Deaconess Association Window Displayed
At the Annual Meeting of the
Deaconess Abundant Life Communities
Annual Meeting in April

On Tuesday, April 12, at the invitation of Executive Director, Chris Sintros, my husband Vernon and I attended the annual meeting of the Deaconess Abundant Life Communities in Concord, MA, the current outgrowth of the New England Deaconess Association which was organized in 1899 in Boston, MA, just around the corner from the Tremont Street MEC in Boston. In 1940 when stained glass windows were installed throughout the church, two honoring the Deaconess Association and the Deaconess Hospital were installed in one of the Sunday school rooms.

About a year ago when the windows from the former Tremont Street MEC/New Hope Baptist church finally became available, Doreen Glynn, Director of Development at the Abundant Life Communities, was the first to claim her window and she is the first to have displayed at least a part of that window. The current plan is that the full window will eventually be installed in some manner in the chapel at the Abundant Life Communities site in Concord, MA. In the meantime, the top of the window was displayed at the annual meeting and Christ Sintros issued a huge “thank you” to the church and the Commission on Archives and History for making the window available to the Association. He noted that it was an important piece of their history and was excited that it would be able to be displayed in the near future.

Seven other windows – six honoring the early missionaries and leaders of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) and the window honoring the New England Deaconess Hospital have been claimed by Boston University School of Theology and will eventually be displayed somewhere in the school. At the day after the annual meeting, I was informed by Maurice Cottman from the New Hope Baptist church that the two windows naming the eight women who originally organized the WFMS had been picked up and are being stored in Lawrence, MA, while the conference determines where the new annual conference office will be located.
Following that notification, Cottman also indicated that the church was interested in giving away the remainder of the windows to anyone who might be interested in them. As a result, I sent out a memo to the hsumc-chat and archives e-lists and the annual conference newsletters indicating that the windows are now available. There has been some interest shown in obtaining some of the windows both from individuals and local churches. After all of the windows which individuals/churches are interested in have been claimed, I will issue a list of where the windows are located. It is my hope that eventually a brochure can be developed describing the various windows and where they are displayed so that folks can see them in their new environment.

**Luther and Lydia Sampson, Founders of Kent’s Hill School in Kent’s Hill, ME, Originally Members of Third Oldest Church in the United States**

In the Mid-Winter 2013 issue of the *United Methodist Messenger* I reported on a workshop in Duxbury, MA, originally owned by Luther Sampson, which had recently been discovered on the grounds of a private nursery school. The workshop has been determined to be the oldest existing joiner’s (carpenter’s) workshop in the country. In the late 1800’s Luther Sampson left Massachusetts and eventually settled in Kent’s Hill, ME, in the town of Readfield, and he and his second wife, Lydia (sister of Luther’s first Abigail, who died in 1788) founded the Maine Wesleyan Seminary in 1825, which became the conference seminary for the newly formed Maine Annual Conference.

About a year and a half ago, I met one of our newest members of the New England United Methodist Historical Society, at a meeting at our heritage museum at the conference office in Lawrence, MA. Prior to traveling to Concord, MA, for the annual meeting of the Deaconess Abundant Life Communities’ annual meeting, I asked Nancy about her visit to the workshop in Duxbury, about which we had talked briefly at the Lawrence meeting and found that it was possible to visit. Nancy also mentioned that when she had visited the workshop, she had also visited a church in Duxbury, attempting to locate the church where the Sampsons might have attended before moving to Maine, but had had no luck.

At that point, I had one of my “aha” moments. One of my best friends from college lives in the neighboring town of Marshfield, MA, and has attended for most of her life the First Congregational church in Marshfield, which is considered to be the third oldest congregation in the United States, being the second congregation to form out of the church originally formed in Plymouth, MA, by the Pilgrims. They are celebrating their 384th anniversary this year! I wondered – could this possibly be the church which the Sampsons attended?

I checked online to see if they had a website and found that they did and that the website had an extensive history printed in its entirety wherein I found the following quote:
The Church lost a number of families after 1780, when a group of young Marshfield men decided to migrate to Maine. One of those was Nathaniel Kent who died soon after the move, and the town they founded was named “Kent’s Hill” in his memory. Others who moved included his parents, Elisha and Susanna Ford Kent, his brother Charles Kent, and cousin John Kent. Another, Luther Sampson, founded the Wesleyan Seminary there, a school that is still in existence and is known as one of the first to offer co-education for boys and girls. His father, Paul Sampson, was the master carpenter on the meetinghouse in Marshfield, built in 1758 and taken down in 1837.

Further research uncovered the graves of Paul and Esther Sampson, Luther’s parents and his first wife, Abigail Ford, are buried in a small cemetery, known as the “Chapel Cemetery,” across the street from the First Congregational church and adjacent to the Parish House which also belongs to the church.

Nancy also has a family quilt which has squares signed by Sarah Bessey and Esther Sampson. These two women were daughters of Chandler and Nancy Thomas Sampson, Luther’s brother and his wife and long-time members of the First Congregational church of Marshfield, and they were both active in the First Congregational church. In her history of the church Linda Ashley describes the organization of the Ladies Benevolent Society which exists to the present day. Ashley says, “At the tenth anniversary of the Society in 1859, Sarah Sampson Bessey Thomas spoke these beautiful words, indicating the difficulties faced during the early years, and testifying to her support of the society. It is almost as if she is speaking to us:”

While we can barely find words to express the thankful feelings we owe our Pastor, we can hardly report the feelings of regret (I might say blame) at the indifference, yea even contempt, shown to us by (even) members of the church which we think should be always ready and willing to aid every good cause.

Some, we are aware, are bitter enemies of such societies, and think that no good comes from them, but we must claim the privilege to differ very widely from them. Having been a working member from the commencement of the formation of this society, I can heartily approve of it as a society to do good, and must say that if evils have arisen from it, I have not been able to see it. We have only to provide the different letters of thanks which have been received to cause our hearts to swell, our bosoms to heave, and a tear to moisten our eye, while thanks go up to the Heavenly Father that we have been willing to lay aside our own worldly affairs (perhaps at a great effort) and work for the poor, the sick, the widow, and the orphan, while the mission of extending the kindness of Christ has not been forgotten.

And can we, do we wish to, forget the gushing tears of warm gratitude which we have seen flow from the eyes of the poor but not forgotten widow? It is among our happiest recollection and one that we believe will go with us to the end of our lives.

I wish to leave my testimony in favor of what has been done thus far, with a longing desire that the film may be removed from their eyes and a glowing warmth of benevolence may spring up in other hearts, so that many that now stand aloof may become warm advocates and supporters of this good cause.

I have been induced to record my feelings here, that in after times, others may know the value I set upon it, and feeling that time with me may be short and if deprived of the use of a pen, I leave this as my last testimony, sincerely believing that there are many recollections of it which will go with me the other side of the river.

This was clearly one of the earliest women’s only church organizations and it was obviously not well accepted by some members of the church, but the women did not allow the opposition to stop their efforts.