

St. Mary's-by-the-Sea

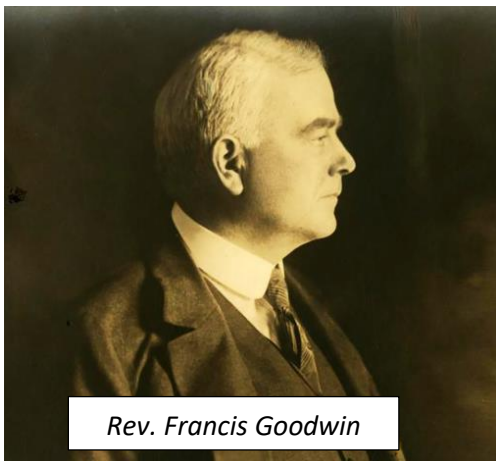
The Pope of Fenwick, a Family Feud, and Medieval-style Wood Carving

(By Lamar LeMonte, OSHS October 2021)

A charming, wooden, summer-chapel in Fenwick is emblematic of many Fenwick structures built in the late 1800s. It was a peaceful, neutral refuge during a turn-of-the-century period of social rivalries and a family feud. Used only two months out of the year for Sunday services, it endures today in its original character.



The New Saybrook Company began selling Fenwick summer cottage building lots to wealthy investors in 1870. By the 1880s, Fenwick cottage owners were very much a reflection of wealthy Hartford and Middletown families. Numerous



Rev. Francis Goodwin

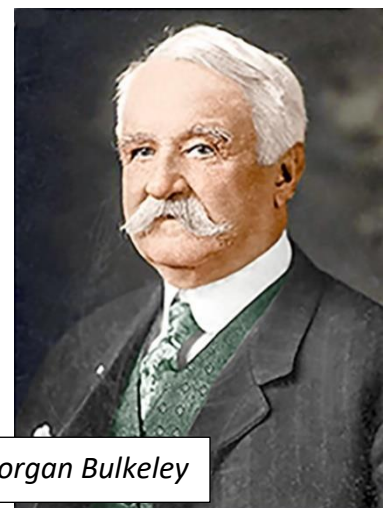
existing relationships from both cities, social and professional, came together in Fenwick during the summers. Those relationships were intertwined by marriages, politics, banking, Hartford insurance companies and church affiliations. Early on, the most prominent church connection was the Hartford-Middletown Episcopalian denomination. During the summer in Fenwick, their spiritual leader was the Reverend Francis Goodwin (1839-1923).

It was in 1880 that Episcopal Reverend Francis Goodwin started holding religious services for the summer residents of Fenwick in the living room of his new cottage. The alternative was a long horse and carriage ride across the wooden bridge to Saybrook Point, then up the road to the Grace Church in Old Saybrook. Three years later, too many families plus occasional guests from the Fenwick Hall hotel were crowding into his home on Sundays. So Goodwin decided to design a separate chapel to be built on his property behind his house. In 1886, that chapel was then moved across the street to another lot, adjacent to the golf course. The chapel was enlarged with more pews and a small bell tower was added. That is the St. Mary's-by-the-Sea that exists today.

The Goodwin-Bulkeley rivalry

Francis Goodwin lived in Hartford and was a descendant of one of Hartford's founding families. He and his family were wealthy, and Francis was recognized at one time as Hartford's largest individual tax payer. His Hartford family tree contained many other wealthy Hartford notables, including his first cousin, J. Pierpont Morgan. Goodwin was both an amateur architect (he designed St. Mary's-by-the-Sea and his father's home in Hartford) and an amateur landscape architect (a close friend was Hartford native Frederick Law Olmstead, designer of New York's Central Park). Goodwin was also a botanist and an ardent supporter of public parks. In fact he became the first commissioner of the Hartford Parks Commission and he championed the cause of green spaces with his slogan, "More Parks for Hartford!" He was also a savvy investor, especially in land, and he purchased several of the Fenwick building lots being sold by the New Saybrook Company. He built his summer cottage on one lot and sold several of his other lots to friends and associates.

