Introduction
As you follow the tour you will be traveling through the Strafford of 180 years ago as it was planned and laid out by the first settlers. At some points you will see locations virtually unchanged from the earliest days.
Along the route various houses will illustrate changing times and fashions and others will show the desire of townspeople to preserve their historical past.

The Settlers
Strafford’s first settlers arrived here in 1803, led by the Rev. Adam Bickerman. Coming from England, they nostalgically named their new home Strafford. Tradition says they loaded at Mary Harp’s house, then Town Historian Lewis Krapp’s research has led me to believe they came overland. Whether it is correct that our ancestors came into the wilderness and cut out a place where they could worship and live in freedom and hope for the future, we are the beneficiaries of their vision and determination.

The location of the first settlement offered an abundant food supply and natural protection. On the exposed western side and to the north, the settlers built an 8-10-foot-high wooden palisade and a watch house a little distance off.

The settlers built homes, laid out one-to-two acre homesteads, and established common fields for farming and grazing. Since they began building boats and established a thriving port for lumber and export, several towns for more than three centuries.

The boundaries of the first settlement are close to those of the recently established National Register Historic District which this tour covers. Main and Elm Streets were the north and south, Speculator and Broad Street, Strafford Avenue and South Avenue were the original cross-streets.

Trolley Tour
The trolley leaves from the American Festival Theatre parking lot on Elm Street.

(TIME THEATER, TURN RIGHT.
HEADING NORTH, ONTO KLM STREET)
1) #1830, on your right as you turn out of the driveway, is the Nicoll-Benjamin House, now the American Festival Theatre administration building. It was built c. 1830 as a Greek Revival home, probably by Capt. Samuel Nicoll, who had made his fortune as a captain of the privateer “Bourger” in the War of 1812. Below the ground floor is a four-foot-high sub-basement which may have been used as a root cellar or smokehouse, or as a store, or for storage.

2) #934 is the Fairchild house, built c. 1871. The spectaculously stylish early-one-half Federal style home with center chimney and gable roof was popular in this area.

3) Sabby’s Pond, the tiny body of water you can see behind the house on the right, was called the Great Salt Pond in Colonial times. and because of its highly saline water, people used it to soak flax to make thread for linen cloth. Legend had the pond was bottomless.

4) #719 is the home was built c. 1760 and has changed very little over the years. Large panses of glass were very expensive in the 18th century and its windows probably were like the 12-12 sash you can see in the attic. Sabba Ahmad, who lived here, used holes from the slaughterhouse across the street to make more. Large panels and sashes were also made from the abundance of holes and also exported from the Lower Deck to the West Indies and other far ports. To Cobin, Strafford, work clothes were usually made of leather, rather than cloth.

5) #227 is the house the Capt. John Sabby house, for whom the pond is named. It dates to c. 1760. Sea captain who sailed the Lower Deck built his home near the water so they could command a view of the port. It was believed that a sea captain lost a minute of life for every minute he could not view the sea. According to Oceana! History of Strafford, Capt. Sabby had two galleys on the first floor with six huge bags of rum in the cargo so he neglected to pay duty. The customs agent seized his boat and auctioned it off. The man in jail, who were the minister’s sons, quietly bought back the boat and resumed the business and Sonny later operated as a mercantile.

6) #940, at the end of the row of houses once occupied by the Baker family, is the Lewis Hoyt house. This c. 1760 Federal house retains a good deal of its original character. The Burritts noted on this house as an office made of rum has it that extra cofins were kept in the basement for those who did not survive their sea voyages.

7) On the left is Brownie’s House. Small shops such as these have served the port and its sailors for more than three centuries.

8) Next on the left is Bondy’s Deck, known over the years as Prince’s, Thompson’s and the Lower Deck. It was the town’s main dock from the mid-17th century. Cargo vessels and sailing packets landed here. Sugar, molasses, rum and salt were imported from the West Indies and horses and barrel staves were exported to the Caribbean where both commodities were wanted. Corn and leather goods were also exported. In 1899 Capt. John Bondy converted the old shipping warehouses into a training center for boys. Hapgood, Epstein and Jack Hacken are said to have trained here and John L. Shull was a frequent visitor.

