

Good afternoon, my name is Todd Farnsworth and I am the 12th settled pastor in the history of this church. Someday, when I am gone from this place, you'll see my head mounted in the rogues gallery that adorns the space between this sanctuary and the church parlor known as the Eastman Room (where we'll be holding a reception following my presentation).

I'd like to start before your expectations of this talk today. As I researched the communities that helped bring the Briarcliff Congregational Church to the juicy fruition you see before you today, I realized that there were people who never visited here, who were still an important part of our formation.

From an early period in the 17th century, pin making had been an important industry in the old city of Gloucester, England. This manufacture employed great numbers of small children not only residents of the place, but gathered in from surrounding regions. Vast numbers of these children were wholly uneducated, and, being without parental restraint or moral supervision, they fell into gross disorder and what was described as "immorality", especially on Sundays, when the factories were not in operation.



One of the earliest people who undertook to remedy this distressing state of affairs was Mr. **Robert Raikes**, a printer residing in Gloucester, and a member of the Church of England. He found four persons who had been accustomed to instruct children in reading, and engaged their services to receive and instruct such children as he should send to them every Sunday. *The children were to go soon after ten in the morning, and stay till twelve. They were then to go home, and return at one; and after*

*reading a lesson, they were to be conducted to Church. After Church they were to be employed in repeating the catechism till half after five, and then to be dismissed with*

*an injunction to go home without making a noise, and by no means to play in the street.*

This was the general outline of the regulations as stated by Mr. Raikes, in his celebrated letter of *June 5, 1784*, which conclusively identifies him as the official originator of the Sunday-school movement. Publish or perish, right?

THIS IS WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS. Raikes took a very hands-on approach to his Sunday School and he was known for having a short temper and a vicious cane that would strike a student who was not following along...as a way of encouragement.

Raikes family publishing business allowed him to print curriculum for his schools and he became the name and face of the program...until...43 days later...



It was the **Rev. John Wesley**, who, for more than thirty years prior to the first Sunday-school of Raikes, had been in the habit of assembling children in various parts of England for the purpose of religious instruction. It was he who, having recorded in his journal, July 18, 1784, that he found Sunday- schools springing up wherever he went, also recorded these memorable, if not prophetic, words: *"Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?"* From