His wealth and prominence in Hartford society often put him at social and political odds with the powerful and very popular Morgan Bulkeley (1837-1922), then the mayor of Hartford. There was a long-standing rivalry between the two. They were often at odds with each other when it came to Hartford city land permits, even in what parks statues could be placed. The Goodwin family ran Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company; the Bulkeley family ran the competing Aetna Life Insurance Company.

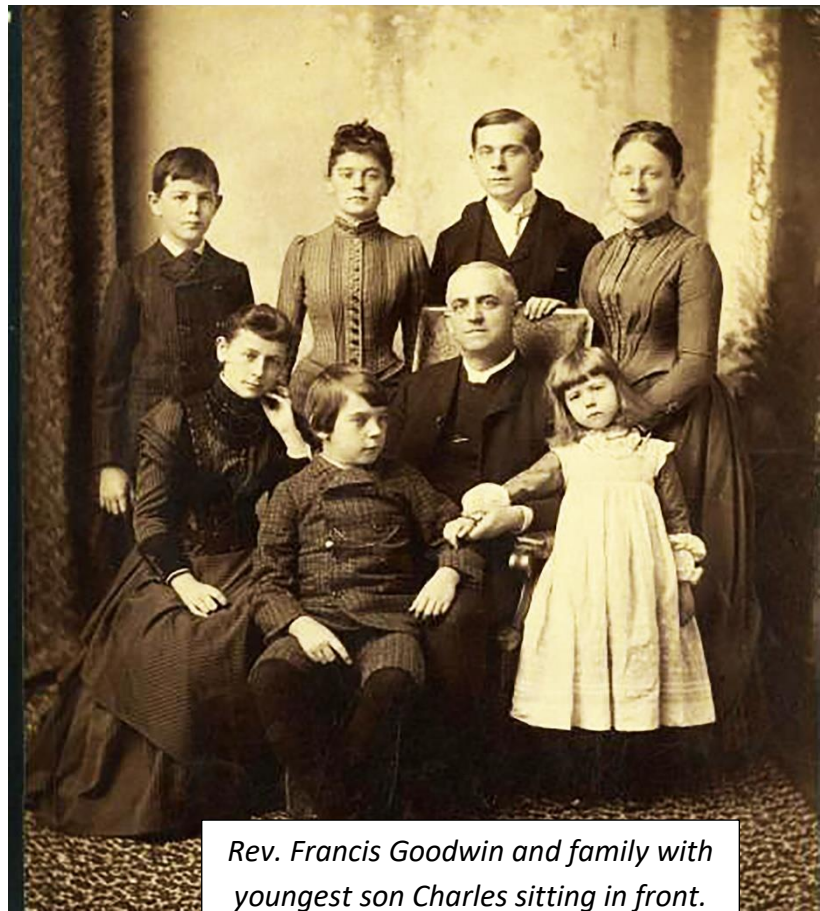


Morgan Bulkeley

Morgan Bulkeley was commodore of the Fenwick Yacht Club. Francis Goodwin was commodore of the Hartford Yacht Club's Fenwick station and then the subsequent Dauntless Club in Essex. They were approximately the same age, and like many of their wealthy peers, both spent their summers in Fenwick. One of Bulkeley's biographers asserts that Bulkeley always had a chip on his shoulder "when it came to Frankie Goodwin." Unlike Goodwin, Bulkeley reportedly never finished high school. Earlier, Bulkeley's father had been ousted as the first president of the Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company, financed and run by the Goodwin and Morgan families. He then founded Aetna Insurance. All this was public knowledge. A rivalry between these two families was incubated from an early age, and it ultimately led to a Fenwick family feud decades later.

Rev. Francis Goodwin

Despite his family wealth and connections to prominent Hartford bankers and politicians, Goodwin decided not to enter the world of politics, insurance or finance and instead attended the Berkeley Divinity School in Middletown. Berkeley was a seminary of the Episcopal Church. The school moved to New Haven in 1928 and is now part of Yale University. While at Berkeley, Goodwin met and married Mary Alsop Jackson (1842-1922), a fellow Episcopalian and a member of a prominent banking family with strong ties to the Berkeley Divinity School. They had six children who survived childbirth. The youngest son, Charles Archibald Goodwin (1876-1954), would have a lasting impact on the Fenwick chapel that his father had designed.