(BEFORE RIGHT ON SHORE ROAD)

9) #19 on the right is the remaining part of an old wavy house constructed in 1830. The upper story served as a residence while the tall basement was a storehouse for export goods.

10) #31 on the left is the only remaining oyster house where Strafford oyster was packed for shipment by boat or train. It was later used to house actors performing at the theater.

Katharine Hapgood lived in it for two summers and enjoyed the fact that water came up through the floorboards at high tide.

11) #60 on the right was once the home of Albert Laing, who inspired the Strafford School of decay careers. According to The Art of the Decay, Laing’s hands were fashioned so expertly they are as tight and good now as on the day they were finished.” In 1896, in failing health and no longer able to carve with the perfection he demanded of himself, Laing made the final entry in his diary: “Today the marble left... and shut himself. His estate listed 111 odd stocks, valued at $45. Today, his decay lingers $1,000 to $20,000 each.

12) Once a thriving was an important industry in Strafford. In the 17th century hard-wood oysters could be picked up from the river bottom and, even before the American Revolution, laws were passed to limit oyster harvesting to winter and fall. In the 19th century as many as 200 oyster ships worked the offshore beds in the Sound.

13) On the right is the American Festival Theatre, originally and still referred to as the Shakespeare Theatre. It is designed in the octagonal shape of the Global Theatre in England and adapted in the uniquely an octagonal mill that had to be drilled. The Republic of France donated the tank, which was originally intended for a 1839 World’s Fair pavilion, that was never built. In 1992 Katharine Cornell broke the ground with a gold shovel and the theater opened with Julius Caesar the following year. After director John Ruben and actor Martin Landau were instrumental in bringing the AFT to the land and such actors as Christopher Plummer, Raymond Massey, Ruby McCallow and Jack O’Brian have performed there. Both for several years, the complex has been acquired by the state, which will run it through the University of Connecticut’s Stratford Institute and a board of directors. A limited summer season was produced in 1989 to coincide with Straf-
ford's 350th Celebration.

(PAUSE AT CORNER BEFORE TURNING RIGHT)

14. Stratford is one of the communities in the area flooding to
 preserve its historic sites. This group appears much as it did at
 the turn of the century. The sign reads on your left and in front of
 you are an open harbor where the first settlers arrived in
 Stratford.

(PAUSE NEAR MARKER)

15. On your left is Mary's Harbor, named for Little Mace (or
 Mark), who was a shallopman and kept his oyster cage at the
 south end of the Theatre grounds, known as Shallop Point.
 The wharf, commemorating this historic site, was erected in
 1770 by the Connecticut Historical Commission and the
 district. The house, at the base of the street, you are on a
 small hill of stones marking the site of the first grist mill.
 By 1660 Stratford had three mills, powered by the tide
 and the other by a fast flowing inland stream.
 Total miles were measured by the power of streams, and
 it was largely due to its superior water power and mode
 of transportation that Haddam became a separate
 community from Stratford in 1833. At one time Stratford encompassed all or
 large parts of what is now Greenfield, Trumbull, Easton,
 Monroe, Huntington and Shelton. For years Stratford even had
 an ongoing dispute with New London over its northern
 border.

(PAUSE AT CORNER OF ELM STREET)

16. The early settlers had a satisfying variety of food. In addi-
 tion to their domestic sheep, cows, swine and chickens, they
 ate water fish, wild turkey, partridge, wood pigeons and
 venison. They grew Indian corn and picked strawberries, black-
 berries and wild grapes. From the streams and sea came
 flounder, eels and clams.