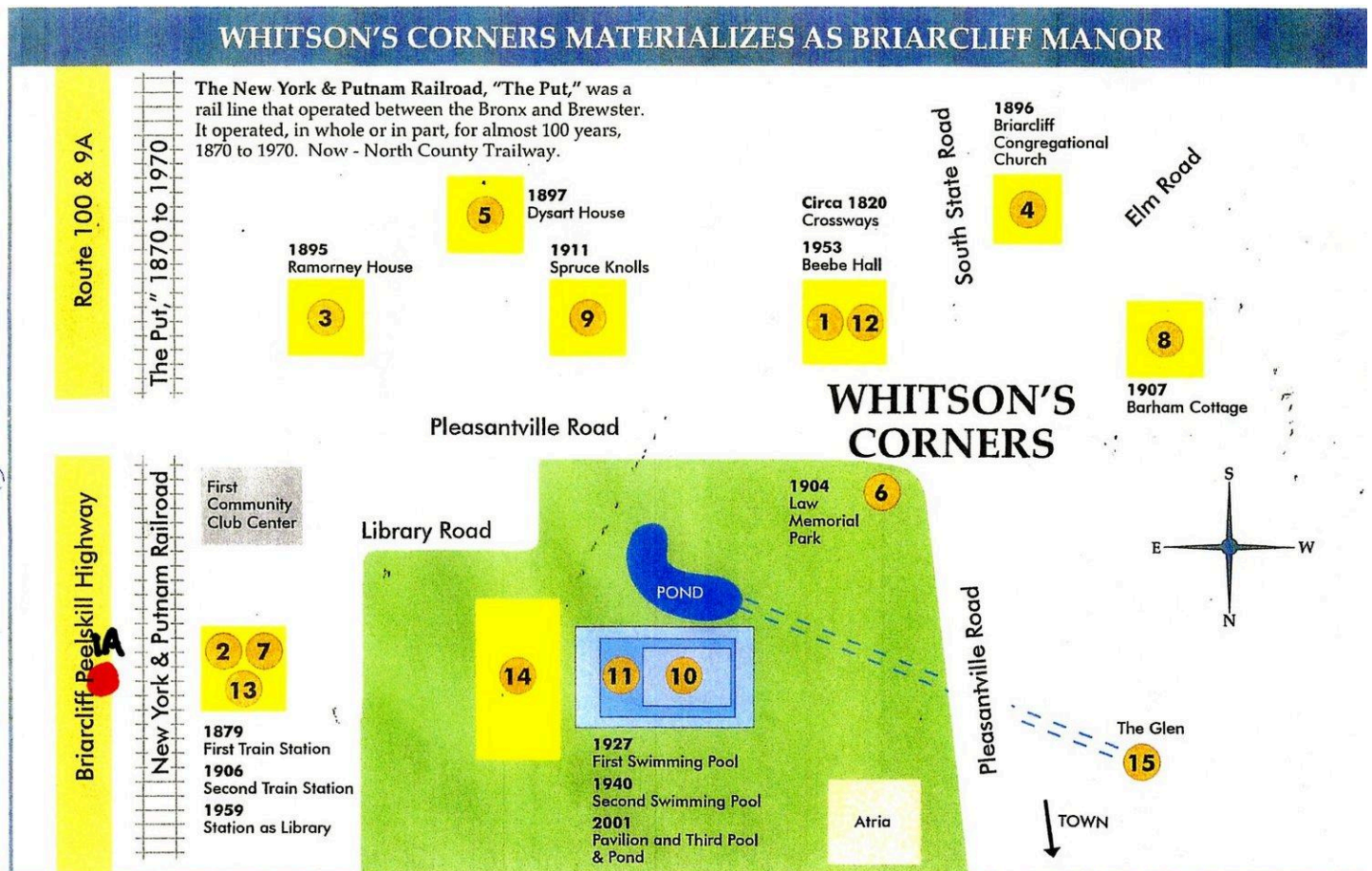
that time forward notices of Sunday- schools were frequent in his journals.

The success of Sunday-school institutes and normal classes caused it to expand into that of Sunday-school assemblies, designed to continue in session from one to three weeks at a time. In connection with the growing American habit of taking summer vacations and of gathering in masses at popular resorts, Sunday-school assemblies speedily grew to be influential of great good and promissory of long continuance. The Chautauqua Sunday-school Assembly, held on the borders of a beautiful lake herebin Western New York, under the presidency of **Dr. John H. Vincent**, may be considered at once the originator and model of various similar assemblies already held, and now

said to be established for regular annual sessions in different parts of the United States.

In 1824 "the American Sunday-school Union." was formed. This union, like that of London, was composed of *laymen belonging to different denominations of Christians* . I think that's an important point in our story because clergy like myself usually get most of the credit for the big stuff that happens in religious communities. The Sunday School movement was championed by the folks in the pews!

As an indication of the work they accomplished, here are some statistics for the year ending *March 1, 1890*: Sunday-schools organized, 1685, containing 7353 teachers and 59,432 scholars. Schools aided 1852, containing 12,788 teachers and 120,792 scholars. –<https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/S/sundayschool.html>



**It is my belief that one of those schools took root in a little place called Whitson's Corner, NY in and around 1865.** The school, which began as a one-room public schoolhouse, District No. 6, was called Whitson's School after John Whitson, who donated the land near the present route 9A access road on Pleasantville Road. In 1867 Whitson's school was replaced by the White School (so named because of its color) and the first superintendent was a local man named George Todd Jr. who owned a farm in Whitson's Corner. –*Cheever page 30*