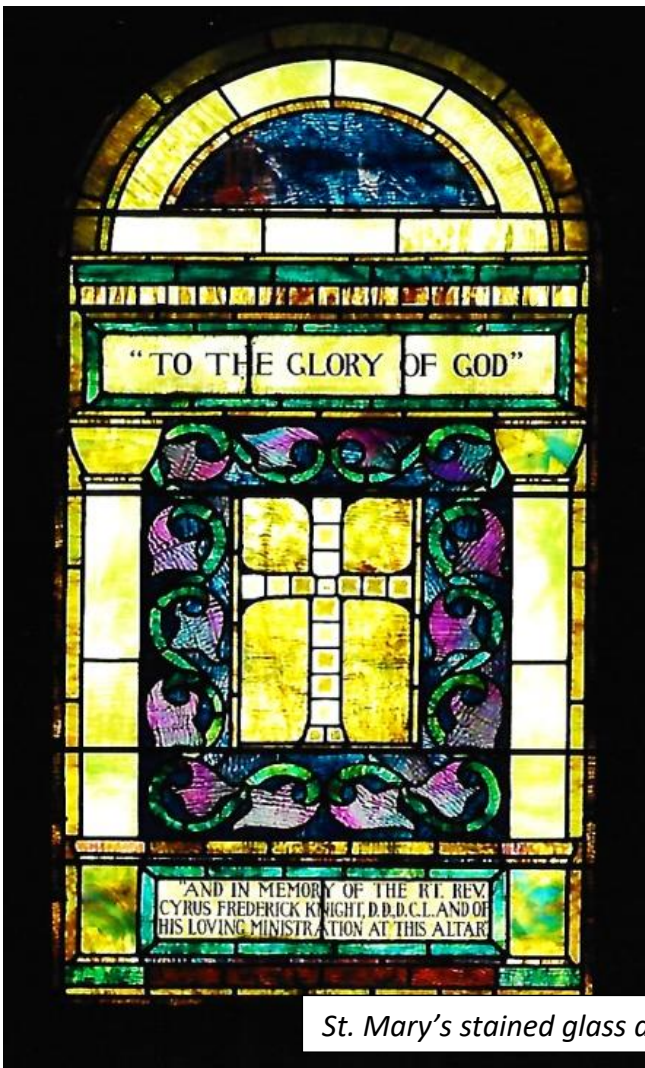
Rev. Francis Goodwin and family with youngest son Charles sitting in front.

Fenwick and Episcopalians

Francis Goodwin and his wife Mary were devout Episcopalians. Many of their Hartford and Middletown friends and acquaintances were members of the Episcopal clergy and they too began to spend their summers in Fenwick. The Berkeley Divinity School was founded by John Williams, an Episcopal bishop and president of Trinity College in Hartford. Trinity College would repeatedly play a role in connecting Hartford, Fenwick, Episcopalians and St. Mary's-by-the-Sea.



Trinity College chapel



St. Mary's stained glass altar-window

After being ordained, Goodwin rose in the Episcopal ranks and over the years was put in charge of several prominent churches around Connecticut. His Fenwick summer cottage was literally surrounded by Episcopal neighbors and senior Episcopal clergy, including Bishop Cyrus Frederick Knight who later became the Bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee. According to Fenwick historian Marion Hepburn Grant, Bishop Knight was very active in the Fenwick chapel and the stained glass window above the altar was dedicated to his memory. Other Fenwick neighbors included Bishop William Ford Nichols, a graduate of both Trinity College in Hartford and the Berkeley School of Divinity in Middletown. Goodwin also sold a lot to Reverend Frederick Howden, who later became the Bishop of Washington, D.C.