#220. The house on the left was probably built c.
 1732 by Joseph Gobran. This homestead has been occupied
 since the founding of the town and is listed in Vol. I, page 1
 of the town's land records. Originally a saltbox, it has been rad-
 cally modified. One owner, the Rev. Israel Isaacson, was a
 founder of Yale University. Later Capit. Nathan Gobran
 sold his 100-ton schooner across the street where now is
 a
 only mansion. The house has sometimes served as an inn even
 into modern times, but is now privately owned.

(PAUSE AT CORNER OF SETTLEMENT STREET)

18. This intersection was known as Sandy Hollow and the
 SE corner is the site of the first meeting house which was
 surrounded by a small burial ground. The green in the middle
 of South Avenue is the approximate location of the old Sandy
 Hollow School House that served until the district was
 consolidated. The marker is the Beardsley family monument,
 which was dedicated during the 350th celebration in 1933
 and the dowsnends of the original settler William Beardsley
 had a family reunion.

(PROCEED DOWN SOUTH AVENUE)

19. #273, the blue house with black shutters on your left,
 is the upper half of the old Sandy Hollow (or Old South)
 School. Shortly after the Consolidated School was built, the old
 school building was moved by team and ground whole to this
 site where it was jacked up 10-12 feet and a framed first story
 built below. A window pane on the east door bears the initials
 "CG" scratched there by a schoolboy in 1835.

(TURN RIGHT ON MAIN STREET)

Main Street, one of the original thoroughfares, dates back to
 the mid-1800's. The sidewalk paralleled the street behind the
 homestead on the west side to protect the settlers from Indians
 and wolves. At the turn of the century quite a ballroom was
 raised by those who felt the sounds of the street would
 interfere when telephone and electric wires were added. Nearly half
 the houses on this street date to before the Civil War and a va-
 riety of architectural styles is represented.

20. #1280 on the right is a large, high style Federalist house
 c. 1870. The flat roof, rounded window bows, bracket and
 large windows are all characteristics of Federalist houses.

21. #1456, also on your right, is a Greek Revival, dating to
 c. 1850. Note the use of classical columns and pediments like
 those found on a Greek temple.

22. #1290, the house on the right was built in 1920 with
 huge red and white columns, similar to certain English Tudor
 homes.

23. #1164 on the right is a large, high style Federalist house
 c. 1870. The flat roof, rounded window bows, bracket and
 large windows are all characteristics of Federalist houses.

24. None of the historic character remains in this once impor-
 tant intersection called Hard's Corner. John Hard's store,
 built in 1792, stood on the southeast corner with the Mason's
 First Hall on the second floor. Across from it was Elijah
 Marshall's Tavern where Lajestee had breakfast in 1824,
 and nearby was Jeremiahquire's blacksmith shop. This
 area is slated for streetcapping and commercial rehabilita-
 tion as part of the 350th celebration.

(TURN RIGHT ON STRATFORD AVENUE)

In a moment we will be turning onto Main Street, originally
 known as Front Street, Elm and Main were the two roads of
 the original settlement. The giant native trees for which it was
 named, as lined each side of the street but have since at
 the Erwin Avenue and Union, and Elm Avenue, and is part of
 the 350th anniversary celebration. The new two denote
 ered trees and two etcetera are being planted to replace the
 elm.

As we continue on Stratford Avenue and cross Main Street,
 we will notice on your left the splendid improvement project
 being completed as part of the town's 350th Celebration.

We are now entering the Academy Hill area. The homes
 here are grandiose and stately and of varying ages dating back
 to the Revolution. The waterfront which we just left,
 first arrived in the town, soon after it was opened up
 and was eventually surrounded with deck, numerous sailors and
the, and now is more fashionable to live closer to the center of
 town. One's home is its position in society and houses are
 constantly being remodeled in the popular style of the day.
 Georgians and Federalists were re-done with Italianate and Greek
 Revival features to keep up with the times. Only in the turn of
 the century did it become practical to own a historic home.
 This trend, thankfully, continues as the moving and preservation
 of many of Stratford's historic houses. Today this attitude is even
 more prevalent as seen in the establishment of Historic Dis-
 tricts such as this.

