** - The church has assisted missionaries in places such as Taiwan, Kenya, Mexico, Arizona, Malawi, Croatia, and the US.
- **2015** – NBRC “adopted” a low-income daycare center Learning Gate as a way to serve the poor and make a difference in our community for Christ.
- **2015-19** – NBRC began young adult mission trips to Taize (‘15), Belize (‘16), Jamaica (‘17-19), and Ghana (‘19). From 2017 the church included more older adults.
- **2016** – The Local Service Team completed its RCA sponsored training so as to build upon the service evangelism already being done at our adopted low income day care center, Learning Gate, our turnaround school in Newark, BRICK Academy, and many other service projects like Easter Outreach, River Clean Up, Raking for the Elderly, etc. Over 120 NBRC members serve per year in the community.
- **2017** – our first church plant organized as the first Latino church in our 300-year classis history as Centro Cristiano Palabra de Fe in Reading PA, worshipping 40 people.
- **2017** – counting committed benevolences, the Kirkside Administrator salary, monthly mission offerings and other ancillary mission offerings, NBRC gave 20% of her income to missions!
- **2017** – The church committed all of our global missionary funding to Chris Briggs in Jamaica through the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf as one of the RCA’s strategic impact areas which allows NBRC to take annual mission trips there.

- **2018** – Rich Horan donated his house to NBRC for affordable housing related to veterans. Highland Park Reformed Church owns and maintains the house
- **2019** – our second church plant organized in Collingswood, NJ as Liberti Collingswood worshipping 150 people.

The church assists in programs such as the Somerset County Food Bank, S.H.I.P., the Interfaith Hospitality Network, the CROP Walk, area flood victims, local blood drives, and toys for the children of Somerset County Jail inmates, and many others.

NBRC also gave aid to Gulf Coast victims of Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Outreach efforts have included mustering a response to Hurricane Sandy that continues.

The number of NBRC community outreach programs has continued to grow in response to the needs of our community, our county, our state, our nation and the world.

### **Congregational Care**

**Christian Care** provides assistance to shut-ins, small chore services for the elderly, videos of church services, transportation, greeting cards, Dinner Angels, an eldercare advocate, medical equipment, blood pressure checks, and the prayer chain.

**Men's Ministries** provides the opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship for men in a comfortable atmosphere. The group meets monthly and occasionally has joint meetings with St. Bernard's men.

### **Women's Ministries**

Mission Statement: To glorify God, we, as women of the Reformed Church, unite in devoting ourselves to Jesus Christ, disciplining one another in love, and developing a responsibility for mission and ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Congregational Health**

#### **Pastor Staff Relations**

- **2005** - Pastor Todd Buurstra completed his Doctorate of Ministry at Drew University. The Pastor/Staff committee finalized the formal process of staff performance reviews.
- **2007** – Pastor Mark Swart joined the church as Pastor of Discipleship.
- **2007** – Pastor Todd took a sabbatical with pastoral travels to Holland, and through a pastoral exchange, Sita Hofstra from the Dutch Reformed Church in Holland served as the guest pastor.

- **2006** - Pastor Joy Carrol left the church after a few years of extraordinary service as Pastor of Discipleship, left NBRC.
- **2011** – Pastor Mark began implementing “Five Fingers of the Hand” Discipleship Goals.
- **2012** – An NBRC Employee Handbook was developed, along with a Child & Youth Abuse Prevention Program.
- **2013** - Consistory developed an Accountable Leadership Vision initiative based on the Carver Policy of Governance model, a process for Consistory and all church teams to follow to become more effective in their respective roles.
- **2017** – The pastors began training lay leaders in their key functions. Pastor Mark is working on a Discipleship Team and Pastor Todd is planning on a Lay Preaching Team, Lay Care Team and building on the Dallas 5 training keeping strong the Local Service Team.

### **Finance**

Finance supports stewardship, oversight, and reporting of the financial resources that the church has been blessed with, including the annual operating budget as well as the investment of long-term financial assets. Finance is organized into three teams that focus on Stewardship (giving), Budgeting and Accounting (operating expenses) and Investments (endowments and other long-term investment assets).