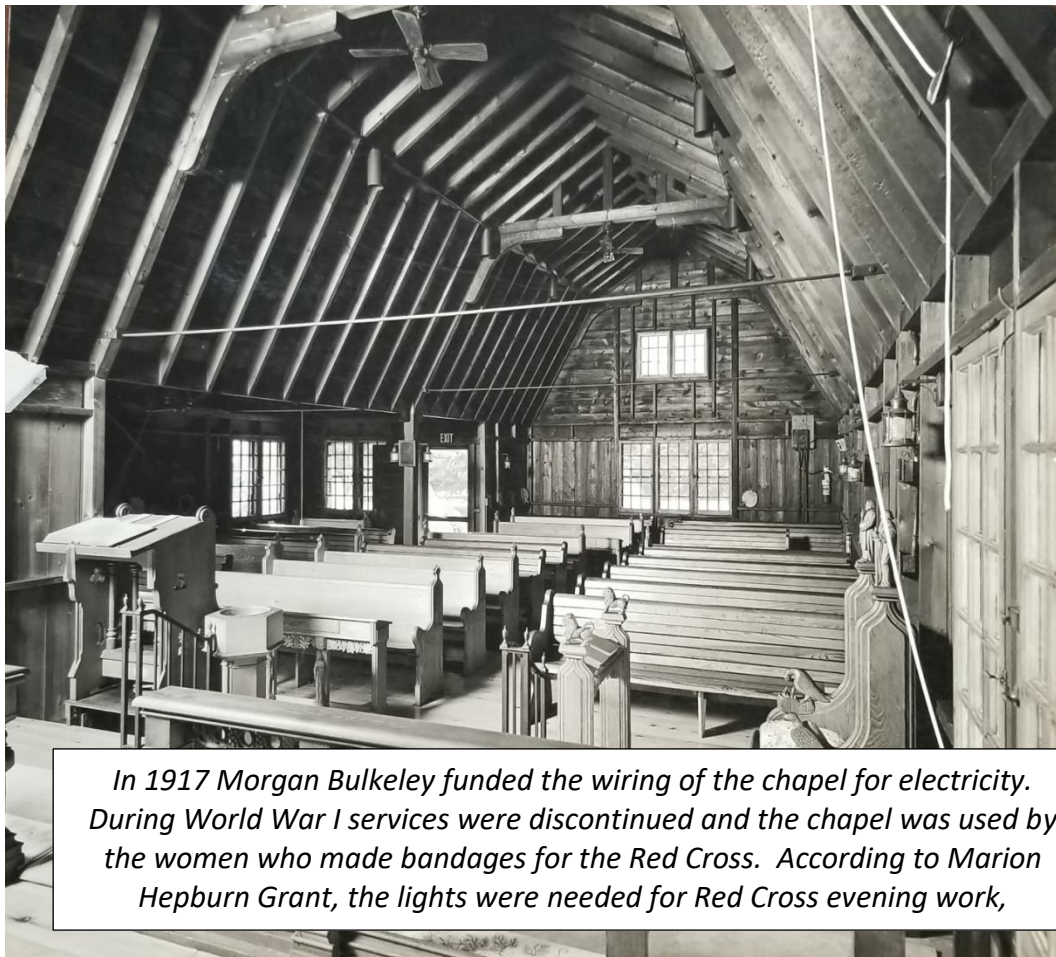
Francis Goodwin (center) and his extended family

With his formal education and ordainment, plus having several senior Episcopalian clergy neighbors, it would have been reasonable to assume that his summer chapel would become an Episcopalian chapel. But Francis Goodwin insisted that the Fenwick chapel be non-denominational, which it was and still is.

This was not only a generous and accommodating gesture by Goodwin, but also perhaps a wise social gesture to the summer residents of Fenwick. Even though Goodwin and his fellow Episcopalians held a formidable social position in Fenwick at that time, there was another social group who would later become even more prominent as leaders of Fenwick. They were originally all Congregationalists, headed by Eliphalet Bulkeley and later his son, Morgan G. Bulkeley, and the Brainard families, all of whom spent their summers in Fenwick. Eliphalet Bulkeley was a founder of the Pearl Street Congregational Church in Hartford. Morgan Bulkeley's sister married into the Brainard family and spent her summers in Fenwick several years before her brother, Morgan, built his cottage there. By 1900, the Bulkeley and Brainard clan would become Fenwick's more prominent social group.

