



RICHARD VOGT.



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MEETINGHOUSE NEWS COLUMNS



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT



Issue 57 May 8th, 1969

these are the generations of noah . . .

Chaos has set in. The Church staff is agitated; the Pastors are pensive; the animals are restless . . . the whole world of Noah's Ark has invaded First Church once again. Children feel free to roar and squeak; adults bark and squawk in unison. This is probably the only time in many calorie-conscious lives when a statement like "You really do look like an elephant!!" can be taken as a compliment. With the meshing of all ages and innumerable talents Benjamin Britten's *NOYE'S FLUDDE* will soon sweep over us, gathering us into what Britten calls "this holy triangle of composer, performer, and listener."

And this year Noah will reach into new lives. At one performance we will bring children and adults to First Church who would not ordinarily have the opportunity to witness an event like this: trains and buses will bring youngsters from Harlem, Stamford and Greenwich; private cars will bring adults from retirement homes. And after that performance those welcome children and adults will be served cake and ice cream in the June Binney Auditorium. YOU can be involved with this part of Noah: if you will bake a cake or brownies, or help serve, call Betsy Pearson (637-0994) and offer your help.

In the folder which you received in the mail concerning this year's production we ask for your contribution. That contribution will involve you as patrons in an adventure that captures hearts and lives. The folder also includes a list of books about animals and nature, some of which portray the life of a rascal raccoon or an animal family, and others, such as Josephine Johnson's *The Inland Island*, which concern the silent Springs of our lives more deeply.

Because our lives and our times demand new Noahs. We have had enough killing of men and animals and water and air to last forever. We must work to be apprentice Noahs, and then no flood will ever drown us. We will drown the floods.

. . . richard vogt

MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT



Issue 63 August 7th, 1969

meanwhile, back on earth . . .

by richard vogt

Surveying my dent-ridden VW during the rains last week I took comfort in Volkswagen's current moon-flavored advertisement, a picture of the lunar module with the caption: "It's ugly, but it gets you there." But the lunar module is now in orbit, jettisoned off to glory among the stars, while my VW is still being parked into by unknown earthmen. There's a moral here somewhere.

The moon has changed our lives. The overworked word "meaningful" has almost given way to "fantastic", and suddenly we are all members of optimist clubs. From these days forward we dare not roll our eyes heavenward in disbelief at a child's fantasies. Anything may be possible.

And this leaves us with Earth, where things are also possible. Astronaut Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin quoted Psalm 8 during Apollo's homeward journey:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

And the verses which follow tell the Lord's giant leap of faith in that man:

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

A little lower than the angels, where war and hunger must be no more; where disease and poverty must die; where peace must be a way of life; where the air must be clear and the waters pure; where men and mind and money must meet to build a base for tranquility.

With all the concern about the moon possibly contaminating Earth, some have expressed similar concern over the possibility of our contaminating the moon. And that American flag sitting up there in the silence of the heavens seems unnecessary to me. I think we can be proud of our achievements without leaving our flag "stiff and awkward, trying to float on the breeze that does not blow." I felt last week's *New Yorker* made the point well:

It is traditional, of course, for explorers to plant the flag, but it struck us, as we watched with awe and admiration and pride, that our two fellows were universal men, and should have been equipped accordingly. Like every great river and every great sea, the moon belongs to none and belongs to all. It still holds the key to madness, still controls the tides that lap on shores everywhere, still guards the lovers who kiss in every land under no banner but the sky. What a pity that in our moment of triumph we did not forswear the familiar Iwo Jima scene and plant instead a device acceptable to all: a limp white handkerchief, perhaps, symbol of the common cold, which, like the moon, affects us all, unites us all.

It is significant, however, that a traditional symbol of America, the Eagle bearing arrows of war in one claw and an olive branch in the other, was able to soar to the moon free of its arrows. Apollo 11's eagle, emblazoned everywhere, and soon to appear on a beautiful new airmail stamp, carried only the olive branch, the symbol of peace. And perhaps for Christians and men of faith everywhere, a symbol of the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

you're a good man, charlie brown!

Thomas Hoving, former NYC Parks Commissioner, thinks the decay of that city's parks is due in large measure to the advent of no-deposit, no-return bottles which today make some parks a sea of broken glass. There is no longer the two to five-cent incentive to round them all up and trudge back to the store, an activity many remember along with selling stacks of old newspapers.

Bob Dylan says "the times they are a-changin'" and that's probably the understatement of the decade. The student protests, the recent Woodstock folk festival and the Vietnam Moratorium Day all continue a trend, often confusing, often confused, but always moving. This certain time in history is a very active tiger with a very slippery tail.

Contrary to statements from high places, I believe the Creation is still supreme. The love of God and the world He made are constant, if we don't ruin it all. How ruin the love of God? Through indifference to man, animals, nature, and the changing times. Each day is the crest of a new wave and yesterday's slogan is often today's tradition. Tradition should always be the best of yesterdays, but we can't force many Victorian hymns, prayers, and prejudices on an age like this. We are living tomorrow's traditions, and hopefully it will be the good songs, the good writing and the worthwhile protests which will en-

sure. New traditions grow on rain-soaked hills in upstate New York and old ones exist in blue-carpeted splendor on Sunday mornings. Both can and should be vital, but too often the Church is crucified with another seven last words: *We've Never Done It That Way Before.*

Are we climbing Jacob's ladder, or are we stuck on a bottom rung?

October 26th is Reformation Sunday, and at First Church we will celebrate Reformation Youth Sunday. It will be different. But I hope you will come to First Church the way you last looked at penny candy, the ten-cent movie or a little child asleep . . .

Sometimes I wince and walk away from the sound of today's everworked record players, but then I stop and think of that long ago bushy-haired David "and all the house of Israel playing before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals; and David dancing before the Lord with all his might."

Speaking about the amazing Mets after the National League play-offs, Casey Stengel said the team "came along slow, but fast." Maybe that's today's youth, their hair blowing in the wind, marching to the sound of a different drum. Sometimes that drum plays too loudly for us, but the important thing is to beat that drum together with them in praise of the Lord, with all His help, and with all our might! . . . richard vogt

the boar's head festival

In the last issue of the Meetinghouse News we traced the history of some carols and customs which "The Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival" will bring to First Church.



