

Our History: Sources of Inspiration and Appreciation

Introduction

History helps us — not by letting us rewrite the past, but by inviting us to imagine it faithfully. Of course, we can carry that too far, as Paul warned the Philippians, and as Will Rogers joked more than once. But our windows, glowing with light in the night, remind us of people who burned with a spirit that animated them by day.

As we turn our attention to the stories in our windows this Sunday, we take a brief tour of our Ebenezers — the men and women whose lives are pictured in our stained-glass windows. Their stories have been gathered and preserved thanks to the work of Randy Belcher, Fred Cooper, Joe Marsh, Joe Parker, Jerry Beasley and many others.

A Brief Tour of Our Ebenezers

David and Hester Martin

In the early days of our community, families lived on scattered farms and saw one another only on rare occasions. Court days, camp meetings, and the occasional home-hosted church service were the few chances neighbors had to gather. As the old saying went, “All roads lead to Wabash.”

It was on one of those court-day gatherings that young David Martin arrived dressed in his finest—his stiff-bosomed shirt, celluloid collar and cuffs—and rode in on horseback with a friend. While strolling the grounds, he noticed a tall, dark-eyed brunette whose graceful carriage immediately caught his attention. David later claimed he “decided to cross her path somehow,” and though Hester always denied it, he insisted she walked *directly* into his way on purpose.

Whatever the truth, the meeting was providential. Seventeen months later, David and Hester were married, beginning a life together that would bless them with thirteen children—one every other year for twenty-four years. Their family line would eventually include the Oxleys, Keatleys, and Fannings.

In later years, camp meetings were held on the Martins’ property, and it was there that the local community made the decision to build three churches, planting the seeds of the congregations we know today.

William and Sarah Holroyd

William and Sarah Holroyd came from England during a time when life near Manchester was shaped by strict class divisions, limited education, and few opportunities for ordinary citizens to vote or advance. Most families rarely traveled far from home, and the Corn Laws kept daily life difficult for working people. William apprenticed as a carpenter, and in time

he married Sarah, beginning a partnership that would carry them far beyond the world they knew.

Their journey to America was bold and demanding: a 35-day voyage across the Atlantic, originally bound for California, where William hoped to minister to the rowdy miners of the Gold Rush era. Along the way, they adopted a son and met James French, who—along with his brother-in-law William Henderson—was involved in a land company that eventually drew the Holroyds eastward. They settled among mostly subsistence farmers and soon found themselves part of a growing community that included the Martins, Vermillions, and Fannings.

The Holroyds joined the Methodist movement, and William became the first minister of Bethel and later the second minister of Concord United Methodist Church. Their ministry unfolded through the trials of the Civil War: William served as a chaplain in French's unit, while Sarah remained at home, keeping their household and faith strong through uncertain times.

Over the years, the Holroyd home welcomed many distinguished visitors, including prominent political figures such as Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley, who traveled through the region. Family tradition recalls evenings of Scripture reading and hymn-singing with their guests — a testament to the Holroyds' warm hospitality and steadfast faith.

William and Sarah Reynolds

William and Sarah Reynolds married in 1852 and built a life marked by hard work, service, and deep commitment to education. Like many families of their time, they lived by the seasons: William taught school in the winter and farmed in the summer, balancing livelihood with a passion for learning.

During the Civil War, William served as a Major in the Confederate Army, while Sarah remained at home, sustaining their household through the uncertainties of wartime. After the war, William's leadership continued in civic life. He served as Superintendent of Mercer County Schools for three years, earning praise "with credit to himself and general satisfaction to the citizens."

His dedication to education did not stop there. Reynolds sponsored the legislation that established Concord as a branch of the State Normal School system — a milestone that would shape the future of the region. But legislation alone was not enough; a school needed a building. On July 26, 1875, he wrote to Princeton attorney John A. Douglas with a heartfelt plea for help in securing county support:

"We desire to employ you to assist in getting aid through the county court in completing the normal school building. Knowing you are a reasonable man, I make no inquiry as to the amount of the fee. You know you are my lawyer on all occasions. My reputation is at stake, in that the building be completed in a reasonable time, and I am exceedingly anxious that

there shall be no blight on my integrity. Make an effective effort and hold me responsible for the fee.”

His determination paid off. The building was completed, and Concord began its long history of educating generations of students. A later account described Reynolds with deep affection:

“Even now, though the frost of many winters has passed over him, his pleasure in the school and zeal for its advancement have never abated. By his kindness, he has endeared himself to many students whose course of study he directed.”

William and Sarah’s window stand as a tribute to steadfast faith, tireless work, and a lifelong devotion to learning.