Peter Bulkeley, now in his 90s, is the grandson of Morgan Bulkeley. He remembers there was actually a dividing line between the two groups. Fenwick's Pattaquasett Avenue runs north and south. The Bulkeley-Brainard clan all lived east of the road, and the Goodwin-Jackson-Morgan clan lived west of the road.

An historian writing about these two social clans might conclude it was the beginning of a classic Fenwick family feud, ala the Hatfields and McCoys, Episcopalians versus the Congregationalists. But it wasn't. There were no spiritual conflicts between these Fenwick families within the non-denominational chapel. In fact, both the Bulkeleys and the Brainards became strong supporters of the chapel. Morgan Bulkeley's wife Fannie Briggs Haughton (1860-1938) was an Episcopalian, and was married in San Francisco's Trinity Church by the first Episcopalian Bishop of California. Congregationalist Edith Brainard, part of the Bulkeley-Brainard clan, married Col. J. H. Kelso Davis, a Trinity graduate and devout Episcopalian. Marion Hepburn Grant relates: *These two women (Fannie and Edith) no doubt helped to sponsor a general feeling of ecumenicism in the borough between the two most prominent religious denominations.*



In 1917 Morgan Bulkeley funded the wiring of the chapel for electricity. During World War I services were discontinued and the chapel was used by the women who made bandages for the Red Cross. According to Marion Hepburn Grant, the lights were needed for Red Cross evening work,

Edith Brainard Davis and her husband Col. J. H. Kelso Davis, as a young couple, were invited to be active participants in Goodwin's Fenwick chapel. Marion Hepburn Grant wrote: *The Davises became so important to the borough's chapel that Mr. Davis was affectionately dubbed, "The Pope of Fenwick."*

The Davises started inviting guest preachers to the chapel on Sundays. Their daughter, Martha Davis Soper, inherited the job, and then passed it on to her daughters, who continued to invite ministers of various denominations to lead the prayers. According to a 1994 article in the *Hartford Courant*, Martha Soper's daughter, Sallie Boody, was one of three chapel trustees, along with her sister, Julie Parsons, and her cousin, Ethel Davis. As children they were responsible for posting a sign out front just before Sunday services, advising golfers to steer clear of the chapel for the duration of the service.



Marion Hepburn Grant recalls: "Early on, the golf hole running by the chapel was never played on Sunday mornings. This continued to be the custom until recent years (i.e. 1974). Now the golfing 'sinners' regularly bombard the church with golf balls, even during services."

Peter Bulkeley recalled when he was in his teens, “Colonel Davis appointed me the chapel bell-ringer. My job was to unlock the doors on Sunday, and then count the number of attendees. I had to ring the bell in scheduled intervals, leading up to the beginning of the service. I was in charge of counting the money from the collection plate and paying the minister from those funds. I think it was around \$25. The remaining funds were left for Colonel Davis. I think I was supposed to nominate my successor. I believe I picked my cousin Newton.”

“I was baptized in that chapel, in 1932. Our family’s pew was in the rear of the chapel, behind my grandfather’s. I remember the Goodwin’s pew was up front, nearest the altar. I’ll tell you, except for a new organ or two, the chapel has changed very little in all this time.”