In addition to the Boar's Head, the Yule Log, Mince Pies, Plum Puddings and Caroling there were the merry MUMMERS. Mumming, or "disguising", has been a part of the Christmas revels from the fourteenth century. The mummers went about the streets carrying torches and wearing strange masks and entered the citizens' houses and invited their hosts to dance with them. In different localities the subject matter of the mummers' plays varied, but one of the most popular plots is based on the legend of *ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON*. The plays often included an *ELIZABETHAN SWORD DANCE*, and the general feeling of the whole entertainment resembled a merry medieval circus.

The *WASSAIL BOWL* was a regular part of the festivities. It was carried from house to house and presented at the door in hope of a fee from the drinkers. The mixture in the wassail bowl might be wine, ale or cider; it was sweetened and "augmented" by the addition of toast and apples stuck with cloves, and it was served smoking hot. The Saxon exchange of healths: "Wessey!" and "Drinc-hey!" ("What Health?" and "I drink your health") gives to drink, bowl and custom their names.

Some beliefs were associated with animals, crops and natural occurrences. Bees are said to hum the Hundredth Psalm in their hives at midnight on Christmas Eve and farm animals speak amongst themselves, but any attempt to overhear what they say is highly dangerous. A very common belief is that cattle turn to the east at midnight on Christmas Eve and bow (in Herefordshire only seven-year-old cattle do this since this was the age of the cattle at Bethlehem).

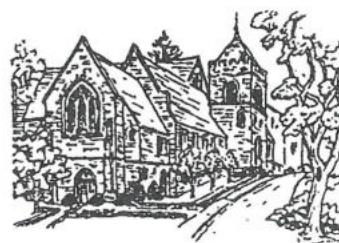
Our "Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival", its carols and customs, herald the birth of Christ. We hope this joyous celebration will bring the message of the angels a little closer this Christmas.

... Richard Vogt



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
Old Greenwich, Connecticut



Issue No. 136 September 23, 1971

SUMMER OF '71 RATED HUMID, WITH DOGS, GODSPELL, AND GREAT GREEN PEPPERS

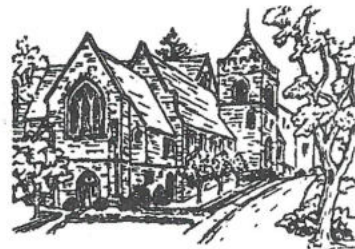
Dogs are great. I enjoy dogs. I like LASSIE more than LAUGH-IN and I abhor those classified ads in the rental columns which state: no pets. So it was especially gratifying this summer to come upon a sign in the window of a shop in Greenwich Village, that area of New York purported to be a haven for drugs and hippies, but for me has always yielded the most heavenly pizza (John's on Bleecker St.) and many interesting places and people. The carefully-lettered sign read: DOGS WELCOME. Through the window the shopkeepers immediately took on a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed appearance and all their wares seemed to reflect quality and good taste. Prejudice on my part perhaps, but sometimes I think if we could all just wag our tails and growl we might get along a bit better and accomplish more..... GODSPELL is something like a rock musical, and if that puts you off I recommend it heartily as a happy, sad, beautifully moving account of Jesus' life based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew. It started out as a revue at Cafe LaMama in the village and then moved to the Cherry Lane Theatre as a full evening's production. Now it plays uptown at the Promenade Theatre, Broadway and 76th St. (the street parking is easy). For me it has SUPERSTAR beat by a mile. It is well worth the attention of older children and adults.....LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, is about two hours from New York. I drove there this summer specifically to see the Farmers' Markets which operate Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays each week all year. Lancaster is the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country and the markets, at least at 7:00 A.M., Friday, August 13th, were filled with shopping townspeople and farm people stocking up for the week or weeks ahead. Fruits and vegetables, fresh-ground peanut butter, apple butter, jams, jellies, cheeses and smoked meats were special to behold, the farm products scrubbed clean and carefully arranged, plus that magical aroma of fresh-baked breads. No pushing; just lots of talk and laughter. The markets are big, the vegetables bigger, greener and more economical than elsewhere. The area is filled with a special beauty, good food, and the strong reverence for life and the land of the local Amish and Mennonite families. An overnight stay seemed to work well, with early morning for the markets and the remainder of the day for the magnificent countryside. The time schedule for market days is posted on the Church bulletin board, just outside the Choir Room on the third floor. For further information please contact your local choir director.

--Richard Vogt

MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Issue No. 147 December 9, 1971



FOR UNTO US IN OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT, A CHILD WILL BE BORN

A few years ago I was fortunate to be part of a small chorus involved in a Christmas show for CBS-TV under Leonard Bernstein's direction. It was a mixture of beautiful carols, a few vocal solos, and some special choruses, one of which was Handel's "For unto us a child is born" from "Messiah." The program was put together on a Saturday and Sunday afternoon, and during the final run-thru Mr. Bernstein said he really wasn't satisfied with the sound of the Handel. He thought we were singing it sort of miserably, often too loud and without much care. He felt his concept was something like a village of friendly people hearing the news of Christ's birth. The "soprano" villagers heard the angel's tidings first and they were almost too afraid to speak; but they ran across the fields and spread the happy word, until the whole valley was filled with the joyful, almost raucous sound of many people rejoicing together.

Mr. Bernstein's words had that effect which gifted people bring to our language. All of us dull choristers really became those villagers, and an old converted movie theater somewhere on the upper East Side suddenly became the hills and valleys surrounding Bethlehem. The choral sound took off into the night. We taped the program and headed happily home.

We hope our "Messiah," Thursday evening, December 16, captures that spirit. We do have the villagers - a great group of young people from the junior and senior high schools, and adults from all over the Greenwich area. Handel's "Messiah" is special music. It is not something to sing or play or listen to only once or twice. It renews itself and brings new life. We would like to share our "Messiah" with you and your children; to share all our music and worship this Christmas so that we can all go into these clear nights singing the glory of the Lord.

--Richard Vogt

MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
Old Greenwich, Connecticut

Issue No.
154



February 3, 1972

HOW TO AVOID THE WORD "MEANINGFUL," AND STILL BE MEANINGFUL

I am getting ready for Lent (Ash Wednesday: February 16). I have decided to give up my excessive use of the word *fantastic* if everyone else, however well-intentioned, will give up *meaningful*. Roget's Thesaurus offers all sorts of (meaningful) escapes from this (meaningful) dilemma. In place of *fantastic* I can substitute *wondrous*, *miraculous*, *stupendous*, or *sensational*. The *meaningful* people can try *significant*, *of moment*, *packed with meaning*, *pregnant with meaning* (!), or *pithy*. Let's consider *pithy*--now there's a meaningful word.

