

Religion in the Marketplace
The Churches of East Hampton
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East Hampton Library
November 20, 2003

At a time in which organized religion, even to its own adherents, has been relegated to the margins of society, it is almost impossible for moderns to understand the kind of relationship that existed between church and society in Colonial America.

I imagine that all of us are horrified - certainly I am - in our own time when so-called "religious leaders" seek to impose their own doctrines or piety on the rest of society; and it's much worse when they attempt to use the power of the state to do so. One of the geniuses of the American experiment was the doctrine of the separation of church and state - the "wall of separation" to use Thomas Jefferson's term - that enables persons of all religious beliefs - or none - to practice their religion freely. The state can neither hinder nor assist any church in teaching its doctrines or practicing its piety.

When this doctrine was articulated, in the late 18th century, it was unique in the western world. No western society since the conversion of Constantine had ever been organized without a single religion being part and parcel of the state. The religious wars of the 16th and 17th Europe were based precisely on that assumption - there could not be a society in which more than one religion was present. It was one thing on which Catholics and Protestants in Europe agreed. No one could conceive of a society in which Catholics and Protestants lived happily side by side - or even one in which Episcopalians and non-Episcopalians could share the same country. We believe that we have devised a better solution. We wish others around the world would learn that lesson.

This conviction - which is so strongly embedded in the American psyche - makes it hard for us to understand, much less evaluate, the situation that existed in 17th and 18th century East Hampton, and indeed in all of colonial America. We tend to judge our ancestors in the light of our modern convictions - on all sorts of subjects - and to damn them for their failures to come to the point at which we have arrived.

Nowhere is this more true than when we think of the Puritans - who founded East Hampton and who for the first hundred years dominated this community. One of the first things they did when they arrived was to conduct worship - lay led for the first three years until Thomas James arrived in 1651 as the first minister. Thomas Baker, the owner of the local "ordinary," was paid one shilling, six pence a week to allow the "meeting," as it was called, to be held in his tavern. The first "meeting house" was built in 1653 in what is now the South Burying Ground. Lion Gardiner's house was right across the street and Thomas James, the minister, lived next door.

The houses in the village were small and modest, and the church was similar. The Town Records for November 17, 1651 describes the Meeting House. It was a rude structure built of logs with a thatch roof. It was 26 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 8 feet

“stoode.” High, I assume. Undoubtedly, a perfectly simple rectangular room. There would have been an elevated pulpit, probably along one of the long sides, and benches where the worshipers sat. There were probably two doors, one used by men, the other by women and children. The sexes did sit separately in the Puritan Churches.

East Hampton remained Puritan until at least the second third of the 18th century when the movement more or less came to an end. That is the most important single thing that one needs to know about the earliest settlers of this community in order to understand how they lived; how they organized their community and conducted its affairs; how they related to each other and to the indigenous inhabitants who lived here before them; and, of course, how they understood their relationship to their God.

Puritanism was a theology. It was a particular way of understanding the Christian faith. That is of critical importance, but that is not the only thing we need to know about Puritanism in order to understand it. For though Puritanism was a theological movement, it was also a political movement and a social movement and an economic movement. It regulated the relationships between persons of various social and economic classes. It determined how political decisions would be made and how the business of the community would be organized.

Puritanism has gotten a very bad reputation in the modern age, because it is almost totally misunderstood. Our ancestors are believed - even by us - to be censorious busy-bodies, preaching a legalistic religion which we equate with modern fundamentalism. H. L. Mencken - more of a wit than a historian - is famous for describing Puritanism as the "horror that someone, somewhere, may be enjoying themselves." Nothing could be further from the truth.

They had quite a lot of fun in early East Hampton. Famously they did not celebrate Christmas or other religious holidays which they regarded as relics of Papistry, but they had plenty of times to eat well and drink plentifully. Nor were the Puritans ascetics. They had a lusty appreciation of the “things of the flesh” and had no shyness about sex - though always within marriage, of course. The great Catholic apologist, Sir Thomas More, was horrified at what he called the “sporting and feasting” of the early Puritans, and was scandalized at their insistence that celibacy was not superior in virtue to marital sex. They were also criticized for not keeping the Lenten fast - in fact they were accused of teaching that a Christian should feast at every meal.