Now, before I get to BCC I have to say that I recall reading that the separation of church and state occasionally prevented local schools from hosting religious programs. Alex Vastola history of Briarcliff Manor notes on the Briarcliff Scarborough website that a *Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Warren Rogers come to live in Scarborough during this period, starting in 1863 (in the stately Greek revival mansion in which Admiral John L. Worden was born), and they then named this mansion Hillside that same year. Also during this same year, they started the Scarborough Mission Sunday School with help of a group of neighbors, including Mr. and Mrs. C. C. North and Dr. James Holden. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Warren Rogers founded this Sunday School because they both had taught previously in a mission Sunday School in Brooklyn and, finding that the children of their new neighborhood of Scarborough were apparently receiving no religious education of any kind, founded this Sunday School. Classes for this school were held on Sunday afternoon in the upper room of the Long Hill schoolhouse, until it was decreed that religious education could not take place in public schools. At this time, the Sunday school moved to All Saints parish house. However, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Warren Rogers still resided at Hillside until the 1900s.*

So it wasn't a natural fit to have religious activities in a public school...and yet, by 1889 there was an SS which was led by Edgar Johnson Jr., that met at the White School in Whitson's Corner. Edgar was a part of the Sing Sing Heights Chapel (which would later become the Ossining Heights Methodist Church on Camp Woods Road, where my wife and I love to shop for handmade crafts in late November/early December).

Edgar served as leader of the White School Sunday school program from 1889 until 1896. As with other parts of the United States, the Sunday School program was very well received, especially in remote communities like Whitson's Corner. Participation in the program grew and by 1896 (approximately 100 years after Robert Raikes had codified Sunday Schools) it became apparent to a local farmer and School Superintendent, George Todd Jr, that something had to give...or should I say, "someone."



**Mr. George A. Todd, Jr.**, a resident of Whitsons Corner, the area that would become Briarcliff Manor, was the teacher of the thirty-five students in all grades of the "White School." Attendance varied with the seasons because the farmers' children stayed home to help with planting and harvesting. Todd himself worked his own farm at his family home, the old Washburn house on Washburn Road. (The Todds and Washburns were closely connected). Todd also taught Sunday school and was instrumental in establishing the Congregational Church. He would also serve as

the first principal (Superintendent of Schools) of this school during this period, and continue to teach students for the next 39 years, until 1906. Before he retired, almost forty years after he first started to teach, he was the growing school district's first superintendent. Todd School and Todd Lane are named after him. (1, page 31) (2, pages 49, 53 and 74)--Briarcliff Scarborough Historical Society

Upon becoming superintendent of SS in 1896, George (who was a United Methodist by faith) approached Walter Law (who was known in the community for his generous spirit and philanthropy) and uttered those immortal words, "Mr. Law, we need a church!" It was an audacious request that anyone who has ever served on a board or committee at a local house of worship knows requires a LOT of cash, coordination and upkeep.

*We need a church*, as a building is one thing, a pretty big thing, and *We need a church*, as an organized body of faith is another huge ask.

But George had a passion and a vision and he knew that there was one man in the area who might share his goals...so he approached him.

You may recall that the Sunday School movement was non denominational. Anyone wishing to learn was welcome to attend. This new “church” that Todd Jr. envisioned would be made up of such an eclectic group. Working with Mr. Law, they investigated different church types and arrived upon the Congregational brand of Protestantism. Robert Pattinson noted in his History of the Briarcliff Congregational Church, “*As the people identified with the Sunday School were of different denominations, the advisability of organizing a congregational Church in which all might unite was suggested. At a meeting held in the schoolhouse...it was decided to proceed to the formation of a congregational church.*”

Mary Cheevers writes, “Because the assembled were of many different denominations, it was decided that the new congregation should join the Fellowship of Congregational Churches because of the Congregationalists’ *democratic policy*. Some years later Arthur Emerson wrote, “Within the population of the place nearly or quite all forms of Protestant belief were represented, but a canvass showed that there were no Congregationalists...and all other creeds were disarmed and rallied to the standard of active support.” That former affiliations of members continued to be diverse is shown the by clerk’s list at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the church in 1946. Twenty three denominations were represented, including “four Scotland, Friends, German Evangelical, German Dutch Reformed, Unitarian, Finnish Evangelical, Swiss Reformed, Calvary Evangelical, Disciples of Christ and a Jew.”---Cheevers page 43

I have to say as the pastor of BCC at this moment of history, we hold a similar diversity of members that also include Roman Catholics and Magical Folk.