Of more significance during Lent is the investment of our minds and our time in the work of the Lord. In February 1969, the Rev. Edward Miller of St. George's Church, New York City, wrote a few words concerning Lent. I've quoted them previously, but I feel they bear repetition: "Lent--bleak, somber, pleasureless. Why do we insist on observing, enduring--but never celebrating--these traditional forty days? We boast of giving up for Lent the things we should have given up for other reasons: candy, to prevent tooth decay; cigarettes, to prevent cancer; liquor, to lose weight; luxuries, to save money. Why this dualism of renouncing physical treats to achieve spiritual destiny? Have you ever heard of anyone's giving up cruelty or intolerance for Lent?"

On six Wednesday evenings, beginning February 16, the Christian Education, Youth and Music departments will cooperate to sponsor a series of exceptional films, listed elsewhere in this issue. And late in March, combined choirs from this church and northern New Jersey will present Johann Sebastian Bach's "St. John Passion" in the Meetinghouse. These important films and the power of the "St. John" can help us keep a good Lent; can help us toward a fuller understanding of our responsibilities to the work of the Lord, so that we may more justly deserve the glory of a risen Christ.

Richard Vogt



MUSIC AT THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH seeks to fill hearts with significant sounds. Our music is worship. Our music is people celebrating sound together. We want big and little people to take advantage of our music. Some areas of the program are for you, others for your children; or your friends and their children.

Our plans for the year include special events for the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, scheduled in October; a performance of George Frideric Handel's MESSIAH (Part I: Advent & Christmas) at a candlelight service in December, a time when we will again welcome choristers from the community to sing with our Choir, soloists and orchestra; MUSIC SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES; an oratorio to be scheduled during Lent 1973; and in the Spring, a production of Benjamin Britten's NOYE'S FLUDDE, the happy, spectacular musical setting of the story of Noah and the Ark.

With the tremendous help of Porter Remington, our organist, and Joann Dannecker, who teaches recorder, the music program ranges from Bach and Mozart to GODSPELL and electronics; from recorders, guitars and drums to organ, brass and handbells. We invite you and your children to share the sound of God's worship in this church.

RICHARD VOGT, director of music

1972

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PORTER'S TREE

About three years ago, Porter Remington, our organist, asked me casually one day: "Did you notice my tree?" "Your what?" I said, mystified. "My tree," she answered, annoyed. "Where is it?" I inquired, calmly. "On the right-hand side of the Hutchinson River Parkway," she replied. (I figured, for the sake of discussion, that there were 10,000 trees on the Hutchinson River Parkway between Greenwich and New York.) "Oh, that one," I said, having narrowed the problem down to the 5,000 trees on the right-hand side, coming from New York. "It was just perfect today; all green and pretty," she said. "Wonderful."

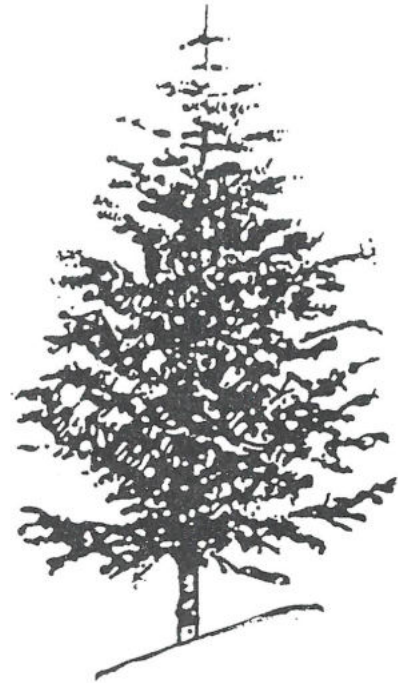
Well, a few months later we happened to be driving to church together when suddenly, from the passenger seat, she screamed "There it is!" "What? Where?" I shouted, swerving the car and hoping to miss something I thought she saw in the road. "The tree, stupid," came the reply. And there, to be sure, was Porter's tree; certainly pretty and green, shaped like a half-open umbrella; the kind of tree elves hide under.

Winters have come and gone, and we wondered this year if the tree would make it to spring. The branches looked very dead and spindly. But it's all green again, and the rain lately really helped.

Porter's tree got me thinking about the land and the activity in nature this month. Our Spring has been cool and on the late side, but once again, just this week, we've witnessed the rebirth- the sometimes fragile, sometimes majestic beauty of the countryside.

In churches we tend to hibernate in the summer. We schedule one worship service instead of two and make schedules lighter for all concerned with church activities. I'm as guilty as the next person in looking toward an easier time, but I wonder if we're justified in being "winter" Christians. Perhaps the old-fashioned revivals, the outdoor hymn-sings were the answer. Perhaps we should worship at the golf course or the beach. The Lord keeps so busy renewing the land; we should take a fresh look at how we renew ourselves. Maybe getting away from it all is the answer, but then there's Porter's tree and all those singing birds that keep telling us the Lord really demands everything from His creation: 52 weeks; no pay; no vacation.

RICHARD VOGT



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Issue No.
159



March 9, 1972

AND IN THIS CORNER, WEARING FADED PURPLE TRUNKS:
JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR!

I must admit I'm glad that *JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR* has faded into \$15-per-seat anonymity somewhere along Broadway after all the hullabaloo it caused world-wide last year. I can still get caught up in the rhythm of the music, and certainly I felt the songs we sang on *MUSIC SUNDAY* a year ago should be heard, but one thing really bothered me, then and now: the lyrics of the title song-- *Jesus Christ, who are you? What have you sacrificed?* I tried to overcome those questions with a couple of trumpets playing *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!* high above the chorus, but that didn't dispel the depressing effect of the song in my mind. *SUPERSTAR* just isn't the Gospel. And it certainly isn't *GODSPELL*.

GODSPELL is a circus. By that I mean it's a happy three-ring trinity full of good news and that simple faith which David Stowe exalted in his sermon last week. It celebrates the life of Jesus, both the happy and sad events. Our *MUSIC WORSHIP SERVICES* this Sunday celebrate Jesus and the Gospel, from the drum sounds of an African folk mass right on through *GODSPELL*. We will worship God through music, and also make our offering to His mission throughout the world in *ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING*. And next week, on Saturday, we ask you to share the sufferings of Jesus, His *PASSION ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN* by Johann Sebastian Bach

Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of *GODSPELL* and the *ST. JOHN*, was more than superstar.