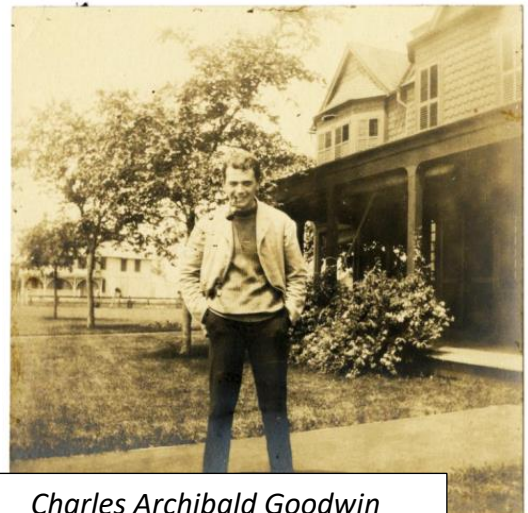
The Feud

There was a feud. In her book, *The Fenwick Story*, Marion Hepburn Grant wrote: *Every time in history has its conflicts—economic, political and religious. Alas, the little summer colony of Fenwick was no exception to this rule! The Goodwin-Jackson-Morgan clan and the Bulkeley-Brainard clan were the two most powerful in Fenwick. They vied for dominance in the Hartford business and political arena.*

The feud was complicated, personal and political. Since it was not a spiritual disagreement, it would not necessarily be a topic related to St. Mary’s-by-the-Sea. Except that the feud involved Francis Goodwin’s youngest son, Charles Archibald Goodwin and Morgan Bulkeley, who was then a United States Senator.

In 1910 Morgan Bulkeley, then at the end of his term, disapproved of Francis Goodwin’s son, Charles, running for Governor of Connecticut.

Charles Archibald Goodwin was a young, handsome, successful Hartford lawyer. Bulkeley had watched him grow up at Fenwick, saw him become a championship sailor and near scratch golfer. But the long-standing rivalry and competitive ill-will between the two families still existed and it was then directed at the son.

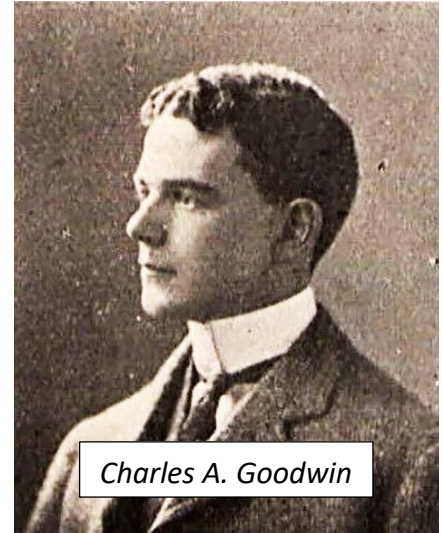


Charles Archibald Goodwin



Young Charlie sailing

Bulkeley and the younger Goodwin were both Republicans but Bulkeley, whose father helped establish Connecticut's Republican Party, decided to support the Democratic candidate for governor, 70 year old Simeon Baldwin. Dirty campaign tricks were reported in the press,

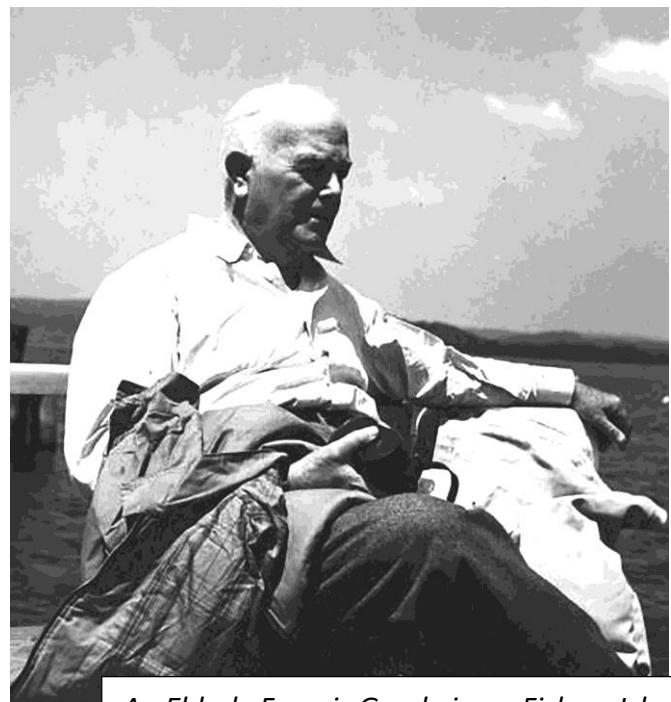


Charles A. Goodwin

including not-so-subtle hints that Goodwin's relative, J.P.Morgan, was helping to buy him votes. These campaign guiles were blamed on Bulkeley and his fellow Hartford power-brokers. The actual degree of Bulkeley's involvement is unknown.