- **2000** – Total income was \$378,000, with expenses of \$356,000. Current assets were \$57,000.
- **2001** – 2010 – Income and expenses increased steadily throughout this 10 year period, with current assets fluctuating normally.
- **2011** – Total income was \$560,000, with expenses of \$574,000. Current assets were \$60,000.
- **2012** – Total income was \$560,000, with expenses of \$564,000. Current assets were \$944,000. The substantial increase in assets in 2012 was due in large part to the generous contribution of nearly \$600,000 by the Ethyl Keinz Endowment.
- **2013** – Total income was \$547,000, with expenses of \$545,000. Current assets were \$957,000.
- **2014** – Total Income was \$593,000, with expenses of \$601,000. Current assets were \$845,000.
- **2015** – Total Income was \$603,000, with expenses of \$620,000. Current assets were \$753,000.
- **2016** - Total Income was \$606,000, with expenses of \$600,000. Current assets were \$855,000.
- **2017** - Total Income was \$632,000, with expenses of \$627,000. Current assets were \$905,000.
- **2018** - Total Income was \$615,000, with expenses of \$624,000. Current assets were \$837,000.

### **Memorial Gifts**

NBRC is grateful to receive Memorial Gifts that are used to make important purchases to enhance the ministries, programs and facilities of the Church.

- **2000** - The church Book of Remembrance, started in 1967, was updated.
- **2011** - The Church received a major endowment from the Ethel Kienz Endowment Fund that included a Statement of Intention for an NBRC Counseling Initiative.
- **2012 – 2014** - Significant memorial gifts received were \$33,185 in memory of Benjamin Van Doren and \$10,000 in memory of Grace Meyer.

### **Worship Committee**

The Worship Committee provides oversight for all aspects of the weekly services, music and audio-visual services, evaluating weekly services, the music, and church marketing materials.

- **2001** - During Lent a Cross Processional, “Lift High the Cross,” was initiated. For the Epiphany, lighting of the Christ Candle and singing of “Shine, Jesus, Shine” was performed for the first time.
- **2002** - The Worship Committee coordinated a renovation of the Banner Chest, reviewed all banners and had the banners cleaned & repaired.
- **2003** - The Greeters Program to welcome parishioners and guests to Sunday services was enhanced.
- **2004** - As part of the Worship Committee’s responsibility to oversee special services of the church, a Wedding Assistants Packet of information was completed.
- **2009** - After a five year study, the Worship Committee recommended two distinct worship services.
- **2010** - New choir robes were purchased for the Youth Choir with funding provided from gifts received in memory of Bruce Hartzog.
- **2010 – 2011** - New Sunday services were initiated and a review and evaluation of the Sunday 9:15 AM “Contemporary” and 10:45 AM “Classic” services was conducted. These services have continued.
- **2011**- The Growing in God's Son group served in a mission project in Korea. A pilot program of providing Communion twice a month was initiated, and twice monthly communion has continued.

- **2012** –The Sunday evening Upstream Service was introduced and led by Seminary Intern Ed Staats,. The Worship Committee initiated an effort to improve the NBRC website.
- **2013-2014** – The committee focused on improving the NBRC Sound System.
- **2017** – After questionnaires and two fora the schedule was changed to 8:30 AM Daybreak Service and 10 AM Celebration Service.
- **2017-18** – The Igniting Inviting Team began to challenge NBRC to invite people to various church events. The 2018 Easter service set an all-time record with 455 people at the 10 AM service. In 2018 II presented its concentric circle vision of inviting people one ring closer to Jesus throughout the church.

### **Audio-Visual and Music Ministry**

- **1999 – 2015** Church music groups, choirs & ensembles were at times as many as eleven. Over the years there has been a continuous effort to upgrade the audio-visual systems and equipment.
- **2003** - A new grand piano was dedicated to the church in memory of Joan Speer Bateman.
- **2008** - After special fundraising efforts, a new digital organ was installed. A concert by Diane Bish, designer of the organ, was held shortly after.
- **2011** – The church hosted a performance by the Philadelphia Handbell Ensemble.
- **2013** – The church hosted a performance by the Wiedensahl German Bell Choir, and the Chancel Choir participated with over 1000 choir members in the Annual Choir Festival in Ocean Grove NJ.
- **2014** - There were six groups, plus special music performances: solos, duets, quartets, fundraisers etc. A new 32 channel soundboard was installed.
- **2015** – Upgrades to the sound system continue.
- **2016** – almost \$20,000 was spent on an upgraded speaker system.

### **Campaigns**

- **1989 – 2000** – The church embarked on a \$1,000,000 “New Millennium” capital campaign to build an education building and to modify and improve the sanctuary building. The final costs for these projects would have been much higher but for the time, talent, and materials donated by church parishioners and members of the community. Over the years loan balances were as high as approximately \$600,000. In 1995 a \$350,000 loan was executed to consolidate existing loans, and in 2000 the loan was paid off with a small grant from the NRBC General Fund.
- **2000** - the Church launched a five year \$700,000 Vision Campaign that was completed in six years and included the purchase of the Sunrise House property (\$350,000 mortgage and

\$50,000 down payment), restoration of the Sanctuary (\$350,000) and development of the “Upper Room” for prayer and group meetings. The Church embraced the goal to increase Mission giving to 20%, thanks to the continuing support and generosity of the congregation.