This may seem impossible to those of you who participate in different forms of faith expression. In short, Congregationalists do not look to a hierarchy for direction, dogma

or doctrine. As it was in 1897, each Congregational church you see is independent and looks to God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit for guidance. Its members decide particular practices and generally held beliefs. There are no tests of faith, hoops to hop through, to belong to a Congregational Church. Folks are free to bring their disparate beliefs to bear on the unfolding of the congregation's mission, and so when the spiritual needs of a community changes, so too may the work of the local congregational church. We vote on pretty much everything, including who will be the minister! It is a little nerve-wracking at times, and it is also a lot of fun at times. There is a spiritual freedom that allows us to go places that are sometimes frowned upon by hierarchies. Although we are independent, there are also checks and balances for each church. Even in 1897 there was the Fellowship of Congregational Churches that provided support during difficult times. Since the early **1960's** we covenanted (which is a fancy word for solemnly promised before God) with other Congregational Churches under the umbrella of a denomination called "The United Church of Christ." This covenantal group helps to ordain and provide guidance for local churches. It's motto has been, "That they may all be one." More recently it has chosen to express itself as "God is still speaking." Which in short means that the members of BCC believe that we have to keep listening!

As you can imagine, this choice of creating a Congregational Church in a religiously diverse community was brilliant! It was inclusive and sought to be faithful. These momentous decisions took place in and around October of 1896, and by Christmas of the same year, the Norman Tower which most of you entered this building and the main body of the church (where you are sitting) was completed. It must have been an exciting time. George Todd Jr. even donated the stones that you are sitting amongst to build the structure! They came from his farm just up the road a bit. To celebrate his faithfulness, George was remembered by his family in 1942 by the dedication of this church flag that still holds a spot in our sanctuary. It actually rests in a part of the church that was added on in the 5 years after the main sanctuary was built.



Sooo, what came next? I'd like to shift gears here to names that may be more familiar to some of you. I'd like to introduce you to Frederick Brockelman.

- I'd like to show you a picture of Friederick Brockelmann. You may not have heard of him before, he lived a long time ago. The picture probably gave you that clue.



Friederick was a businessman who worked for a transportation company that had been called the *Austrian Lloyd Steam Transportation Company* in the late 1800's. It transported customers from Trieste, Italy to Alexandria, Egypt (about 2700 miles). Mr. Brockelmann's work was about connecting people around the world. Mr. Brockelmann must have been pretty good at his work based on what he is wearing. We can see a fine suit, a stylish walking cane, and one more thing...a wedding band on his left hand.

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- The Austrian Lloyd Steam Transportation Company experienced financial ruin in 1878 (it's owner overspent on lavish building projects!), and a new company was founded. According to the *Journal of Hong Kong Branch of the Asiatic Society\**, a new company was formed in 1882 by the previous owner's two sons. In 1882 they welcomed Carl Ludwig Reuter into the firm and in 1887 Freidrich Alexander Alfred Buesing Brockelmann, Jr. became a partner. His business interests were in China and he helped to expand the firm that came to be known as *Reuter, Brockelmann, and Co.* Friederick was an importer and exporter of almost all products and manufacturers, and also shipping and insurance agents. Mr. Brockelmann attended the International Commercial Congress, on special invitation, as a merchant representing the business interests of Canton.