Incidentally, and more or less in passing, the secular origins of the popular American Christmas come precisely because the Puritans didn’t celebrate it in their churches. Catholics and Episcopalians have a right to be indignant about the commercialism and secularism of our modern Christmas. Presbyterians and other Protestants do not - they are responsible for it when they decreed that no “popish” celebrations would be held in their churches.

You simply cannot understand 17th or 18th century Puritanism by reference to fundamentalism, revivalism, or any other modern religious movement or to 19th century prohibitionists or blue nosed prudes. That simply is not who they were.

Puritanism was a third generation development of the Protestant Reformation in England which established the Church of England as independent from Rome. Unlike the continent, in which the reformation was a religious revival, in England it was an act of state. Henry VIII, an enthusiastic - though not necessarily very gifted - theologian, established a church which was simply independent - not necessarily protestant.

Under Henry's three children - the protestant Edward, the Catholic Mary, and the politically astute Elizabeth - the circumstances of whose birth required that she be a protestant - the Church of England was buffeted by theological and liturgical change for a generation until it reached a compromise accommodation when Elizabeth assumed the throne in 1560. The original Puritans were those who flocked back to England from the continent at Elizabeth's accession - having breathed the heady wind of Calvinism during the Marian exile - determined to continue the religious reform in England in a more protestant direction.

Under Elizabeth's Stuart successors, these Puritans rose to increasing prominence in both church and state. Far from being an oppressed underclass, they dominated the commercial and business life of the nation - especially in the city of London. They controlled one of the two universities - Cambridge. Many were prosperous, middle class farmers. It is estimated that about a third of the clergy of the Church of England were Puritans.

Beginning with John Winthrop and the establishment of Massachusetts Bay in 1630, many hundreds of Puritans flocked to these shores during the decades preceding the English Civil War and many more came after the collapse of the Puritan experiment in government in 1688. They established here a society based on a Calvinistic understanding of Christianity. This included a political theory in which governmental authority is given - by God - to "the people" - not to the king.

Exactly who comprised "the people" has been a subject of continuing dialogue in American history. Originally, of course, it did mean "white males," and our history has been the sometimes uneven story of the expansion of that definition. Sometimes other restrictions, such as land ownership or church membership, were included; though neither was ever required for the voting franchise in East Hampton. But at least it did not mean that power came from the top down, but from the bottom up. The bedrock political principle of Puritanism was that governmental power belonged to "the people;" that free people had a right - a right given them by God - to self-government.

As they spread through southern New England, the Puritans perhaps inevitably came to eastern Long Island and established a community here. And the church was as integral a part of their community as was any other part. They also started a school, dug a pond and fenced in a sheep fold, established procedures for sharing common grazing land

and conducting whale watches, built wind-mills which were shared communally, and did a great many other things. The church was simply a normal and essential part of the community's life.

The church building was built and maintained by the community, which also paid the minister's salary. This was done out of what was called a "general assessment" - what we would call a property tax - which constituted the only communal funds of the community. The minister and the school master were the only people regularly paid out of public funds for quite a long time.

The "spiritual" life of the community was entrusted to the elders - elected annually by the church members. The entire "social service" function of the community - caring for the poor and supporting those who were dependant, classically the "widows and orphans" - was done under the leadership of the elders. They were also the guardians of the public morals of the town.

It is this function that has caused the Puritans to become regarded as censorious busy-bodies, largely because the definition of public immorality has changed in modern times. Blasphemy and profanity, sabbath breaking, wife-beating and dishonest business practices - along, of course, with sexual immorality - were among the offenses for which citizens were routinely cited to appear before the Elders for repentance or censure. That, by the way, was the extent of their powers of punishment. If anything greater was needed, the offender was turned over to the magistrate to be fined or imprisoned.

By the second decade of the 18th century, the village was large enough, and prosperous enough to make the construction of a larger and more beautiful church feasible. So in 1717 the Town Trustees voted to replace the rude little wilderness chapel by a much larger building on the south-east side of Main Street - approximately where Guild Hall now stands. It was described by Long Island historians Thompson and Prime as "the largest and most costly church edifice on Long Island."