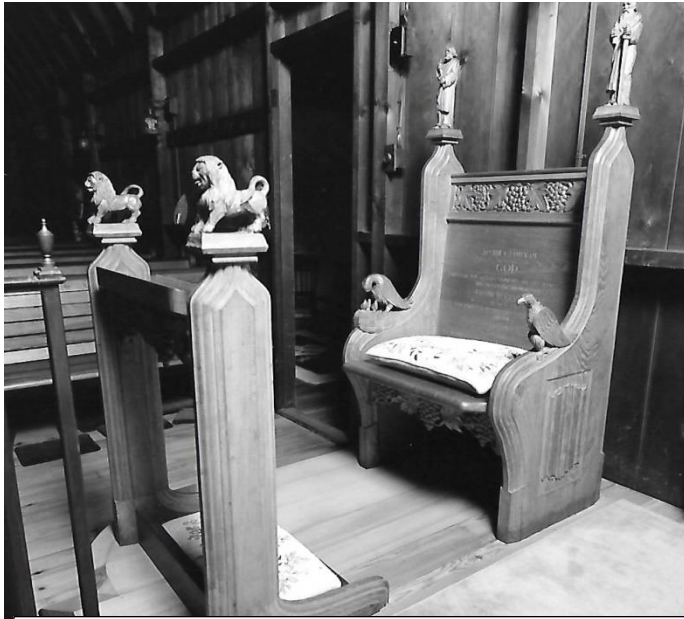
Goodwin lost the election to Baldwin by only 4,000 votes, and the Goodwin family personally blamed Morgan Bulkeley. Charles got married two years later and decided his children would spend their summers at the new Goodwin cottage on Fishers Island, not Fenwick. He summered there for the next three decades and the Goodwin's Fenwick cottage was rented out. Charles and his family didn't return to Fenwick until the early 1940's. His self-imposed exile from Fenwick was blamed on Morgan Bulkeley and the 1910 election.

Reverend Francis Goodwin died in 1923 during the family's absence from Fenwick. Morgan Bulkeley had died the year before. The death of these two patriarchs marked the end of the long-standing rivalry between the two families. Having reached an armistice, Charles Goodwin returned to his Fenwick property with renewed interest in the status of his father's chapel.



An Elderly Francis Goodwin on Fishers Island

Charles helped formalize the appointment of successor-trustees of the chapel. In 1944 he wrote the “Fenwick Hymn,” which is still sung today. Peter Bulkeley affirms that he is the only person still alive today who heard the hymn sung for the first time in 1944.



The chair and kneeling desk, carved by Gregory Wiggins, were given in memory of Francis and Mary Alsop Goodwin by their son, Charles A. Goodwin, in 1944. It was for that occasion that he wrote the Fenwick Hymn.

Charles also collaborated with other Fenwick families to help embellish the old chapel. Once again, there was a Hartford-Trinity College-Episcopalian connection. Wood carver John Gregory Wiggins had been carving interior elements for the Trinity Chapel in Hartford. The Fenwick committee commissioned him to create additions to their chapel interior. These remarkable carved wooden pieces by Wiggins in the 1940s still adorn St. Mary’s-by-the-Sea.