James French Holroyd and Betty Lively Holroyd

James French Holroyd stepped into responsibility early in life. At just sixteen, he managed the family businesses while his parents traveled to England. By eighteen, he was running the local post office. Although not formally trained as a lawyer, he became the person neighbors turned to for practical legal help — writing deeds, preparing vouchers for Northern soldiers’ pensions, and offering steady, trustworthy advice.

His connection to Concord began almost at its founding. Holroyd became the first assistant (dean) of the institution and its first librarian, roles he carried with quiet dedication. Over the next 34 years, he taught history and mathematics, shaping generations of students. State Superintendent S.S. Shawkey once described him as: “As silent and steady as the growth of an oak tree, and as far-reaching as a strong and sure one.”

To countless students, he was affectionately known as “Uncle Jimmy.” A cherished photograph shows him with friends on the front porch of a Vermillion Street store, a gathering spot that feels like a foretaste of the Deli Mart conversations that, though now part of our past, still linger warmly in our memory.

Betty Lively Holroyd brought her own strength and determination to the story. As a young woman, she rode horseback with her brother from their home in Lowell to attend Concord, carrying her suitcase and umbrella along the way. Her brother, Frank Lively, would later become a Justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court.

Betty’s contributions to Athens and Mercer County were remarkable. She taught Bible class in this church, served as the first president of the Mercer Welfare Board, became the first woman member of the Athens Town Council, and founded both the Tri-Sigs and the Athens Women’s Club. Her leadership helped shape the civic and social life of the community for decades.

Together, James French and Betty Holroyd represent a legacy of education, service, and steadfast devotion to community — a legacy beautifully captured in their stained glass window.

Closing Reflection

Why pause on a Sunday morning for a history lesson? Because their story is our story. Their names may not be our family names, but their lives shaped the place where we worship, learn, and gather today. A revisionist historian could easily point out that they were as fallible as we are — they doubted, they sinned, they lost courage, they grew weary. Yet in the midst of ordinary human frailty, there were bright, shining moments when they worked for something larger than themselves: a town, a college, a church, a faith whose roots reach back through Samuel and Eli into the mists of pre-history.

We do not always get it right either. But we should remember the times we do — and remember that we have never done it alone. So when we walk past these lovely windows on summer evenings, let us remember and be thankful. And after we have given thanks, let us resolve to go and do likewise.

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The following highlights the stories behind our other windows:

Rev. S. R. Wheeler

The window honoring Rev. S. R. Wheeler bears the image of a broken column, a symbol long used in Christian art to represent a life cut short yet upheld by faith. It is a fitting tribute to a minister whose service to Concord United Methodist Church was sincere, steady, and deeply felt, even though his time among the congregation was brief.

Rev. Wheeler arrived in Athens during a period when the Methodist movement was expanding across the hills of southern West Virginia. The communities he served were small but devoted, shaped by the rhythms of farming, shared labor, and the close bonds that formed among neighbors who depended on one another. Ministers like Wheeler traveled circuit routes that demanded stamina and conviction, preaching in homes, schoolhouses, and the early church buildings that anchored rural life.

At Concord, Wheeler's ministry reflected the qualities most valued in frontier pastors: humility, perseverance, and a willingness to meet people where they were. His sermons were remembered as earnest and encouraging, offering Scripture as a steadying force during a time when families faced hardship, illness, and the uncertainties of post-war Appalachia. Though records of his life are modest, the affection with which the congregation later memorialized him speaks to the quiet strength of his leadership. The broken column in his window carries layered meaning. In classical symbolism, it marks a life interrupted—yet in Christian tradition, it also points to the promise that God completes what human hands cannot. Wheeler's ministry, though shortened, left an imprint on the early Concord community, strengthening the foundation laid by the families and pastors who came before him. His work became part of the living structure of the church, continued by those who followed.

Today, the window stands as a gentle reminder of the many servants whose names are not widely known but whose faithfulness shaped Concord's story. Rev. S. R. Wheeler's legacy endures not through long records or grand events, but through the devotion of a pastor who gave what he had, trusting that God would carry the rest.

Dr. William H. Holroyd

The window dedicated to Dr. William H. Holroyd honors a man whose life of service left a lasting imprint on both Concord United Methodist Church and the Athens community. Its imagery reflects the quiet strength and steady compassion that defined his vocation as a physician, a calling he carried out with deep commitment during a time when medical care was personal, demanding, and often shaped by the close-knit bonds of rural life.