Who are you? I AM THE RESURRECTION; AND THE LIFE: HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE: AND WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN ME SHALL NEVER DIE. What have you sacrificed? I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD: THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVETH HIS LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP.

Richard Vogt

A MIGHTY ORGANIST IS OUR PORTER

Four years ago I placed a call to Porter Remington in Augusta, Georgia. She had participated in the Spring production of Britten's "Noah's Flood", and now I sought her help as full-time organist of First Church. She accepted, and from that time the care and development of our music program became her work and concern.

Porter leaves First Church this Sunday, Reformation Sunday; a day when we sing and celebrate a strong hymn of our faith, and one of Porter's favorites - Luther's A MIGHTY FORTRESS. Most organists can't play hymns worth sour apples. Porter plays hymns as if her life depended on it. They become powerful and majestic, or subdued and reflective; and they always move with grace. There are so many details and transitions within a worship service which only a gifted organist can grasp. Porter has this awareness instinctively.

Her talent, her counsel, her personality and sensitivity, have made the music program a vital part of our Church. She has moved from the oom-pah of GODSPELL to the glory of Bach's ST. John, and each had the lilt of life. Most recently, tribute came to her at the concluding service of the Connecticut Conference, when fifty or sixty delegates crowded toward the chancel to listen and then applaud her playing of Widor's flashing "'Toccata' from the 5th Symphony".

We have worked well together, and I will miss her greatly. I wish her well from all the ears and hearts she has opened. And for sure, no one else will ever be able to respond to my wintertime question, "Are you cold, Porter?, with "No; I'm not Cole Porter; I'm Oscar Hammerstein."

RICHARD VOGT

MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
Old Greenwich, Connecticut

Issue No.
164



April 13, 1972

ON THE ROAD WITH ST. JOHN AND THE CHANCEL CHOIR

Many in our Church may be unaware of the Chancel Choir's activities surrounding the performance of "St. John Passion" last month. The Choir was joined by the Knickerbocker Chorale from New Jersey, a chorus which rehearses under my direction (Porter Remington is accompanist) on Tuesday nights in Demarest, N.J. In December we suggested that the two groups combine to achieve a 70-voice chorus, with the additional benefit of a performance to be arranged at First Church as well as the one already scheduled in New Jersey.

On Shrove Tuesday, February 15, the Knickerbocker choristers traveled here for our pancake supper, and the first combined rehearsal. On Music Sunday, March 12, after the morning worship services, with heads still reeling from tribal rhythms (Missa Luba"), recorders, and the lively "Godspell" music, one of our choir members, Mary Hunt, kindly provided a quick lunch of sandwiches and coffee before we all departed for the first chorus-orchestra rehearsal at St. Cecilia's Church in Englewood, N.J. The orchestra players came from the ranks of the Greenwich Philharmonia. On the following Thursday, March 16, the Jersey chorus drove to Connecticut for the final rehearsal, and on Saturday the entire group - combined choirs, orchestra, and soloists - about 100 people - performed Bach's mighty work here in First Church at a special candlelight service. A freewill offering was received to help defray expenses. The next evening, actually Passion Sunday, we journeyed once again to St. Cecilia's Church, where more than 600 people paid \$3.00 per ticket to share in that second performance.

It was a busy time, the culmination of months of regular and extra choir rehearsals, much juggling of dates, times, and the availability of soloists and orchestra. The men singing in both groups also transported the chorus platforms, music stands, and a positiv organ which must have weighed a good two tons.

I know all who were involved would gladly take part again, because it was a great event in our lives, and hopefully our telling of Jesus' passion made the time of Lent more memorable for those who listened. Certainly the glory of Eastertide, the triumph of Christ, the recycling beauty of the land - all seem more significant this year; this season of renewal, so sensitively described by another Biblical evangelist: "For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone' the flowers appear on the earth; the time of birds is come and the voice of the turtle (dove) is heard in our land."

Richard Vogt

MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Issue No.
197



February 1, 1973

A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES

In our American folk calendar, February 2 is Ground-hog Day. In the liturgical calendar it is Candlemas, the time when candles are blessed for use in the church and in the homes of the people throughout the year.

The day also celebrates the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple. The Holy Ghost had revealed to old Simeon that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple, where Mary and Joseph had brought the infant Jesus in observance of a rite obliged by Jewish law. The old priest took the young child up in his arms, blessed God, and said: Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

There are several customs associated with Candlemas. The Oxford Book of Carols traces the year through the green verses of a Candlemas carol:

*Down with the rosemary and bays,
Down with the mistletoe;
Instead of holly, now upraise
The greener box, for show.*

What does all of this mean to New England Congregationalists in 1973? Well, I feel it is good to work with ideas that bring the Church closer to our everyday lives. I wish we could become a little medieval, spend more time with symbolism; get involved with the color, drama and pageantry of worship, with some simple customs carrying over into our homes.

It is a blessed time of peace; a time for healing and building up our nation, our church and our own selves. Perhaps the simple ways are ways to begin: the ringing of bells; the baking of bread; the gathering together of people;...and the blessing of candles.

RICHARD VOGT

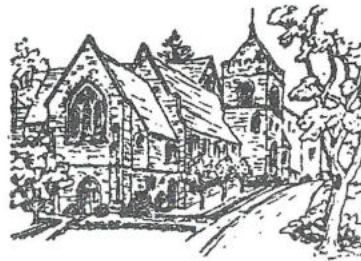


MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Issue No.
206

May 3, 1973



"SOME LIFT THE AGE THEY INHABIT....
SOME WALK ON HIGHER GROUND."

Frances Reissig was one of the few women I've known who looked great in slacks. She had a special magic, and she certainly made life a lot brighter. She poked fun at herself and refused to let doctors or machines interfere with a happy thought or a twinkle in the eye. She always turned conversations away from her own troubles. Her chief concern was her husband and his welfare.

Like Herman, she had the free soaring spirit of a child with a new kite. Both could have been eternal ministers to youth on any church staff. Age and time were foreign to their life together.

Frances always found the right and different word. She used the language to light candles in people's hearts, and in doing so she trailed happiness behind her like flowers. She was also a beautiful listener.

When I was saying goodbye to her at the hospital with a friend awhile ago, I asked if she needed anything, and mentioned how good I was at smuggling shrimp and scotch and other special necessities into hospitals. She narrowed her eyes and fixed me with a playful stare, and said quietly, "I'll talk to you later."