Photos by Michael Kolster & Dorothy Euclidean
Tour Key:

1850s 10th Street - Nicolai Benjamin House
422 State Street - Priest House
476 State Street - Nisbet House
527 State Street - Captain John Selby House
640 State Street - Lewis Burritt House
675 State Street - Wheeler House
720 State Street - Bost's Dock
79 Shore Road - Warehouse
85 Shore Road - Oyster House
97 Shore Road - Albert Long House
114 Water Street - Shakespeare Theatre
134 Water Street - Mark Van Dyke
138 Water Street - Diet of early settlers
138 Shore Road - Joseph Gorham House
140 Sandy Hill
146 7th South Avenue - Sandy Hollow School
204 1st Street - Ballarat House
246 1st Street - Greek Revival Home
270 1st Street - Tudor Homes
305 1st Street
310 1st Street - Captain Samuel Austin House
325 Academy Hill
325 3rd Street - Captain David Judson House
325 4th Street - Thomas D. Peters House
520 Main Street - Christ Episcopal Church
520 Main Street - St. John's Episcopal Church
520 Main Street - Episcopal Church
520 Main Street - First Congregational Church
540 Main Street - Franklin Street
540 Main Street - First Congregational Church
570 Main Street - National Bank of New Bedford
570 Main Street - Mercury Insurance
590 Main Street - St. John's Episcopal Church
610 Main Street - Grammar School
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American Revolution, in 1806 and are dedicated to "the men and women who piloted the wilderness the early homes of Stratford, who fought bravely and suffered patiently in the pursuit of the American Revolution and who left to their descendants a proud memory of courage, endurance and faith in God."

40) #2175 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.

41) #2173 On the left is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

42) #2172 On the right is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

43) #2171 On the left is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

44) #2170 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.

45) #2169 On the left is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

46) #2168 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.

47) #2167 On the left is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

48) #2166 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.

49) #2165 On the left is the First Congregational Church, built between 1857-1863. It was designed by Pravement and Smith, a prominent architectural firm.

50) #2164 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.

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52) #2162 On the right is the General Joseph Walker house, built in 1755 and owned by George Washington's great-grandfather. It was later owned by the Revolutionary War hero General Joseph Walker who lived here from 1775-1806.
1637 — Flight of Pequot, through Connecticut, to last stand at Southport.

1639 — First treaty granted by Indians to Connecticut Colony for security. Connecticut's first constitution drawn up by Roger Ludlow of Fairfield.

1640 — First settler farming in Fairfield, led by the Reverend Adam Blakeman. First (now Congregational) church organized.

1644 — Great Fire called "Stratford," Palisades built across Watch-horse hill; Indians troublesome at.

1646 — First permanent settlement at "Cosynbrige." Boundaries ordered, settled by General Court.

1647 — General Court ordered taxes of Stratford and Fairfield, formerly collected together as one plantation, to be collected separately.

1654 — Town ordered mill built at Old Mill Green by John Judson.

1656 — First Indian deed made. General Court confirmed right of soil to Indians.

1658 — General Court ordered planting land laid out for Indians, that peace should prevail.

1660 — Gristmill established by Esek Thacher and with Chief Ninigret of the Narragansett nation.

1666 — First Indian deed made. General Court confirmed right of soil to Indians.

1668 — First grinding stone mill at Old Mill Green and the next year, built mill at what is now known as New Town.


1665 — The Reverend Israel Chauncey called to assist the aged Rev. Adam Blakeman, who died this year.

1666 — Difficulties arising in first church, a second ecclesiastical society was formed. Fairfield County and three other counties, organized.

1667 — Permission granted to establish plantation at Newtown, soon abandoned.

1668 — Regulation, or "advice," of Governor accepted concerning voting privileges.

1669 — Liberty granted for both Congregational societies to use the same building for services at different times.

1670 — "Select school" authorized.

1671 — While Hills purchase, forty pounds.

1672 — Stratford people made settlement at Woodbury.