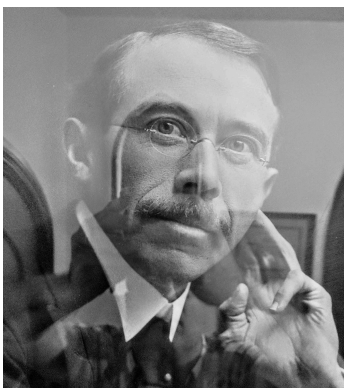


- Born in the Bronx and working overseas, I'm not sure how Friederick aka Fritz came to be associated with Briarcliff, although I suspect it had

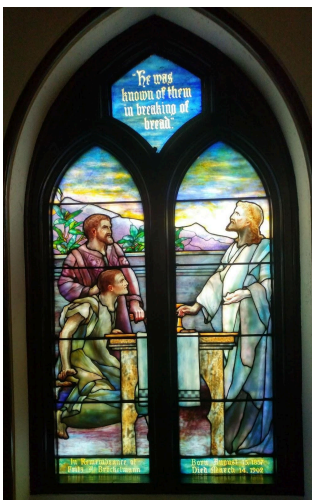


something to do with the man who would become his father-in-law, Walter Law.  
Yes. Our Walter Law.

- And through those connections, Fritz began attending our church.
- As someone who once attended church just to sit beside the woman I was falling in love with, I can imagine how that would happen. I can also envisage that over time, the message of the minister began to sink into Fritz's unchurched soul.
- Sadly, Fritz died of cholera in March of 1902. Fortunately for us, we can hear a glimpse of the man from a dedication delivered by his pastor, our first pastor here at BCC, Rev. Alexander Mac Coll.



● *As you know there has been placed in the church this week a memorial window in which the scene of which we have been speaking today is most beautifully depicted. To me, and I fancy to many of you, this window, the fifth in our church, speaks as none of the others do, not only because of the sweetness and sacredness of its theme, and the strength and delicacy of its execution, and "the light that never was on sea or land" that seems to shine through it, but for another reason. Into these other offerings of the heart we have entered sympathetically, they are memorials of the loved ones of our friends, whom we knew not; into this we enter much more intimately, it is a memorial of our friend, the first memorial of a member of this church.*



● *I shall not soon forget that first Sunday of January two years ago (1900) in some respects the happiest day which my ministry in this place has brought me--when, standing here side by side, four men, all of them of mature age, some past middle life, made a confession of their faith in Christ and for the first time sat down with us at the Communion table. To one of them the familiar forms of faith had not always appealed, religious commonplaces did not come readily to his tongue, but there was in his heart a hunger which God had used this little church to deepen, and a faith which grew stronger and richer. And so, without suggestion from anyone, he came to me; in his own*

*way made what I shall always think one of the most beautiful testimonies I have heard to “the simplicity that is in Christ,” and expressed a desire to sit with us at Communion feast. For him, too, and his, it was a happy day. He was not a man to speak much of such things, but before he left for the distant home from which he was not to return, I came to know that that day lingered and would linger in his memory, that in some degree the Emmaus experience had become his, and the Master who had some times seemed distant was known of him as never before in breaking of bread.*

- Besides this beautiful window which was given in his memory, Fritz's family gave this bronze plaque commemorating the Last Supper, in memory of Fritz's mom. You will also notice the Japanese lanterns around our property and in Law Park. These were arranged for by Frederick Brockelman.



- Next up, Dr. Ion Jackson whose music ministry burned brightly in Briarcliff from 1914-1926. Dr. Jackson not only led the music at our church, but conducted the Harlem Oratorio Society in NYC, the Beacon and Newburgh Oratorio Society, and directed the Musical Department of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York. He was known for rallying young people to music with his good humor and passion for excellence in song. The Briarcliff Forum newspaper posted at least three editorials noting his spirit at the

time of his death. Each described a man full of life. Henry H. Law wrote: *Those of us who knew him more or less closely cannot help feeling that he would be horrified at the thought that we mourned him by putting on black cloth and singing dirges. Can any of us honestly say that he would be gratified by such pomp? As a matter of fact, nothing would so have pleased our genial and*

*large-hearted friend--who enjoyed song and laughter and good company--as to think of us remembering him happily and not gloom.*

In 1928 (two years after his death) these lights were placed on the ceiling in the front of the sanctuary, as a reminder of Ion's spirit. His joy. His faith. The glory he gave to God throughout his time with us.