Last October, Frances and Herman Reissig walked into the life of this church and quickened hearts and minds into a closer understanding of the meaning of life. One of them is gone now, but with Herman in our midst we remain the ones blessed. We knew Frances too briefly. Think of the countless lives she graced with care and compassion. Already we miss her greatly, but we rejoice in her life, a life that cast no shadows, only sunlight. This week has been a time of sorrow, but it is also a time of joy. For in place of so many who walked with her in the sunlight, Frances surely now has angels for companions.

RICHARD VOGT

The First Congregational Church
OLD GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Non Profit Organization



THANKSGIVING 1976

We have survived the hoopla of the bicentennial, and happily we will only remember the sights and sounds that made it special for each of us. For many it was the tall ships; for others perhaps a song, a parade, the sound of drums, or a child's eyes lifted up to banners and balloons.

For me the worth and vitality of the year was in people. In New York City there is one time in my memory similar to July 4th this year, and that was the night of the blackout a dozen years ago. In the darkness, suddenly, there were helping hands and laughter. July 4, 1976, was like that. It was a happy day for the thousands massed along the Hudson, even when the rain forced a retreat to sheltering places under the West Side Highway.

As this festival year draws to a close we will gather together with families and friends in a great American tradition - Thanksgiving. On Sunday the choir will sing an anthem made special with words of Thomas Jefferson, words that brought strength to a troubled nation: *The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy but cannot disjoin them.*

Thanksgiving in this bicentennial year is a blessed and beautiful day for America.

Richard Vogt

Minister's Column

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

born 22 November 1913, at Lowestoft, Suffolk, England
died 4 December 1976, at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, England

When Benjamin Britten died in early December, most of the notices and articles which followed referred to him as England's greatest composer since Henry Purcell, a master musician who lived in the late 1600's. It was a just tribute. For me, however, Benjamin Britten was the exceptional man who created the joy of *Noye's Fludde*, and gave the opera world its contemporary masterpiece, *Peter Grimes*. He was the simple man who treasured a dachshund named Gilda, and also happened to compose the most significant choral music of our time.

It is different when a great musician dies. Something unique, something more than a life is stilled. Britten was a master craftsman. His work is clear and concise; poetic, powerful, full of invention and melody, God bless him. He was also an expert pianist and conductor. His life and his music celebrated what he called the "holy triangle of composer, performer and listener."

When the Greenwich Choral Society sang at the Aldeburgh Festival last summer (an annual event that Britten and his friend Peter Pears started almost thirty years ago), the composer came to our second concert, an evening program of opera and theater music. It took place in the Maltings, a splendid refurbished brick building that rises out of the marshlands a few miles from the village. He was in failing health and could remain through only half the program. He wanted especially to hear Gershwin's *Summertime*. He loved that song. Through an interesting set of circumstances we had determined that a special title might come to Mr. Britten that day as part of the Queen's birthday honors list. The Choral Society had obtained his arrangement of *God Save the Queen* and practiced it in London for a surprise tribute, just in case. On Saturday, 12 June, the morning papers carried the news: Her Majesty had awarded Benjamin Britten a lifetime peerage; he was now Lord Britten. Our concert that night in the composer's presence took on added significance. Backstage I asked Peter Pears how Lord Britten was, and he said he was "still just Ben." A few minutes later, at the opening of the program, I dedicated our performance of England's national anthem to Lord Britten, and also to "just Ben," from a stage filled with American choristers who enjoyed so the opportunity to sing at the festival. It was a hushed and magical moment, as the audience rose in tribute to their Queen and country, and to a composer from a little fishing village on the North Sea.

Britten and Pears welcomed us to the garden of The Red House, their home at Aldeburgh, the following morning. I remembered watching that butterball dachshund Gilda circle that garden in nothing flat on a previous visit. This day the composer waved from an upstairs window, as the choristers took pictures. He spoke with Cynthia Clarey and Seth McCoy and inquired if we had been well cared for in the village. Then he asked me how my dachshund, Pushkin, was. He always asked about Pushkin, sometimes long distance from England, sometimes in a card at Christmas.

It makes me very sad that Benjamin Britten has died, yet his music is a tremendous and joyful legacy. It was a privilege to have known him a bit. He always called me Dick, but even after several years and requests I could never call him Ben. He was Mr. Britten. In May our church will perform *Noye's Fludde*, his happy combination of children and animals in the story of Noah and the Ark. The performances will be in happy memory of Mr. Britten. He is called England's greatest composer since Purcell, but I will remember him as the gentle man who always inquired about the welfare of my long dog.

Richard Vogt

NOAH'S FLOOD: A CELEBRATION IN MAY

Noah and his Ark have been in our minds from childhood...the coming together of animals and water and dry land and a rainbow has really been common to all our lives. It is a story which captures our hearts in so many ways...it is an adventure and danger, and finally peace and happiness.

Benjamin Britten composed "Noye's Fludde" to give children an opportunity to participate with adults in a miracle play with contemporary music. Britten was born in 1913 in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England, in a house that faced the North Sea. His life was filled with the sound of the sea from the beginning, and that sound can often be heard in his music. Britten wrote "Noye's Fludde" in 1958. The words are taken from a medieval Chester miracle play. These plays were performed by ordinary people: local craftsmen and tradesmen of the town and their families, with choristers from the local church for the children's parts. Britten brought this beautiful idea forward to our time. He retains the early English spelling, the colorful descriptions of birds and animals and all the lively disagreements between Noah and Mrs. Noah.

Benjamin Britten died near the sound of the sea last December. Last Thursday, March 10, more than 1000 people crowded Westminster Abbey for a service of thanksgiving for his life and music, an event attended by ordinary craftsmen, tradesmen and musicians, and also Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

On Saturday and Sunday, May 21 and 22, our church will celebrate Britten's life with performances of "Noye's Fludde." We need your help to make this possible. Next Thursday, March 24, there will be a NOAH'S FLOOD RALLY NIGHT at 7 p.m. in the auditorium. It will be a time for you - both children and adults - to offer your help and ideas. We need people for publicity, lighting, scenic design, properties, a chorus of animals, a chorus of Mrs. Noah's gossips, animal feeders, orchestra players, and teenagers (three boys and three girls) for the six solo parts.

Join us Thursday night at the rally. We will see pictures from past productions.