1673 — Gristmill and sawmill at Old Mill Green.

1674 — Militia companies of towns placed in county organizations.

1674 — Defenses strengthened against any enemy.

1675 — King Philip's War. Men drafted, revisions collected.

1677 — Congregational burying ground laid out. Attempts to distribute lots on Golden Hill stopped.

1676 — Blurred twenty pounds to maintain a schoolmaster. General Court reaffirms grant to Indians at Golden Hill.

1677 — Village line set between Fairfield and Stratford. General Court ordered that "present roads to plantation to plantation shall be repaid the said roads to King's Highway.

1680 — Secotad Congregational church building erected, placed on Watch House Hill. Tract at Coram Hill given to Indians.

1683 — Under an oak near western boundary, at which final Indian deed was signed as authorized by General Court.

1685 — Commissioned to sandy hollow, torn down.

1684 — Settlement with Moses Wheeler about the house he had purchased in 1680.

1685 — Highway to Fairfield established by town as.

1686 — First ladder company — every householder in Stratford must provide a ladder to reach the top of his house, which provided and warehouses built.

1687 — First provision made by town for the support of public school instruction.

1688 — Patent, or charter, of town of Stratford, granted in 1688 in Governor and General Court, was recorded in the town records by Speaker Curtis.

1693 — Town ordered meetinghouse fortified as a place of security.

1690 — Samuel Wheeler leased the Stratford ferry to.

1689 — Last trial for witchcraft in Connecticut. (Mercy Bishop's) was held in Fairfield.

1695 — Ecclesiastical Society of Stratford was organized.

1701 — "James Benett, a shipwright, built a vessel at Stratford."

1706 — Birth of Elizhanet South, who first, in Connecticut, began a fund for relief of charity.

1708 — Death of Moses Wheeler, aged 100 years, the first ferryman.

1709 — Death of the Reverend Israel Chauncey.

1710 — Birth of the Hon. Robert Walker, noted lawyer and native in his time.

1705 — Indian capital, or "Council fire-place," at New Milford, sold.

1710 — The Rev. George Munson, Episcopal missionary at Rye, held services at Stratford and baptized twenty-four persons, "which was the first step toward introducing the church worship in the colony" (for Episcopalian)."}

1717 — Christ Church, first Episcopal parish in Connecticut, was founded.

1708 — The Rev. Munson died. Episcopal church left to occasional visit of missionaries.

1714 — Stratford church being butler settled as minister of Congregational church.

1710 — Birth of General David Wooster, Revolutionary War officer.

1710 — The Rev. Francis Philips, of Episcopal mission, located here about five months.


1734 — First service held in the First Episcopal Church building.

1732 — Episcopalians were excursion from New York, visited Episcopal parish. The building of a church edifice considered. The Rev. Hezekiah Gold called to be minister of Congregational church.

1730 — Robert Wheeler granted liberty to set up grist mill on east bank of Farm River.

1735 — Division of common lands ordered, which was not made until 1738.

1733 — The Rev. Samuel Johnson and others reorganized and set up a schoolhouse on the Common.

1738 — Supporters of the Episcopal church petitioned town for title to town commons lands for their minister. It was granted.

1736 — Birth, in Stratford, of Andrew Adams whose name appears signed to the Articles of Confederation.

1737 — All taxes, but tax money of Episcopalians turned back to their use.

1739 — Another request by part of common land for Episcopal church use, again granted.

1740 — Visit of the Rev. George Whitefield, who stood upon the steps of the Congregational Church on Academy Hill and preached to a great multitude.

1741 — Third Congregational church building erected, by taxation. Second Episcopal church building erected on Main Street, by stock ownership. Upon its spire is placed the weather-cock which tops the spire of the present edifice.

1744 — New Episcopal building, un Developers, and without peers, opened with a sermon by Dr. Johnson.

1745 — Public greens came into town's possession as gifts of private individuals.

1750 — Voted to build a town hall.
a Revolutionary War officer.