It was a rectangle, 45 by 80 feet, covered by clapboards and then three foot cedar shingles fastened with hand wrought nails. There was a tower at the west end which projected slightly beyond the line of the main building. There was a belfry in the tower whose floor was covered with lead. Above this square tower rose a sexagonal steeple, made of wood; and above that, a red cedar spire atop which was an iron spindle on which hung a large copper vane with numerals cut denoting - incorrectly, we now believe - the year of the town's settlement and the building of the first church. This weather vane is now in Clinton Academy, and a replica of it adorns the church steeple now.

The church was built of massive white oak beams, 10 by 10, and the sills and posts much larger. The timber came from Gardiner's Island, a gift of the proprietor. Originally there was one door in the middle of one of the long sides of the church. In an 1822 renovation, the entrance was moved to the steeple end of the church.

The church contained benches at first, later pews were built and placed around the perimeter of the room with benches in the middle. Women and children sat in the east, men on the west. The pulpit was on the long wall, opposite the door. Over it hung the sounding board. The pulpit from the 1717 church - though maybe not the original one - is now displayed in the church sanctuary, on loan from the East Hampton Historical Society.

There was a balcony, reached by stairs on either side of the door. Later, galleries were erected on each side of the building. These were all removed in the 1822 renovation, and the door on the long side was closed when new doors were built beside the tower.

At that renovation, a narthex, or vestibule as it was called, was created at the west end. There was an arched entrance to the church, looking to the pulpit which was then moved to the east end of the room. The narthex was divided in half, and one section was reserved for the seating of black members of the church. Incidentally, though there were slaves in East Hampton - 25 in 1687 and 35 other persons who are described in the records as "coloured servants" - there was not segregated seating in the church until the 1822 renovation. This presumably lasted until the construction of the present church building in 1861. The blacks were full members of the congregation, though they were not given the dignity of having their last names recorded. The Session minutes say things like "Phoebe, servant of Mrs. so-and-so, is admitted to communion."

Four tall round pillars supported the pulpit, which was very high; reached by curved stairs on either side. In front of the pulpit, at floor level, was the deacon's seat; and in front of that the communion table. It was a simple cherry table, with one leaf - turned down on hinges when used, folded up when not in use. That table is also now on display in the church sanctuary, courtesy of the Historical Society.

Nathaniel Huntting, like his predecessor, was one of the most prominent citizens of the town. He was regularly involved in the perennial controversies with the Royal Governors in which the East Hampton Town Trustees were always engaged. Though the right of dissenters to worship legally was no longer contested, as it had been prior to 1688 when non-Anglican worship was illegal in the colony of New York, the residents of East Hampton objected vociferously to the requirement that they pay taxes to support the established Anglican Church.

In fact, in the long series of controversies between Samuel Mulford, whom East Hampton regularly elected to the General Assembly of the colony, and Lord Cornbury, the fanatically High-Church royal governor, the payment of church taxes was routinely included among the villager's protests against what Mulford called "the encroachments of our Liberties." In 1728 the Town Trustees voted that "right or wrong, the town money shall go to ye payment of Mr. Huntting's taxes" - meaning his salary.

Toward the end of Huntting's active career in East Hampton the malaise, which had affected religion in this country and had caused the decline of Puritanism, came to a

more or less sudden end with what is called the "Great Awakening." This remarkable movement, which affected all the English colonies, from New Hampshire to Georgia, should be neither surprising nor accidental. Puritanism was itself, by expressed intent, a religious reform movement which carried the seeds of its own reform within it.

We will not linger long here, though the revival tremendously affected the East Hampton church and caused great controversy here. In the midst of this controversy, the Trustees issued an invitation to Samuel Buell to replace the venerable, but now quite elderly, Nathaniel Huntting. Mr. Buell, again straight from the University, this time Yale, was an excellent choice as the third minister of East Hampton. He was a worthy advocate of the revival who exhibited none of the excessive emotionalism which had characterized the extremists and which had caused so much controversy here.

He was ordained here in 1746, his ordination sermon being preached by Jonathan Edwards, the most renowned minister in America. Edward's ordination sermon, "The Church's Marriage to her Sons and to her God" demonstrates the scholarly character of these revivalists. It is a scholarly work of thirty seven octavo pages, with carefully crafted arguments and skilled use of language. The manuscript is in the Long Island collection of this library, and as far as I know, it has never been published. It should be. Maybe I will do it.