John Gregory Wiggins (1893 – 1956)

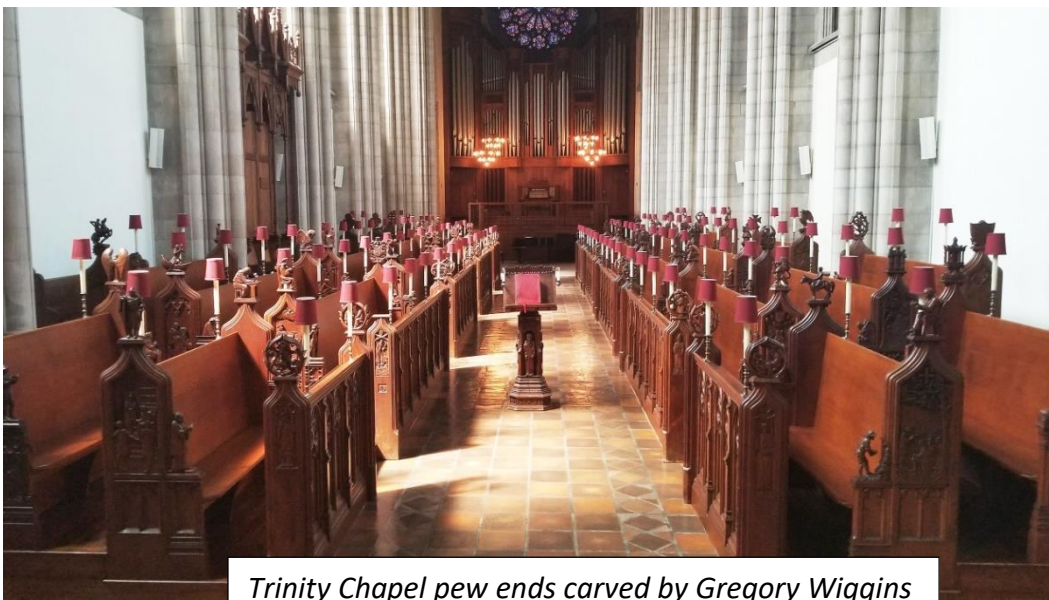
Gregory Wiggins was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His father died when he was a child, and his mother obtained a position running the private college-preparatory Pomfret School in Pomfret, Connecticut. He attended that school and then Harvard College. After college, Wiggins joined the faculty at St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire. For four years from 1912-1916, he taught Latin, Greek, and German, and coached crew. There he began to perfect his hobby of wood carving, but it was interrupted by World War I. During the war Wiggins joined the American Field Service, an alternative to military service, and drove an ambulance in France. After the war, he began a full-time career as a wood carver and lived back in Pomfret, Connecticut.



Wiggins in his workshop



Wiggins carved ornamental wood pieces for private homes, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, churches, private schools and colleges, including St. Paul's and Trinity College. His most numerous and best known carvings are his ecclesiastical works, largely done in a Gothic framework and reflecting the spirit of the Middle Ages. His most ambitious single commission undertaken in this vein was to carve the woodwork and church furniture in the chapel of Trinity College, in Hartford. He was judged to be the perfect candidate to embellish St. Mary's-by-the-Sea.



Trinity Chapel pew ends carved by Gregory Wiggins

Many of the Wiggins carvings grew out of his particular interest in Christian animal-symbolism. Other carvings represented symbolic forms of the Christian Bible, its Saints, Prophets, Apostles.

(Far right) A typical pew end at Trinity Chapel

(Middle) An eagle representing the resurrection of Christ

(Right) The pelican as a symbol of Christ's self-sacrificing





The Chapel still closes its doors in the fall, when almost 150 years ago, the summer residents of Fenwick would leave their vacation cottages to return to their city homes. Each spring, decisions are made about its reopening and who will be invited to preach on Sundays. The chapel has hosted weddings, birthdays, christenings, remembrances, recitals, and other public gatherings. The July and August Sunday services continue to be open to the public.

The hope of anyone who knows the chapel is that this quaint vestige of summer Sundays from the 1800s will continue its tradition of hosting interfaith gatherings.

Special thanks:

- To **Sallie Boody** for access to the black & white photos of the chapel interior, taken by Old Saybrook resident Ben Rosenthal
- To **Peter Bulkeley** for his recollections and gracious consent to be interviewed

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