Dr. Holroyd practiced medicine in an era when physicians traveled long distances, tended to families across generations, and served as both healer and counselor in moments of hardship. His work touched nearly every corner of the community, from the homes clustered around Concord University to the farms and hollows beyond town. Those who

knew him remembered not only his skill, but the gentleness with which he offered it—an approach rooted in faith, humility, and a sincere desire to ease suffering wherever he found it.

Within the life of the church, Dr. Holroyd embodied the qualities most cherished in Christian service: steadfastness, compassion, and a willingness to meet people in their need. His presence strengthened the congregation during seasons of growth and challenge, and his family's long connection to Concord helped shape the church's identity in its early decades. Though the details of his ministry are preserved more in memory than in written record, the affection with which the congregation later honored him speaks to the depth of his influence.

The symbol in his window carries layered meaning. It reflects a life devoted to healing and to the quiet, faithful work that often goes unnoticed yet sustains a community from within. In Christian tradition, such imagery points to the belief that acts of mercy—however small—become part of God's larger work of restoration. Dr. Holroyd's years of service, offered without fanfare, helped build the foundation upon which Concord's ministry continued to grow.

Today, the window stands as a gentle reminder of the many servants whose contributions shaped Concord's story. Dr. William H. Holroyd's legacy endures not through grand events or public acclaim, but through the steady devotion of a physician who cared deeply for his neighbors and trusted that his work, given faithfully, would bear fruit long after his lifetime.

Benjamin and Nancy Fanning

The window honoring Benjamin and Nancy Fanning bears the image of an open Bible and a lily — symbols of Scripture's enduring guidance and the resurrection hope at the heart of Christian faith. It is a fitting tribute to a couple whose lives helped shape both the early Methodist community in Athens and the identity of Concord United Methodist Church itself.

Benjamin and Nancy were among the earliest settlers in the Athens area, arriving during a time when the region was still a patchwork of farms, homesteads, and rough wagon roads. Like many families who came to the hills of southern West Virginia in the mid-19th century, they built their lives through steady labor, shared community, and deep reliance on faith. Before Concord had a sanctuary, before stained-glass windows cast color across its pews, worship often took place in the homes of families like the Fannings — places where Scripture was read, hymns were sung, and neighbors gathered for encouragement.

Benjamin played a particularly important role in the church's early history. When William H. French deeded land for a Methodist Episcopal Church South building on July 25, 1858, Benjamin Fanning was named as one of the trustees responsible for establishing the congregation on the very site where Concord United Methodist Church stands today. His

signature on that deed marks him as one of the foundational figures who helped transform scattered Methodist gatherings into a permanent church home.

The Fannings' influence extended beyond the church walls. In 1866, Benjamin's home became the first Post Office in the area, and he chose to name it "Concord Church," recognizing the congregation as the central landmark of the community. That simple act tied the identity of the town to the life of the church — a connection that continues more than a century and a half later.

The symbols in their window carry layered meaning. The **open Bible** reflects the role Scripture played in shaping their household and the early Methodist movement in Athens. The **lily**, long associated with resurrection and Christian hope, speaks to the enduring legacy of lives lived faithfully, even when the details of those lives fade from written record. Together, these symbols honor a couple whose quiet devotion helped lay the foundation upon which Concord's ministry would grow.

Today, the window stands as a reminder of the early families whose faithfulness built the community we inherit. Benjamin and Nancy Fanning's legacy endures not through grand achievements, but through the steady, foundational work of people who offered their homes, their labor, and their faith to the life of the church. Their story remains woven into Concord's history — a testament to the power of simple, steadfast service.

David and Hester Martin

The window honoring David and Hester Martin bears the emblem of **C & E**, encircled by olive branches — the historic symbol of **Christian Endeavour**, a movement that flourished in British Methodism during the late 1800s. Its presence in the window reflects the Martins' commitment to nurturing faith among young people and strengthening the spiritual life of the early Athens community. The olive branches, long associated with peace and steadfast devotion, underscore the quiet, enduring influence the Martins had on the congregation they helped shape.

David and Hester were part of the generation of families who settled in the Athens area when the region was still defined by small farms, close-knit neighborhoods, and the emerging presence of Concord College. Their story begins in Wabash, where they met at a court day gathering — an ordinary moment that became the foundation of a marriage marked by resilience, generosity, and deep faith. Seventeen months later they wed, eventually raising thirteen children whose descendants would include the Oxleys, Keatleys, and Fannings, families that remain woven into the life of the church today.