At about the same time as Buell became minister, the East Hampton Church became Presbyterian. Buell was, in fact, one of the charter members of Suffolk Presbytery, which was established in 1747 in Southampton. The Presbytery organized itself and petitioned to be received into the "New Side" branch of the Presbyterian Church. The denomination had split in 1745 over the revival, and the "new side" or pro-revival branch, was attractive to the independent Puritan Churches of New York and New Jersey. At the same time, most of the churches in New England became Congregational.

Like both his predecessors, Buell was very actively involved in the public affairs of the community. He supported the colonists' position in the increasingly acrimonious controversies with the British authorities, but when the Revolutionary War broke out and all of Long Island was occupied by the British, Buell remained in East Hampton. Like all adult males, he signed the oath of allegiance to George III, which Colonial Abraham Gardiner required, and he was a regular visitor to the headquarters of General William Erskine, which was located in the Brown House on Main Street - now the LVIS house. But he also conducted regular correspondence with the Patriot Governor Trumbull of Connecticut. He protested to each his loyalty to their cause, but he also fearlessly condemned soldiers of both sides who came to East Hampton to steal cattle - as evidently both sides did.

In 1783, with the ratification of the Treaty of Paris, the British evacuated New York City and Long Island, and the people of East Hampton turned to the pursuits of peace. Buell turned his attention to the establishment of a school in East Hampton, and in 1784 the "East Hampton Academy" was established. It met in the church until the building now known as Clinton Academy was built a few years later.

Apart from the eccentricities and notoriety of Lyman Beecher - called by a professor mine "father of half the brains in America" - by the nineteenth century the East Hampton Church had evolved into a recognizably conventional pattern. The town trustees still ran the business affairs of the church - they chose and paid the minister and maintained the property in East Hampton for several decades into the 19th century. I don't know the exact date when this ceased, but the church first elected Trustees in 1848. The following year, in a divided and controversial vote, the town trustees voted to deed the manse to the church's trustees. Apparently there was no controversy about giving the church property to the church, but there was over the manse.

So by 1849 the town's financial involvement in the church's life was over. This is very late. The first amendment to the US Constitution prohibited the national government from either "establishing" or prohibiting the free exercise of any form of religion, but the state and local governments had no such strictures until the adoption of the 14th amendment following the Civil War. Nevertheless all state governments, including New York, dis-established churches in the Jeffersonian period, and support of churches by local governments, which persisted longest in New England, had come to an end almost everywhere by the 1830s. It lasted in East Hampton until the 1840s.

Beecher was succeeded by several short pastorates, until Stephen Mershon was called as pastor in 1854, straight from Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a remarkably able man and under his ministry the church grew rapidly. In 1858 the building known as the "Session House" was built. It was originally located on Main Street, about where White's Pharmacy now stands. It was moved to the corner of Main Street and David's Lane in 1903, when it was doubled in size; and to the present site in 1928 when it was doubled again by raising it and making it two stories.

In 1861, the present church sanctuary was constructed, on a lot which James Madison Hunting, the great-grandson of Nathaniel Hunting and the President of the Church's Board of Trustees, purchased from his cousin Deacon David Hunting for \$1500. At that time the immense sum of \$9,300 was already in hand for the construction of the new building. Additional funds were raised by the Hunttings and the building was built without debt.

The 1717 building, which had served the community well for 140 years, was sold to Jeremiah Dayton for \$250 and the lumber was used to construct a house on Newtown Lane. I don't know which one. Perhaps some of you do.

The original design of the 1861 building was what might be called, by some stretch of architectural definition, "Romanesque." There were two unequal and dis-similar towers in front. The one on the north-east corner was capped by a four sided spire, a much taller one on the right, or north-west corner was capped by a sort of mansard roof.

The facade of that church was altered in 1961, making the church look like what we think it is - a New England-style "meeting house." The chancel was also altered during that renovation, but apart from re-arranging the pews to create a center aisle, no

other changes were made to the interior. Visitors routinely comment on the beauty of the building, with which I agree, and say what a perfect example it is of the Georgian New England church style. I just smile and say “thank you,” and don’t point out that the style is not original, and that the rounded windows are left from the original romanesque building.