1779 - "Colonel Frazier's Highland Battalion was encamped on the common and amused themselves by shooting at the weather-cock on the Episcopal church spire, piercing it many times." Birth of Colonel Aaron Benjamin, who was in the attack on Stony Point.

1778 - First town meeting held in first town hall. Organized in Episcopal Church. Stratford and sister towns reorganized by General Assembly for quartering Colonel Frazier's Highland Battalion.

1770 - Town voted to build a "pease house." 1782 - Severe drought, but spring which answered the prayers of the Rev. Nathan Birdseye, in order never has dried. Episcopal bell cast in Fairfield.

1774 - Articles of Confederation carefully considered and approved.

1775 - "Cry" spread by on shore towns. Stratford people, terrified, circulated petition requesting William Samuel Johnson and other prominent people to use their influence with British Admiral and General to save Stratford. Johnson arrested, by orders of General Oliver Walcott and ordered sent to Farmington, undoubted, to prevent him holding correspondence with enemy. Johnson given parole, journeyed to place the case before Governor Trumbull and soon was investigated by Council of Safety. Town made effort to clear itself of charge of carrying on a traitorous correspondence with the enemy.

1776 - Town voted to provide one hundred of each of the following: shirts, mittens, stockings and shoes for soldiers from Stratford who were in active service. Birth of John Dunmon, Governor of Connecticut from 1827 to 1831 and U.S. Senator. Division of town into two townships considered.

1778 - May 4, General Assembly against division of town. Matter dropped.

1782 - Town authorized to "borrow money on the credit of the Town," for the first time, to pay public debt; to fill the quota for the army. Berkshire mill established.

1784 - May 30, 1784, as a day of "Public Rejoicing" for peace. Prayers, an address, singing, refreshments and toasts, and dressing of cannon made up the celebration. Birth of Hon. David Plant, four years later. Governor of Connecticut and member of Congress.

1784 - Ordination of Stephen William Stackhouse of Congregational Church, who "stopped the vandalism which cut away so much from Academy Hall and spoiled its symmetry.

1786 - Third Congregational Church struck by lightning and destroyed by fire.

1784 - Fourth Congregational Church built on location of present edifice and dedicated. Benjamin's Bridge built and Stratford Road (Avenue) opened.


1790 - Post office established with Robert Walker as first postmaster. Methodist Church organized in Stratford by Jesse Lee.

1791 - Methodist Bishop Asbury preached in the town house.

1759 - General Joseph Walker granted the privilege to build a grist mill at Benjamin's Bridge. This became the old "Yellow Mill.

1773 - F Day for bridge at the Ferry, before the General Assembly.

1796 - Birth of Capt. D. Polaski Benjamin, last survivor of the Continentals.

1797 - Town of Trumbull set off from Stratford.

1798 - Birthdate of Jesse Oney, A.M., author of a book on the history of his people, whose home was what is now the St. James rectory.

1799 - Epidemic of dysentery and typhus fever be- longing to be due to dyke built across Little Neck Creek.


1801 - "Turnpike era" under way.

1802 - Permission granted to build a toll bridge at the Ferry. Golden Hill Indian find established and still active.

1803 - Name "Washington Bridge" first used.

1804 - Stratford Academy established.

1855 - Town voted to again dyke at Little Neck.

1866 - "The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1867 - The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1879 - Fourth railroad train passed Stratford.

1890 - "The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1891 - The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1894 - "The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1897 - The Rev. Dr. Birdseye on the death of a gentleman who died on the same day of the death of the Rev. Dr. Birdseye.

1899 - Fifth and present Congregational Church built.

1905 - Dyke rebuilt at Little Neck Creek.

1911 - Civil War. Stratford men in Union ranks provided comforts for them and for wounded in hospitals.

1912 - The Rev. B.L. Swan, early town historian, resigned as pastor of Congregational Church.

1914 - The Rev. Louis R. Chappell pastor at First Congregational Church. Christ Church chapel erected.