The Martins' property became one of the earliest gathering places for worship in the region. Long before Concord United Methodist Church had a sanctuary or stained-glass windows, camp meetings were held on their land, drawing neighbors from miles around for

preaching, singing, and fellowship. These meetings were more than religious services; they were moments of renewal for families who faced the daily challenges of rural life. In seasons when ministers traveled circuit routes and formal church buildings were scarce, families like the Martins provided the spiritual anchor the community needed.

The **Christian Endeavour symbol** in their window carries layered meaning. Founded in 1881, the movement emphasized youth discipleship, personal commitment to Christ, and active participation in the life of the church. Its presence in the Martins' memorial suggests that their home was not only a place of worship but also a place where young people were encouraged to grow in faith, responsibility, and service. The olive branches surrounding the emblem echo the peace and unity that Christian Endeavour sought to cultivate — qualities the Martins embodied in their daily lives.

Today, the window stands as a tribute to a family whose hospitality, faith, and steadfast devotion helped lay the groundwork for Concord's ministry. David and Hester Martin's legacy endures not through extensive records or public acclaim, but through the memory of a family who opened their land, welcomed their neighbors, and nurtured the next generation in Christian faith. Their story remains an essential part of Concord's history — a reminder that the strength of a church often begins with the quiet faithfulness of ordinary families who give generously of themselves, trusting God to bless the rest.

The American Literary Society & The Philomathean Literary Society

The windows in the Anchor Room at the back of the sanctuary honor two student organizations from **Concord State Normal School—the American Literary Society** and the **Philomathean Literary Society**—groups that played a formative role in shaping both the academic and cultural life of early Concord students. Their presence in the church's windows reflects a time when the bonds between the school and the Methodist congregation were deep, natural, and mutually sustaining.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, literary societies were central to student life at many colleges and normal schools. They offered young scholars opportunities that extended far beyond the classroom: public speaking, debate, writing, music, and the disciplined study of literature. For many students—especially those from rural communities, these societies provided their first structured experience of intellectual community, encouraging confidence, curiosity, and leadership.

The American Literary Society fostered a spirit of civic engagement and broad learning. Its members explored themes of national identity, public service, and the responsibilities of educated citizens. Meetings often included orations, readings, and spirited discussions that helped students develop the skills needed for teaching, ministry, and public life. In a

region where educational opportunities were still emerging, the society offered a place where young people could stretch their minds and imagine wider horizons.

The Philomathean Literary Society, whose name comes from the Greek *philomathēs*—“lover of learning”—cultivated a more classical and philosophical approach. Its members devoted themselves to the study of literature, rhetoric, and moral reasoning, believing that disciplined thought and eloquent expression were essential to shaping character. Their gatherings blended scholarship with fellowship, creating a community where learning was both serious and joyful.

That these societies are memorialized in the Anchor Room speaks to the close relationship between Concord State Normal School and Concord United Methodist Church. Students worshiped here, sang in the choir, attended Sunday School, and found mentors among the congregation. The church offered spiritual grounding, while the school offered intellectual formation; together they shaped generations of young adults who carried their learning and faith into classrooms, churches, and communities across West Virginia and beyond.

The windows stand today as reminders of a time when education and faith were intertwined in the daily life of Athens. They honor not only the societies themselves but the countless students who gathered in their meetings—young people who loved learning, sought wisdom, and found in this church a place of welcome and belonging.

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The stained-glass windows that grace the sanctuary of Concord United Methodist Church were installed during the construction of the present church building, completed in 1907. This structure—the third to stand on the original 1858 church lot—was designed in the early-20th-century Methodist style, a period when congregations across Appalachia began incorporating symbolic stained glass as part of their worship spaces. For Concord, the windows were not an afterthought but an intentional part of the sanctuary’s character from the very beginning.

Earlier church buildings had been simpler in form. The first, built in 1858, was a modest frame structure without decorative glass. The second, erected in 1886, added a steeple and bell but still relied on plain windows typical of rural churches of that era. It was only with the 1907 sanctuary—larger, sturdier, and built to serve a growing congregation—that Concord embraced the beauty and symbolism of stained glass.

The windows installed at that time reflected the people and organizations who shaped the life of the church: families like the Holroyds, Fannings, Martins, and Reynolds; pastors such as Rev. S. R. Wheeler; and even the student literary societies of Concord State Normal School. Their images—open Bibles, lilies, anchors, broken columns, and emblems of learning—were chosen to speak to faith, hope, service, and the pursuit of knowledge. More than a century later, these windows continue to cast their colored light across the sanctuary, linking today’s worshippers with the generations who built, served, and

dreamed before us. They remain one of the most enduring expressions of Concord's heritage: a blend of faith, community, and the quiet artistry of those who sought to honor God through beauty.