Richard Vogt



Music: Past-Present-Future

Lord Jesus, think on me,
That, when the flood is past,
I may eternal brightness see,
And share thy joy at last.

The FLOOD is past, and the joy and the brightness came in a rainbow of ways. We thank all who took part, all who played a part, and all who gathered in the Meetinghouse for Benjamin Britten's "holy triangle of composer, performer and listener."

Two weeks after Noah's Ark floated out of First Church it landed in Bridgehampton, New York, for two performances. We took Noah and Mrs. Noah along, some instrumentalists, and Jon "Jaffett" Hunt. Saturday, June 4, was a beautiful day: the air was cool, the church was filled, and 70 animals - a new contingent - roared happily. Our organ fund also benefitted from the rental of costumes and scenery.

* * *

This Sunday, June 26, we welcome an outstanding preacher: William Sloane Coffin, Jr., formerly chaplain at Yale University. We will greet also Cynthia Clarey, soprano, and Jake Gardner, baritone, as guest soloists. The anthems will be Aaron Copeland's setting of the beautiful hymn tune, "Shall We Gather at the River," and Alice Parker's arrangement of "In that Great Gittin' Up Mornin'."

* * *

On Sunday, July 3, we will celebrate Independence Day with the sound of three pipers, members of the Pyramid Temple Pipes and Drums of Bridgeport. David O'Neil, who sings in our choir, will be one of the players. They will perform traditional marches and accompany the congregation in the hymn, "Amazing Grace."

* * *

The Chancel Choir welcomes all who would like to sing at the summer services. Rehearsal 9:00 a.m. each Sunday in the chancel.

* * *

If you go to the city before August 30, I urge you to see the exhibit of Russian clothing and accessories from the 18th and 19th centuries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; also, Degas' painting of a "Woman with Chrysanthemums" in the exhibit of that artist's work. These are worth a journey to this special place.

* * *

On Friday and Saturday, August 5 & 6, Robert Shaw will conduct at the Mostly Mozart Festival, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center. The program will include Schubert's "Mass in G," and Mozart's "Requiem."

* * *

Have a happy summer.

Richard Vogt



* * * * *

In some countries there is a custom that all preparations for Christmas must be complete by December 21, St. Thomas' feast day. Then there is time for reflection and meditation on the great event close at hand. The verse by Robinson Jeffers in our advent calendar captures that beautiful idea.

For an hour on Christmas eve
And again on the holy day,
Seek the magic of past time,
From this present turn away.
Dark though our day,
Light lies the snow on the hawthorn hedges
And the ox knelt down at midnight.
Merry Christmas, everyone.

Richard Vogt



1977

WHERE IS THE ORGANIST?

The design of our present organ and chancel demands that the organist be heard and not seen. Those who have ventured into the unmarked area have discovered him buried in a small wood and concrete cage, unbarred, with no food or water. He functions without being aware of the sounds he is creating, because they happen somewhere around the corner from his perch.

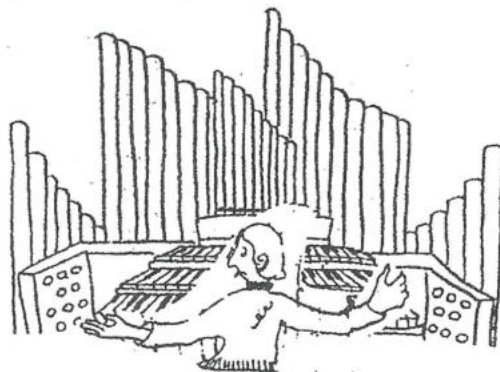
It is a poor situation, and happily will be corrected with the advent of a new instrument next summer. An organist should be able to hear what he is playing; each nuance should awaken the ear, and thus create music for himself, the choir, and the congregation.

Preludes and Postludes: Until we find the organist, I urge members of the congregation to feel free to sit in the chancel and listen to the organ prelude and/or postlude. Each is part of the service, not Muzak to cover loud voices.

I realize that greeting friends is a great and beautiful part of the communication within our church family, and I would not deny it. But the sound of the organ is the sound of worship, and closer attention should be paid.

I invite us all to "listen". The organist welcomes your comments and questions. Please try to find him - and bring food and water.

Richard Vogt



FORECAST: WARM BODIES; COOL MUSIC...

The heat is on...
six staff members - I'm one - have been
having healthy discussions about
communication, problems and priorities,
and today the heat came on...
a church seeks its place...
a church reaches out...
our music program seeks to support,
with echoes of the past
and new directions...



THE CHANCEL CHOIR
hopes to take
another program
of music to the
correctional
center at Danbury
sometime this fall

On SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1
at four o'clock...
a free FESTIVAL OF HYMNS...
a lively camp-meeting of voices,
organ, drums, bells and brass
for all ages...
with ALICE PARKER and others...

Dave Brubeck's
LA FIESTA DE LA POSADA
...an Epiphany celebration
for children and adults
early in January
with DAVE BRUBECK at the piano

HANDEL'S MESSIAH: PART I
Sunday, December 20
at four o'clock
in the Meetinghouse... MUSIC SUNDAY
...in May



...we hope these events
and many more
will picture
music on the move
in our church
...hearts, hands and
voices, children and
adults reaching out
...trying to do
the work of the Lord

Some day after mastering the winds,
the waves, the tides and the gravity,
we shall harness for God the energies
of Love...and then for the second
time in the history of the world
man will have discovered Fire...

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

RICHARD VOGT.

...perhaps one sound of a bell
...one sentence in a sermon
one moment of silence
one carol at Christmas
one word in a prayer
one verse in a psalm
...perhaps some one thing this year
can make this
the Christian year of the Second Fire

PASSION SUNDAY AT THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH...

I like to get up early, and besides, who can sleep thru a lick on the nose (dog) at 5:58 a.m. Fred Swann, the organist at The Riverside Church, also gets up early. I know nothing about his alarm system, but we had two 7:30 a.m. meetings at Riverside last week to settle arrangements for our combined choirs' concert there on Sunday, 23 March. The second meeting was in the sanctuary and I was glad no one other than Fred was there. I act like a tourist at Riverside: wide-eyed, mouth open, the whole thing. It is a special place, and what a fantastic experience for First Church: our choir (90-strong for this event), our senior pastor, our organist, Cynthia Clarey, Jake Gardner, plus Bill Coffin singing with Riverside's 70-voice group - all will become musical tourists, joined together in two masterpieces by Johannes Brahms, the ALTO RHAPSODY and A GERMAN REQUIEM. I hope you will be a tourist with us: Sunday, 23 March, The Riverside Church, 122nd Street and Riverside Drive, New York City; carillon recital: 3:00 p.m.; organ recital: 3:30 p.m.; concert: 4:00 p.m. No tickets required.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST: CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND THE PLANNING CONFERENCE...