- **2004 – 2009** - Vision II - a second 5-year master plan was launched with goals to increase the passion for spirituality, grow in need-oriented evangelism, develop a physical master plan of property and facilities.
- **2006** – The parking lot was paved.
- **2007** - The mortgage on Sunrise House was reduced to \$40,000.
- **2009** - The mortgage for Sunrise House was retired.
- **2010** - Through generous giving from NBRC parishioners, the surplus of donations were committed to paying down the Hope House mortgage and increasing donations to local and global missions.
- **2012** – Plans were developed for a new capital campaign.
- **2013** - A three-year-capital campaign, “Just Imagine,” was launched with a goal of \$428,672 for projects to improve the church (\$303,922), Sunrise House (\$20,000), Hope House (\$42,250), the parking Lot (\$27,500), the cemetery (\$25,000) and project management (\$10,000). The mortgage on Hope House was reduced to \$40,000.
- **2015** - The “Just Imagine” capital campaign was completed. Water damage remediation, safety and energy efficiency projects, and the first layer of paving the parking lot were done.
- **2018-2020** – The “Herb and Ray Capital Endowment Campaign” was launched. The Bateman and Vollers families generously donated a total matching gift of \$100,000. The congregation is being challenged to raise \$300,000 more in order to help future congregations pay capital expenses into perpetuity.

### **Addendum through 2003**

With the conclusion of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration the church embarked upon a visioning process. The purpose of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary was to REMEMBER the past, REJOICE in the present, and RENEW ourselves for the future.

The 5 year Vision Committee collected dreams from the congregation and from those dreams discerned God’s will to be three priorities:

To restore the sanctuary;  
To purchase the Pareti property; and,  
To increase mission giving to 20% of the Operational Budget.



In the summer and fall of 2002 the sanctuary was restored at a cost of \$330,000. The windows, pews, carpet and paint were renewed. New lights and fans were hung from the ceiling and a new projection system was purchased. The congregation was very pleased at the worshipful space that was restored.

During December of 2002 the congregation became the proud owners of the Pareti house and 1.8 acres for the price of \$350,000. By the summer of 2003 the house was leased to Interfaith Hospitality Network to be used as a transitional home for homeless families. It was renamed the Sunrise House with Malachi 4:2 as the inspiration: *the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings*.

While the church has not yet quite reached its goal of giving 20% of the operational budget to missions it has made great progress. In the 2000 budget \$31,400 was dedicated to missions. By the 2003 budget \$78,700 was dedicated to missions (including \$10,000 debt relief for the Sunrise House and property) which comes to 17.5%.

Now the church is at a new crossroads where it is seeking a new vision for the next 5 years. A new committee is forming to discern God's will amongst the congregation's dreams. How will the next chapter of North Branch's history be written?

August 2000

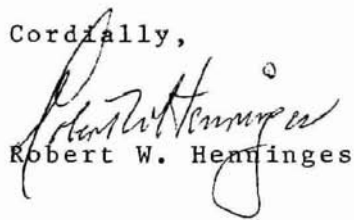
Dear Members and Friends of North Branch Church:

Any Anniversary carries with it, of course, a recognition of the passing of time. As you celebrate the 175th Anniversary of the North Branch Church this occasion is a symbol of many years that have come and gone. In another sense, however, an anniversary should be seen as the celebration of a relationship or relationships that have been formed as the years have flown swiftly by. These relationships are the lasting and most important by-products of any anniversary celebration.

Having served this congregation for some 28 years, the significant thing is not then the years themselves, but the bonds that were forged with so many in the North Branch community. Surely I do not speak just for myself but also for my wife Barbara and for our four children who have solidified their own kinships within this body of Christ. Years count for little. What does matter are the bonds we have formed and the spiritual alliances that have become stronger and more meaningful as the years have moved briskly by. This is what the church is all about. We are a people who share a gladness and in that sharing we are strengthened and become part of each others lives in the good times and the bad.

My congratulations and best wishes to you on this happy event as we acknowledge the years that have passed, but more important, as we reflect on those years let us give thanks to God for relationships formed here that have sustained us and given us the power and joy to celebrate life in all its fullness.

Cordially,



Robert W. Henniges

# OBITUARIES

## The Rev. Robert W. Henninges, minister

**ANNANDALE** — The Rev. Robert W. Henninges, 70, died Tuesday (July 24, 2001) at his home in Annandale.

Born in Weehauken, he was the son of Walter and Vera Henninges. He grew up in Ridgefield Park and attended the Neighborhood Reformed Church where his life was deeply influenced by his minister. It was there he made the decision to enter into the ministry.