By the second third of the nineteenth century, not everyone in the community adhered to the “Olde Town Church.” It was sometime in the 1840s that John Wallace, who is almost always described in East Hampton historical lore as “a mysterious Scotsman,” came to the community and began to conduct Episcopal services. My guess is that Mr. Wallace was not particularly mysterious, but that the writers of the histories simply didn’t know much about him. Or maybe they think all Scotsmen are “mysterious.” In any case, he acted as a lay reader to a small group of Episcopalians, with a priest coming occasionally from Sag Harbor or, in the summer, New York to celebrate the sacraments.

Wallace, and another parishioner, Dr. Alfred Wagstaff, raised \$43,000; and in 1859 they bought the land where St. Luke’s now stands and constructed a little wooden chapel there. Dr. Wagstaff named it after St. Luke, the patron saint of physicians. The first priest, Charles Gardiner, was called in 1869 and he served the congregation, part time, for 31 years. In 1902, it became a parish of the Diocese of Long Island.

Quoting from the church’s own account of its history, “. . . with the coming of the ‘summer people’ the little chapel’s congregation began to grow. It was through the enthusiasm, efforts and money of the summer people that in 1910 the simple chapel was replaced by the present beautiful building.” The building was designed as a replica, on a smaller scale, of All Saints Church in Maidstone, England from which some of East Hampton’s early settlers emigrated.

There had been Roman Catholics in East Hampton for many years before any formal Catholic services were held. Indeed, the first Catholic mass in East Hampton was celebrated by Father Thomas Harvey in Montauk when Governor Thomas Donigan landed there in 1683. A few Catholic families began to settle in Sag Harbor early in the 19th century, drawn by the industries associated with whaling. This community grew, and St. Andrews Church was established as the 9th Roman Catholic congregation in New York State in 1835.

The first permanent Catholic residents in East Hampton arrived not by choice, but by accident. In August, 1851 a British ship, The Catherine, was wrecked off the coast of Amagansett. The ship was bound from Dublin to New York with cargo, but in addition there were some 300 passengers, headed for the slums of the Lower East Side or the mines of Pennsylvania. All the passengers survived the shipwreck, and a few days later most of them were put aboard another ship for New York. But two of them, Patrick Lynch and James Gay, both young men bound for the gold fields of California, decided to remain where they were.

Not long after they arrived in East Hampton, Lynch and Gay discovered the Irish community in Sag Harbor and began to go there - both to meet friends and compatriots, and also to worship at St. Andrews Church. Both found wives there, and the Lynchs and Gays settled down in East Hampton soon afterward.

Following the Civil War and the influx of wealthy second homeowners - many of whom maintained large homes with large staffs of servants - the Irish population of the East Hampton increased rapidly. Patrick Lynch's home on North Main Street, now the "Mill House Inn," became the center of the religious life of this community. They said the rosary, read lives of the saints, and said Catholic prayers. Occasionally priests would come from Sag Harbor or elsewhere to say mass, hear confessions, baptize babies and marry those who were waiting. Often in the summer these services would be conducted on Sunday evenings, when the servants were off duty, and sometimes the Lynch's entire front yard would be filled with worshipers who could not get inside.

This piece of information comes from the diary of Miss Fanny Huntting who lived next door. Miss Huntting's main interest in the Catholic worship in the neighborhood, however, came from the fact that the widow of John Tyler - always called in East Hampton records, "Mrs. President Tyler" - had converted to Catholicism and was among those who worshiped in the Lynch living room. She, of course, was the former Rose Gardiner, who had married the widowed President in 1845.

The Catholic community continued to grow, but there was no resident priest and no church building. Lay led services were sometimes held in Clinton Academy, which was a public assembly hall. Other services were held in the "Eel pot" in which William Lynch, Patrick's brother, lived for a time. By the 1880s a priest from Sag Harbor was holding regular mass in the summer at Clinton Academy.

In August, 1890 the Star carried an advertisement for a fund-raising dinner at Clinton Academy sponsored by the "Catholic Young People." The following year property on Buell Lane was purchased in the name of Bishop John Laughlin and the Star noted that the Bishop proposed to build a church there. Numerous fund raising efforts ensued, and in September, 1894, St. Philomena's Church was dedicated by Charles McDonnell, the Bishop of Brooklyn. Father Lawrence Guerin was the pastor. Though the building has been remodeled and restored over the years, it is essentially unchanged today.