Rehearsals for the Brahms' concert have consumed much time, but I must admit I miss the production of CHRIST CRUCIFIED, the drama that occupied many of us during Lent the past two years. I feel it made those times significant, and after it we knew "an Easter of unending joy."

At one of the planning conference sessions on SPIRITUAL LIFE AT FIRST CHURCH IN THE 80s, Alice Morgan posed the question: "What would I do if I were a disciple?" and asked each person there to answer the question for him/herself. I must have missed the point. All I could think of was the joy of becoming a follower of Alice Morgan. She brings sunshine to dark places, like meetings. Thank you, Alice.

RICHARD VOGT.

MUSIC 1980/81....PLAN AHEAD...

It used to amaze me that professional musicians are often booked years in advance - Seth McCoy knows where and what he will be singing three or four years ahead. Now I find myself thinking the same way: 1985 will be the year of Bach and Handel, the 300th anniversary of their births. That's lots of D Major in '85, a favorite key with both composers.

At First Church our music plans are taking shape for the fall and winter, and next May a special event will transform our church into a festival. In the fall, the Chancel Choir is planning to visit two prisons in Connecticut with special music programs. Other dates: Sunday, 14 December: A CHRISTMAS MUSIC PROGRAM; Sunday, 21 December: Handel's MESSIAH; Sunday, 15 March: Verdi's REQUIEM at The Riverside Church in New York with the Chancel Choir and the Riverside Church Choir, in celebration of Riverside's 50th anniversary.

In May 1981, First Church will present AN ENGLISH FESTIVAL, an all-church celebration of our Congregational heritage. The British Royal Family will be invited to send a representative, and also the British Ambassador and the Consulate General in New York. The British Navy will be invited to anchor a ship off Greenwich for special tours. The five weekends in May will include British films; high tea; an Elizabethan dinner; "Shakespeare and Music", a program by the Yale Concert Choir; an English organist in recital; an English preacher; vaudeville and music hall entertainment; a Maypole; A Night at the Proms; discussions of poetry and literature; Benjamin Britten's "Noye's Fludde", and other events.

We will need your help and support to make ENGLAND '81 a reality at First Church...

Helene: how many scones will we need to feed 300?....The beef-eaters will meet in the undercroft....Carol: will Prince Andrew need special food?....Barbara: the fish and chips date must be switched. Please check with Sallie....Julia: will you ask Phyllis to take care of the raven and dove?....Stanley: the double-decker bus should be here by 3:00 p.m....Arthur: your tail is too long; tigers just don't look that way....

It will be a great and different time. **RICHARD VOGT.**

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO "MEANINGFUL"?

Ten years ago, life could be *meaningful*. Jack and Jill had a *meaningful* relationship. Dogs who ate Alpo had a more *meaningful* taste experience. And now...from north, south, east and west...the word of the year...(drum-roll...da-daaahhh!)

HOPEFULLY!...*hopefully* has supplanted *meaningful* and is gaining on *you know*. Everyone speaks *hopefully*, especially this season's crop of politicians. But I'm afraid many of us are guilty.

Often we seek in single words the solutions to manifold problems. Ten years ago we longed for a more *meaningful* existence. Today we look *hopefully* to our candidates. Our single-word language is an outgrowth of dreams...for ourselves, our country, and each other.

The Bible's use of *hope* is compelling and certain...*Psalm 31*: Be strong and take courage, all you whose hope is in the Lord.
Psalm 39: And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in thee.
Psalm 42: Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, my deliverer, my God. *Colossians 1*: The secret is this: Christ among you, the hope of a glory to come.

On Sunday, 28 September, the choir will sing excerpts from Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, an oratorio based on events in the first and second books of Kings, a drama that is often centered on hope in the Lord. The text at the offertory will offer one illustration: Behold, God the Lord passed by. And a mighty wind rent the mountains around, brake in pieces the rocks, brake them before the Lord; but yet the Lord was not in the tempest. And the sea was upheaved, and the earth was shaken; but yet the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there came a fire, but yet the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there came a still small voice. And in that still voice, onward came the Lord.

The choir will sing the correct notes, on pitch...*hopefully*.



PRAISE THE LORD!...AND PLEASE PASS THE TARTAR SAUCE...

The day before film director Billy Wilder (*Sunset Boulevard*; *Some Like It Hot*; *The Apartment*) was honored at a Lincoln Center gala last week, he was interviewed in *The Times* and made the following comment about his craft: "The basic point is to bring them in and keep them awake."

I thought about concerts and church services when I read those words and reflected on similar responsibilities to composers and the work of the Lord: bring the people in; keep them awake; excite the mind; please (sometimes tickle) the ear.

We hope our MUSIC SUNDAY service 23 May will bring you to First Church to worship the Lord. We also hope it will keep you awake. We will praise God with voices, trumpets, organ, recorders, bells and electronics, and it will be a color-filled event. A brief preview:

NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD/*Pachelbel*/organ/brass/chorus
DEEP RIVER/*Burleigh*/soprano solo/chorus
THANKS BE TO THEE/*Handel*/baritone solo/chorus
THE LOST CHORD/*Sullivan*/baritone solo/chorus
IN THAT GREAT GETTIN' UP MORNIN'/*Parker*/soprano solo/chorus
JONAH/*Vogt*/Sound Beach Choir Department/electronics
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL/*Wertsch*/soprano solo and chorus

Soprano CLAMMA DALE and baritone MICHAEL TERRY will be guest soloists and THE SOUND BEACH CHOIR DEPARTMENT will make its debut, with Tad Low as JONAH.

The COFFEE HOUR will be hosted by the Music Committee and, from 11:30 a.m., an AFTER-CHURCH BRUNCH (\$3.75) will be served on the church lawn, catered by the ARGYLE FISH & CHIP RESTAURANT, Kearny, New Jersey. This worthy establishment scored a major hit with their delicious supper during our British Festival last May. Blankets and beach chairs may be secured near the Memory Garden before the service for the picnic brunch on the lawn.