The Rev. Henninges attended Hope College in Holland, Mich. and graduated with a bachelor's degree in English literature. He then attended Western Theological Seminary, also in Holland, and graduate in 1955 with a masters of divinity. In 1965, the Rev. Henninges earned his masters in theology from Princeton Theological Seminary.

In June 1955, the Rev. Henninges was ordained and installed by the Classis of Raritan at the North Branch Reformed Church. He served the North Branch congregation for 26 years. During the course of his ministry, the church experienced unprecedented growth. Some of the ministries that commenced under his leadership where the Good News Inn, the Nursery School, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and Friendly Church, a youth exchange program between a Reformed Church in New York City and North Branch. He served as the moderator or interim pastor



for several local congregations, including United Reformed Church in Somerville. The Rev. Henninges served on the Board of the Somerset County Chaplaincy Council and as the Stated-Clerk of the Classis of Raritan.

The final 14 years of Rev. Henninges' career were spent working for the State of New Jersey as the Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services for the Departments of Corrections and Human Services. Over the years his involvement with many of the inmates at New Jersey State Prison in Trenton was a vitally important part of his ministry.

He spent many hours on the Capital Sentence Unit and corresponded with many of the inmates in the years following his retirement.

The Rev. Henninges was predeceased by his wife, Barbara B. Henninges, who died in 1989.

He is survived by four children, Peggy Moran of South China, Maine, Debbie Vollers of Annandale, David Henninges of Holland, Mich., and John Henninges of South China, Maine; and five grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at the North Branch Reformed Church at 7 p.m. Wednesday.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial gifts be made to the North Branch Reformed Church, 203 Highway 28, Bridgewater, NJ 08807 or to the New Jerseyans for a Death Penalty Moratorium, 22 Oliver St., Chatham, NJ 07928.

Arrangements are by Speer-Van Arsdale Funeral Home, 10 West End Ave., Somerville, N.J.

July, 2000

To the wonderful membership of the North Branch Reformed Church:

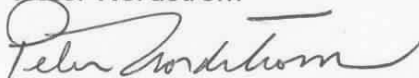
As you celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of North Branch Reformed during the month of October, it will already be six years since Pat and I took up our ministry with Rolling Hills Community Church in Zellwood, Florida. And though there are still many people that we know in the church, in reading North Branch's monthly newsletter, it is obvious to us that there are many people who are new to the congregation since we departed. This is one of the really exciting things about the church and the nature of its ministry that we so appreciated when I served the congregation as its pastor. The church is so welcoming to newcomers, offering them so many opportunities right from the start to be active contributors to the church's ministry.

As I think back to my time of service with the church I'm thankful for the willingness of the church's members to both listen and respond to God's call in a variety of ways. The importance of biblical literacy was embraced as central to the life and witness of the church. Many new Bible studies were started, and a large percentage of the church's membership committed itself to reading through the Bible in a year. In addition, a growing awareness of the importance of the ministry of the laity was accepted by the leadership. With this came a greater emphasis on spiritual gifts, and the need for every member to be involved in a ministry of the church that would utilize their particular gifts for ministry. There also developed a growing evangelical spirit that brought an increased vitality to the church's witness to the Gospel in the community. Some of the evidences of this were an expanded Vacation Bible School program, a weekly nursing home ministry, as well as a pastoral care and bereavement program that reached out beyond the church to the community at large. As the program life grew, so did the need for expanded facilities. It was thrilling to see this need met in the completion of a renovated and expanded Christian education facility that was built through the dedicated efforts of so many. It was during this time that the congregation responded to the need for additional staff by hiring a full time Minister of Christian education that enabled the church to envision and embrace ministry in a variety of new ways.

Pat and I continue to follow closely the ministry of North Branch, not only because of the warm memories we have of our years there, but also because our daughter and our grandchildren continue to be an active part of the church. It brings great joy to us in knowing that they are a part of a congregation that has a history of both caring for its people, as well as challenging its members to fully embrace the Gospel call that we continue to share with you in Jesus Christ.

May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus from this time forth and forevermore.