The church was named for Philomena, a somewhat legendary and mythical virgin-martyr of the early Christian centuries. The parish was given that name in honor of Father Guerin's sister, Philomena, who had died as a young girl. Sadly, in the 1960s the Second Vatican Council removed the names of many of the semi-legendary saints from the early centuries and the East Hampton Church was re-named in honor of the Most Holy Trinity.

At almost exactly the same time as the founding of St. Philomena's, the Methodists of East Hampton were organized into a congregation by the Long Island Conference of

the Methodist Episcopal Church. The original nucleus of that congregation consisted of persons who had moved to East Hampton from New York City and elsewhere on the island who were already Methodists, but even before a Methodist pastor was sent to organize the church, a Sunday School for children from “down hook” was organized - once again, meeting in the famous “Eel pot.” The church met there until the present building was built, shortly before 1900. In the early years the Methodist Conference sent itinerant ministers to serve the East Hampton congregation and there were many of them. It was not until the 1920s that there was a resident pastor.

Quickly touching congregations outside the Village, the Amagansett Presbyterian Church was organized in 1861 by about 150 persons who were transferred from the First Presbyterian Church. Stephen Mershon preached the dedication sermon that year. In 1883 the Presbyterian Church built a chapel in Springs, at the head of Accabonic Harbor. For 90 years it was part of First Presbyterian Church, often served by an Associate Pastor, but in 1972 it became a separate congregation. St Peter’s, the Episcopal chapel in Springs, dates from 1881 and has always been affiliated with St. Luke’s Church.

There had been an Italian community in Amagansett since the establishment of the fish factories in “Promised Land” in the 1890s, but there was no Catholic Church there until 1920 when the pastor of St. Philomena’s bought the Baker-Parson house on Main Street. The house was moved to Egypt Lane, where it still is, and St. Peter’s Church was built in 1928. It has always been affiliated with Most Holy Trinity.

There was no church of any kind in Montauk until after the First World War, but the rapid growth of that village in the 1920s made the establishment of churches natural. An ecumenical group of Protestants began worshipping in the Montauk Theater in the early 20’s. Catholic worship was held in Montauk Manor Hotel by visiting priests who were given accommodations in exchange for conducting services. When Carl Fisher began the development of Montauk he gave land and money for the construction of both the Montauk Community Church, which was established by the Presbytery of Long Island in 1927, and St. Therese of Lisieux Roman Catholic Church the same year. Apparently he did not give enough money for sound construction, and both those congregations have had numerous and severe problems with their buildings over the years.

Also in the 20th century came the founding of Calvary Baptist Church. I am very sorry that I do not have more information on the establishment of that congregation. There had been blacks in East Hampton since colonial times, of course, and prior to the Civil War they were members of the Presbyterian Church. I do not know when, or by whom, Calvary Baptist Church was established. I know that the property which the church now owns was given to it, and that a basement sanctuary, now a Fellowship Hall, was constructed shortly after the Second World War. Later the present sanctuary, in the modern architectural style, was constructed with contributions from the whole East Hampton community as well as the members of the congregation, of course.

The most recent congregation in East Hampton is the Living Waters Full Gospel Church, established in the 1980s. It is an independent, Pentecostal church which now has several hundred members, meeting in a building which they purchased from the Town on Industrial Road, near the airport. Michael Smith was the founder and remains pastor. Untypical of Pentecostals, he is ecumenically minded and very active in the community's religious affairs.

There had also been Jewish residents of East Hampton from very early times, but there were not enough to establish any Jewish institutions until after World War Two. A tailor, whom the records identify only as "Isaac the Jew," was recruited to come to East Hampton in the 1780s, to supply a much needed service to the community. In 1786 he built the house and tailor shop on Main Street in which I now live, it having been purchased by the Presbyterian Church as a manse in the 1870s. The next time he is mentioned in the records he is identified as "Isaac Tailor." He married the daughter of one of the local families and eventually became an Elder in the Presbyterian Church!

For the subsequent history of the Jewish community I think you will be happy that I am just going to read to you some remarks made by Charlotte Markowitz at the Jewish Center of the Hamptons a few years ago. I could summarize and paraphrase her remarks, but why do that. She writes, and I am slightly abbreviating her words: The few Jewish families that were here back in the mid-50s - and some are here today - felt a need to establish a meeting place, a synagogue, and a place in which to educate our children. We met in each other's homes and taught our own youngsters. Then our good friends and neighbors at the Presbyterian Church offered us the use of their Session House on Friday evenings so we could conduct Shabbat services there. We gratefully accepted.

