

FCCEJ CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF SERVICE TO GOD AND COMMUNITY

Meet the First Congo Church Pastors from 1867 to 2017

In the first 150 years of its history, 24 senior pastors have served at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. Chronologically, they are Reverends Andrew Willard, Joshua Maynard, Edwin Wheelock, Charles Seaton, John Cowan, William English, Orlande White, Dwight Prentice, Theodore Bacon, Evan Thomas, Chauncey Adams, Elliott Foster, William Millar, Archie Axtell, Duncan Livingstone, Leslie Blundon, James Hutchinson, Earl Vincent, Robert Snelling, Maxwell Reader, David Brown, Robert Harding, Stephen Garvey, and Mark Mendes. The majority came to First Church from the New England States, and five were Canadians.

The first pastor, Reverend Andrew Willard, served both the Essex Center and the Essex Junction churches and left to become superintendent of schools in Burlington. After a year as superintendent, he entered the University of Vermont Medical School. Upon graduation, he studied mental and nervous disorders in New York City and then returned to Burlington to open a private practice. He was also an instructor in chemistry, toxicology and sanitary science at the UVM College of Medicine. In 1881, he became superintendent of the Mary Fletcher Hospital giving up his private practice and taking up residence at the hospital. In 1882, he established a training school for nurses at the hospital. Next, Dr. Willard established a rest cure for nervous individuals at the William Nervine Home, located in Burlington. It had all the comforts of a first class hotel with the necessary seclusion of a retreat. In 1899, ill health forced him to give up the sanitarium and he returned to private practice. (*Source: Historic Guides to Burlington Neighborhoods, Volume II, published by the Chittenden County Historical Society, 1997*)

Reverend Charles Seaton served from 1875 to 1876. He was a self-made minister without college or seminary training. Instead, he received special training under a local minister to better qualify himself. Reverend Seaton served churches in Charlotte and Colchester after Essex Junction and was known as a man of great natural aptitude.

Long time Essex residents may remember Reverend Maxwell Reader who was one of the five Canadians to serve as pastor. It was during his tenure that First Church voted to accept the constitution of the United Church of Christ and the one-story addition on Church Street was added. At the time of his resignation in 1969, he had served for twelve years -- the longest of any of the previous pastors. Since then both the Reverends Robert Harding and Stephen Garvey have served longer at fourteen and seventeen years, respectively.

Rev. Mark Mendes was installed as senior pastor at First Church on May 18, 2008. From 1990 to 2004 he had served as senior pastor at Second Church of Plymouth in Plymouth Massachusetts, and from 2004 to 2007 at Church of the Isles, UCC, in Indian Rocks Beach, Florida. He grew up in Coconut Grove, Florida, and attended Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC in Miami, Florida.

By Ann Gray