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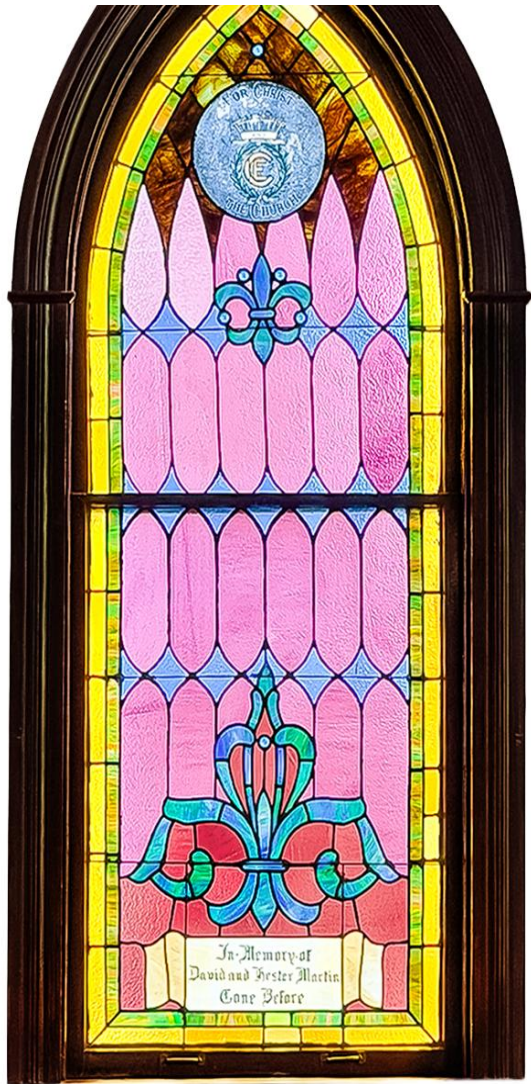
The windows were installed with the construction of the current sanctuary in 1905–1907. The present church building — the third structure on the site — was completed in 1907, and the historical record explicitly notes that this building *included stained-glass windows* as part of its original design.

Supporting details from the historical record

The first building (1858) did not have stained glass.

The second building (1886) was a frame structure with a steeple and bell — again, no mention of stained glass.

The third and current building, completed in 1907, is the first to include stained-glass windows. This aligns with the architectural style of early-20th-century Methodist churches, which often incorporated symbolic stained glass as part of their sanctuary design.



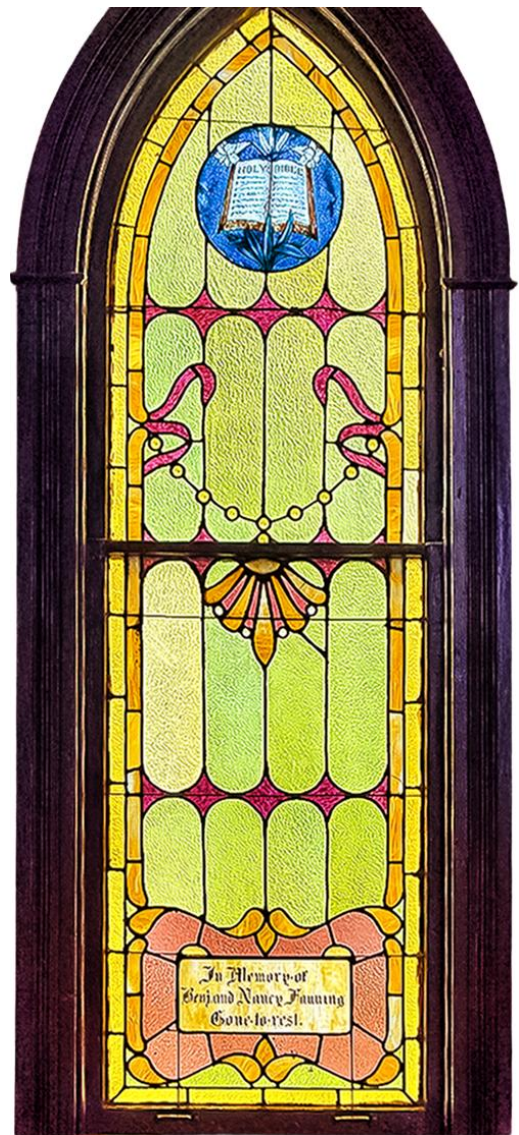
In Memory of David and Hester
Martins – Gone Before



In Memory of William and Sarah
Reynolds



In Memory of William and Sarah
Holroyd



In Memory of Benjamin and Nancy
Fanning – Gone to Rest