(C) Underwood & Underwood Studios, N. Y.  
**Sergeant Ruth Farnam**  
The author of "A Nation at Bay," the story of  
Serbia in the War.

- Ruth Stanley Farnam moved to Briarcliff Manor after serving in the Serbian Army during WW1. Ruth wrote about her time at war in her autobiography, *A Nation at Bay*. To say that she was a little bit different from Ion is an understatement. In the opening chapter of her book (which is available for download on the internet) she writes: *My own country is now at war with Germany and Austria and though I am a member of the Royal Serbian Army I am also a true American. I know what our boys will have to face and I know, too, that they are as brave as any other soldiers of the Allied Nations—and now they have the*

*opportunity to prove it. They will face a cruel, cunning, desperate foe—and they will conquer and drive him back—yes, back to Berlin. Worthy of our highest traditions will our Army prove itself. Worthy of that flag which we all love—the Flag on which the stripes represent our National Honor, which has never yet been stained. Those crimson bands which were dyed a deeper red by our fathers' blood on the battlefield: while that field of midnight blue—not so dark, alas! as the night of pain which now prevails in Europe—holds the shining stars of our National Ideals. Today there can be no such word as "pacifist." We are at war. Men and women who live under the protection of the American Flag and*

*claim the privileges of American citizenship can be only one of two things—Patriot or Traitor !*

Ruth was a long-time, active member of BCC and shared her passion for the people of Serbia with our membership. She married a vineyard owner in France (Baron Charles de Luze) in 1928 and went on to capitalize on her new title, Baroness de Luz, by soliciting funding for Serbian Relief locally. With her husband, the Baroness/Ruth raised funds to sustain a 100-bed hospital in France. When she was in Briarcliff, she lived on the property behind the high school on Pleasantville Road. In 1942 Ruth gifted BCC with a token close to her heart, a flag of crimson bands and a midnight blue field that holds shining stars of our National ideals, the American Flag. You will note upon closer inspection that it is only 48 stars...so apparently there was room to grow!

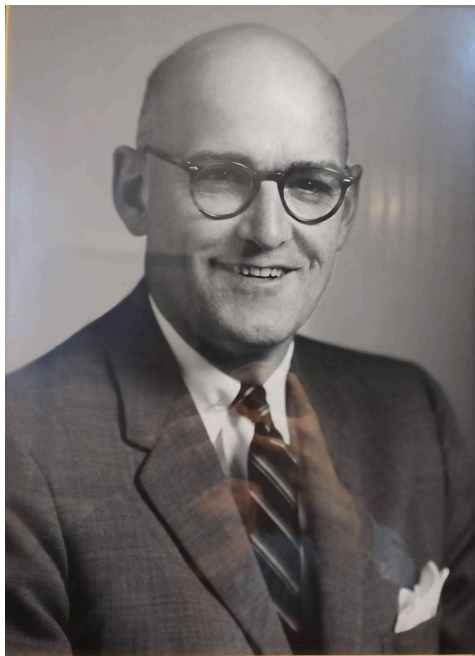


- **Julia Stimson** was another woman of honor to our church and country. She served in WW1 and WW2 as an Army Nurse. During her service, she directed activities of 10,000 Red Cross Nurses in France (some of whom may have worked at Baroness de Luz hospital! From 1938-1944 she was president of the American Nurses Association and worked for higher professional standards and improvement of the status of nurses. For her services in WW1 Colonel Stimson received the Distinguished Service Medal, the Florence Nightingale Medal of the International Red Cross, and was cited by

General John J. Pershing for exceptionally meritorious and conspicuous service.” She too wrote a book entitled *Finding Themselves: The Letters of an American Army Chief Nurse in a British Hospital in France*. Living members of BCC tell me

that Julia was a very quiet, private person. She was humble and always looked for ways to serve the church during her short time here before her death. The church honored this magnificent woman with a room located beneath this sanctuary. The Stimson Room was used as a Sunday School classroom for many years, and more recently has become the home for our Welfare to Work program which you may know as the Career Closet. The CC provides business attire for women who are entering or reentering the professional workforce. It seems a fitting tribute to Julia.