In Christ's love,  
Peter Nordstrom



Peter and Elizabeth Paulsen  
1161 Oldfield Road  
Decatur, Georgia 30030-4542  
404-377-2246  
Bethandpetepaulsen@compuserve.com

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October, 2000

Dear Friends,

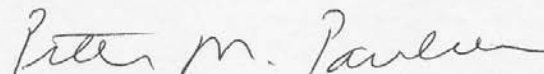
One of the things I most value and most remember from our time together is that worship each Sunday began with a "Remembrance of our Baptism." As we came from our various homes and responsibilities we were reminded that we are people called and loved by God. No matter what the morning had been to that point and no matter what the week just past had given to us, we rehearsed the fact that we were part of the great company of God around the world, gathered at our place, North Branch, to offer our praise, to study God's word, and to pledge our obedience and service.

The language we used for that moment in worship cited the fact that the water of baptism makes us in a special way a family. The water cleanses us and refreshes us. In the act of baptism we are witnesses to the death and resurrection of our Lord and find courage to claim and work within our own salvation.

I don't know why some congregations live to be 175 years old and still thrive while others with apparently the same promise languish and die. My guess is that our congregation was blessed by its location and a continuing leadership corps that cared passionately about reaching into the community and bringing people to join us at font. North Branch speaks volumes about the foundation of its life and longevity when it gathers every Sunday at the baptismal font.

Beth, the girls, and I miss our time with you. We thank you for your warm welcome and your gracious farewell. We learned in your midst and have taken those lessons with us. We believe that this celebration is but a new beginning for a ministry that has already enjoyed a great history.

May God continue to bless us all!





# Faith Reformed Church

NORTH OF HWY. RTE. 6 ON SO. CENTERVILLE RD.

SOUTH CENTERVILLE, NEW YORK

(MIDDLETOWN, N.Y. AREA)

THE REV. BERT E. VAN SOEST, D.  
210 SHORE BOULEVARD, R. D. 1  
SLATE HILL, NEW YORK 10973  
TELEPHONE 914 - 355-9023

July 25, 2000

To the wonderful people at North Branch Reformed Church:

It is with joy and thanksgiving that I congratulate you upon the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your church.

Barbara and I had the privilege of four exciting and Spirit filled years with you. This came at a crucial time in our lives and of North Branch Reformed Church. We were amazed at God's wonderful work all four years – until we moved to be near family in the last days of Barbara's terminal cancer.

When driving an automobile, it is important to look into the distance but it is as essential to look in the rearview mirror occasionally for safety reasons. This is a parable of what the North Branch Church is doing in its anniversary celebration.

I rejoice with you as you continue to go forward to always be engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ to your community and the world.

Blessings,

*Bert E. Van Soest*

# CHURCH BY THE RIVER

*A Tribute to The North branch Reformed Church at it's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

From over the treetops, your white spire gleams,  
A beacon of hope and of love, dignity standing serene.  
Through all of the valley, your memories true,  
You watch over the River of life, we watch over you.

From the toil of our fathers, those brave pioneers,  
You've nourished believers, near two hundred years.  
You've watched over North Branch, the town that turned 'round,  
You're the path on our journey of faith, you're our solid ground.

Church by the River, your carillons hail,  
Calling the faithful to worship, reminding that God's love prevails,  
Church by the River, so proud and so tall,  
Drawing us nearer to God and each other, you care for us all.

Families with children and people alone,  
Seek Living Water alike, their thirst is so strong,  
Sheltering the homeless, consoling the tired,  
You reveal God's Word to our souls, and leave us inspired.

Church by the River, your carillons hail,  
Calling the faithful to worship, reminding that God's love prevails,  
Church by the River, so proud and so tall,  
Drawing us nearer to God and each other, you care for us all.

Blessed Assurance, That Old Rugged Cross,  
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, Amazing Grace,  
Rock of Ages, Cleft For Me,  
May these hymns shake your walls and your windows 'til eternity.

Church by the River, your carillons hail,  
Calling the faithful to worship, reminding that God's love prevails,  
Church by the River, so proud and so tall,  
Drawing us nearer to God and each other, you care for us all.

Through floods, wars, and hardships, you gather us near,  
Knowing our Faith in the Son, leaves us nothing to fear,  
Christenings and Weddings, Celebrations and Praise,  
Sending your peacemakers out to the World, to tell of the Way.

Church by the River, your carillons hail,  
Calling the faithful to worship, reminding that God's love prevails,  
Church by the River, so proud and so tall,  
Drawing us nearer to God and each other, you care for us all.

The River runs silent, on it's way to the sea,  
Just as we trust in our God and our pure destiny,  
Prepare me to live, with my Jesus in heaven,  
For when with my last breath, I lay down by the Church By the River.

*instrumental solo*

(Quietly)

Church By The River, Our life and our song,  
Church By The River, our pardon from wrong,  
Hold us together and strong in the Lord, Our Church By The River.

*Joseph Bocchiaro III,  
September 18, 2000*