

Brief History of Second Baptist Church of Suffield and Suffield Academy

Baptists established their first church in Connecticut in Groton in 1705 and, in 1769, the first Baptist church in Hartford County was created when a congregation of Separatists became the First Baptist Church of Suffield. By 1800, this church was the seventh largest Baptist congregation in Connecticut and provided state leaders. One of them, Ephraim Robbins, along with two other members of the Danbury Association, wrote a letter in 1801 to President Thomas Jefferson concerning religious liberty and in 1802, Jefferson responded with a letter which included the phrase “wall of separation” between church and state. In 1805, fifteen members of First Baptist formed Second Baptist Church of Suffield.

The Connecticut Baptist Education Society was created in 1819 by Connecticut Baptists and a year later incorporated a school to prepare young men for the ministry. In 1832, any town which raised \$5,000 would get the school - citizens of Suffield, Baptists and non-Baptists raised almost \$5,000 and “won” the school. The Connecticut Baptist Literary Institution opened in 1833 and its first building was completed in 1834. A year later, “Baptist” was dropped from the name because non-Baptists had contributed money and their children could attend the school. Women were admitted in 1843 as the school’s purpose was expanded; leaders and pastors of Second Baptist Church provided strong support.

A young, dynamic minister, Dr. Dwight Ives, came to Second Baptist Church in 1839 partly because of the Connecticut Literary Institution (CLI). He became an active supporter in terms of “marketing” and advising the administration of the school until his departure from Second Baptist in 1874. He was a major force in the strong growth of the CLI from 1843-1870. In 1898, the town of Suffield created a high school which would be provided by the CLI. CLI became known as Suffield School in 1912 and, when the town built its own high school building in 1939, the name Suffield Academy came into use. Second Baptist members continued to provide leadership during these years of change. Edward A. Fuller, a member and leading citizen of the town, was a member of the Academy’s Board of Trustees in the late 1800’s and Chairman in the early 1900’s contributing time and money to its support. Second Baptist’s church building (1840) was used by the Academy for a variety of activities and students attended worship services.

Suffield Academy suffered a serious financial situation during WW II; in 1952, Appleton Seaverns became Headmaster and he “saved” the Academy through his leadership and financial resources. After Rev. Joseph A. Sisk became Pastor of Second Baptist in 1954, Seaverns expanded the Academy’s curriculum with courses on religion taught by Rev. Sisk. The Academy eventually hired its own chaplain who taught the religion courses. The Academy held weekly chapel services and its Baccalaureate program in the sanctuary of Second Baptist and many students attended Sunday morning worship and the Sunday evening youth group meetings (girls were a main attraction as the Academy was male at that time.)

Second Baptist has used Academy facilities occasionally. In 1994, Second Baptist utilized space for a retreat and when the church hosted ABCCONN’s 175th Anniversary celebration in 1999, the dinner was held in the Academy’s dining room. Also, the church has used Academy lawn space for Sunday School activities.

The Academy (which is now co-ed) continues to use the sanctuary for weekly chapel services and other special programs. Suffield Academy is now non-denominational but still recognizes its historical connection to Second Baptist Church.

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Second Baptist Church of Suffield