Each decade brought more amazing people through the doors of BCC. Like all of you today, some stayed a little while, some stayed a lifetime.



- In the mid-1950s Rev Richard Beebe worked with members of the church (including Robert Heim) to create the community center/Parish House that is now known as Beebe Hall. The work began in 1956 and the building was dedicated in 1957. According to Karen Sharman in *Glory in Glass*, “From the beginning, it housed a wide variety of programs and activities. The list from 1958 alone is impressive. Sunday schools classes, K and 2nd-grade classes for Briarcliff Manor Schools, League of Women Voters, Briarcliff Junior

College, Women’s Auxiliary of the fire department, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Briarcliff Manor Democratic Club, The Masons, Briarcliff Garden Club, a PTA clothing sale, the Red Cross, the Lions Club, a polling place, AA. St Theresa’s School, Hudson Valley Montessori School, and in more recent years, Garden House School, cooking with Kana, and the Emergency Shelter Program. Like the church itself, the mission of the building is to bring folks together. To be a space for the community to gather in and nurture their spirits.



- In the early 1970's when the Nixon administration was touting the arts, BCC likewise began investing in music as a way of promoting faith and cultural growth. Robert C. Heim was a big supporter of the arts. He moved there in 1983 from Briarcliff Manor, NY, where he was former Chairman of the Board of Education, the Public Library, the Planning Board of Appeals, and active in other community affairs, including the music programs at BCC. Before his death, Mr. Heim established a fund at the church which has allowed us to provide top-quality musical programs for the community. Robert expected our music in worship to be top-notch for the glory of God, but every once in a while he wanted to give people the opportunity for something a bit more. The fund continues to exist today and helps to provide concerts such as the collaborative program that will take place this May featuring the music of Beddy LoBalbo (a member of our church and a former Roman Catholic), the BCC choir, and the choir from HORAC Church in Ossining. Watch for more information on our Instagram, Facebook page and website.
- People from our recent past and present include Caldecott Winner Jerry Pinkney and his wife Gloria Jean Pinkney. Jerry played Jesus in our annual Palm Sunday procession during the pandemic.
- Ted and Helen Buerger who started the program which allows the church to support women in Westchester county, The Career Closet which meets in the Stimson Room below us. Ted also recently began the Ossining for Refugees program which helps immigrants from Afghanistan and other areas of the world settle in our community. Besides this important work in the community Ted works with our Tech Team to provide online programming of our church services to the community, and Helen is a tireless leader of our annual Women's Society Rummage Sale...which Helen would like me to note will be happening on April 27 this year. Mark it on your calendars.



- Finally, I am proud of our congregation today. The women and men who show up and continue to act as Mr. Todd Jr and Mr. Law envisioned 127 years ago. The women who make these beautiful prayer blankets and whisper their intentions for healing into them. The men who spend hours repairing and keeping in good shape the very old property we have inherited and, our 97-year-old social media maven who posts regularly on our Instagram page. As a democratically engaged body of faith who are open to the wide variety of God's love and challenges. I am proud that we became Open and Affirming in 2012, and continue to explore what that means for us by way of breaking down barriers with people who have been left out of faith community in the past or feel hesitant to enter into it today. I am proud that we decided to open our doors to El Olam congregation whose Spanish Language worship graces this sanctuary 4 nights a week (and whose equipment is set up for this evening!). I am proud to now be a part of the history of this remarkable church, and I am glad that you joined me here to learn about it this afternoon. Thank you.