A few more Jewish families settled here and we grew. The need for our own house of worship persisted and a handful of us purchased two acres on Montauk Highway. We put up a sign proclaiming that as the future home of the "Jewish Center of the Hamptons." and hoped it would arouse interest. Two wonderful people took notice - Jack Kaplan and Evan Frankel, who together gifted this Borden estate to us.

We spruced up the old house. We painted the upstairs bedrooms, converting them into bright, sunlit classrooms. We transformed the front parlor into our sanctuary. One of our members carved the ark doors. My mom and dad gave us our first Torah, our first yad and our first shofar. My husband, Irving, practiced blowing the ram's horn until I thought that if there was a moose on the east end of Long Island it would be converging on this front lawn.

Now we had a Shul and a steeple, and we opened up the doors for the Jewish people. We conducted our own services for two years, then hired our first Rabbi, Albert Friedlander, now of London, who came on weekends. Soon afterward we realized we couldn't accommodate everyone for High Holy Days and so our first small tent was erected.

A few years passed. We needed a larger synagogue and plans were drawn up to build a modest addition to our building. But by that time Evan Frankel was our President . . . and he had a dream. We were going to erect a place of great beauty - awe-inspiring - and with the architectural genius of Norman Jaffe . . . our dream became a reality. . . .

If someone had suggested to me, forty years ago, when we could barely count on a minyan, that I would be addressing today over 1,500 Jewish people under a tent on the old Borden estate on Rosh Hashanah, I wouldn't have believed it. That sounds like a Jewish fairy tale.

The whole thing sounds like a fairy tale to me. I am a preacher and I could easily turn this into a sermon now. But I will not. Just a reminder, that in our pluralistic and secular society, from the beginning of this community the churches and synagogues of East Hampton have been an integral part of our common life.

They have enjoyed, and have inculcated, a very unusual degree of cooperation with each other and with the community. For the first two hundred years, there was but one church and in the beginning at least, everyone was a member of it. As the community became more pluralistic, other churches and the Jewish Center were welcomed and encouraged. Citizens of all faiths contributed to the numerous fund raising activities that preceded the construction of St Philomena's Church. Calvary Baptist Church was also built by donations from the entire community. The Ku Klux Klan, which was very strong in Long Island in the mid 1920s, dominating the politics of some towns, never attracted any following here. The Klan tried to have a rally in Sag Harbor, but they were denounced by the Protestant clergy and were simply laughed at by most local residents.

Immigrants were welcomed, and though there were some snide comments about the Irish - poor; clanish; inclined to crowd together in sub-standard houses; willing to work in menial jobs for low wages; speaking poor English; given to playing ball on Sunday, which of course the Protestants didn't do; drinking in taverns instead of clubs or homes - for the most part the new residents were welcomed and by the 2nd generation at least thoroughly included in the community.

For almost nineteen thousand weeks the bells have rung; the hymns and psalms have been sung; ministers, priests and rabbis have come and gone and the religious institutions of this community have remained strong witnesses. Not only to the creeds and doctrines to which they adhere, but also to the common faith which has united the community through political controversy, military occupation, hurricanes and ship wrecks, the transformation to a sophisticated beach resort.

In some ways the religious institutions of this community are no longer at the center of its life. East Hampton is a thoroughly secular community. The vast majority of its people, even counting only the year round residents, never worship and are not affiliated with any of the churches or synagogues. The same is true for the part time residents, though they are numerous in some churches and at the Jewish Center.

Yet they remain strong and vigorous institutions, well supported and well attended. And they remain at the center of the community's life. In the days after September 11 there were many hundreds of people at the "Olde Town Church" every day - summoned there by the conspicuous leadership of Rabbi David Gelfand - who commented, every time he rose to speak that week, that this was the appropriate place for the community to gather to worship, to grieve, to hear from its public officials, to express its solidarity. Through every crisis in our nation's history, he said, the community has gathered here for this purpose.

The beautiful buildings of which the churches and synagogues are proud stand as much more than scenic backdrops to a "Hampton Weekend Experience." They are real places to which real people go for comfort, inspiration, challenge, education, fellowship, and service to the community.