So, the schedule for SUNDAY, 23 MAY: 7:00 get up; 7:10 two-mile walk; 7:50 shower; 8:05 light breakfast; 8:20 read *The Times*; 9:25 drive to church; 9:40 preludes; 10:00 music/worship; 11:10 Coffee Hour; 11:30 brunch and Maypole dances on the lawn; 1:30 nap.

RICHARD VOGT.

FORECAST: THANKSGIVING, FOR CHRISTMAS...

Weather often invades conversation. It is a bridge over troubled silences..."Hi, how are you?...What a beautiful day!... Such great weather!"...and I think many will agree: we were blessed with a less humid summer, a multi-colored autumn, and now...crisp, cool nights.

The influx of catalogs tells us Christmas is coming and geese are getting fat, and can be ordered via Visa, MasterCard, et al. But don't panic: you can be among the first to take advantage of my new, improved, money-back, low cholesterol offer: for only \$10. I will take your name off every mailing list (except this one), with a special bonus for early subscribers: your leaves raked and bagged and taken to the dump...during the night.

Everyone says it will be a cold winter, and at this point we will probably be disappointed if it isn't. But cold winters mean the great sight of ice in Binney Park and many bodies, big and little, bundled up on flashing skates, and a time to ring the tower bells over the snow.

At election time, and recently at SUNY/Purchase, I was thinking about Nelson Rockefeller..."Hiya, fella!". I liked him, and remember, as a youngster, my aunt's aggravation with anyone who criticized the wealth of great American families, like the Rockefellers or the Mellons..."Just think of the number of people in their employ. Look at New York...the museums, the parks, the research." Through the years I often felt Nelson Rockefeller was a man of vision and ahead of his time. And that will be the strongest statement from this Democrat/Independent at this time.

But a man of greater vision, for all seasons, was Jesus Christ, whose birth date we celebrate next month...and we need it. We need it more than Saks and Bloomingdale's...the idea, the glory, the simplicity. He is the man who preached peace (doves, handshakes), not a sword (guns, nuclear weapons)...who lived once in royal David's city - with no snow, and no problems with conversation.

RICHARD VOGT.

Shall We Gather at the River?

On Sunday, the 13th, at four o'clock, we will gather in the Meetinghouse for A NEW OLD-FASHIONED HYMN-SING, a time to sing hymns and carols, old and new. It will be an hour with the sounds of organ, brass, piano, handbells, recorders and percussion...a camp-meeting, with apples for all.

Our new booklet of 56 hymns and carols will be used for the first time that afternoon. We will sing some of those new tunes and texts, plus favorites of yours from our own valuable Pilgrim Hymnal.

And within a few weeks, the sound of music will change. Handel's MESSIAH will echo with rehearsals, and I am particularly happy that tenor SETH MCCOY will be able to join us as one of the four soloists for the first time in several years. The MESSIAH chorus is limited to 200. Rehearsals begin on Tuesday, 6 December, with registration from 7:00 p.m. in the Meetinghouse. The performance will be Sunday, 18 December, at four o'clock. No tickets required; freewill offering.

Music invades our lives in many ways these days, and I'm sure Bloomingdale's is already awash with muzak carols. But the best music is made by live bodies: soloists, choristers and instrumentalists, singing and playing; and children's voices make carols special.

I hope you'll save some time for singing at Christmas - singing at home or caroling with friends. Many of you will remember a great CAROL CARAVAN we organized a few years ago. There were two hundred or more in a procession through the streets of Riverside and Old Greenwich. And we had hot chocolate in the parking lot at St. Saviour's Church midway on our journey. Perhaps this is the year to try that again.

The hymn-sing this Sunday is a prelude to the wealth of familiar sights and sounds we will enjoy within a few short weeks. Shall we gather at the river?...You bet!

RICHARD VOGT.

KITCHENAIDS IN RIVERSIDE...

Apples become special to me at this time of year, and two varieties are favorites: Macouns and Stayman Winesaps. For many years I've been driving to Tice Farms in northern Jersey for their cider and apples. Betty Woodman put me in touch and taste with Staymans a good while ago. They come along later in the season and they're great, both for pies and just plain eating.

This election year has prompted us to put together a big American apple program for Saturday, 3 November, at 7:30 p.m. - 60 MINUTES: A CELEBRATION OF AMERICA IN MUSIC & WORDS - a one-hour event for all ages, spanning three centuries; singing and speaking texts that carried our nation forward; some lively old American songs, some sentimental, some nostalgic.

My hope for America remains the same: for leaders, either party, who will move us from senseless preoccupation with guns and giant weapons of destruction to that elusive spirit of renewal; leaders who will tell us where we are wrong, wasteful, overfed and overprivileged; leaders who will use and celebrate the arts, language and intellect. A quote on David Taylor's door used to read: "It will be a great day when schools have all the money they need, and the air force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber."

And perhaps - just perhaps - that sequence of a nation's separation and restoration that Dr. James Forbes spoke of in his sermon yesterday, that spirit of renewal might bring a celebration of dishwashers and flowers in Harlem as well as Riverside.

Where have all the flowers gone, the flowers of the spirit? Have they been smothered by mushroom clouds and handguns?

I feel they are in our hearts as ever, waiting to blossom.

RICHARD VOGT.

GOD'S LOVE MADE VISIBLE...

A letter to the NY Times' METROPOLITAN DIARY (Wed/9 May) caught my attention last week:

Dear Diary: You might be interested in hearing how my church, ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI on West 31st Street, celebrated Easter. We were singing a rousing, hand-clapping, tambourine-shaking hymn at the 11 o'clock mass when a man, moved either by the ceremony or by a controlled substance, stripped to his underwear, marched up the aisle and hurled himself on the altar. The celebrant, Father Russell Becker, removed him from the altar and a member of the congregation sat on him until the police arrived. Led by a choir director who believes the show must go on, we remained singing throughout. Father Russell closed the mass with the wry suggestion that an appropriate final hymn would be "I LOVE NEW YORK." We then adjourned to the church office for coffee and cake.

Deborah Flynn

Well, MUSIC SUNDAYS can be pretty lively, especially when DAVE BRUBECK is in residence, and what a happy privilege it will be to welcome him and Iola and two of their sons, Matthew and Dan, to this MUSIC SUNDAY, 20 May.

Dave Brubeck took part in a similar celebration many years ago, plus two festive productions of LA FIESTA DE LA POSADA, his colorful re-creation of the Christmas story, most recently in January, 1982. And those two productions grew out of the premiere performances of LA FIESTA that I conducted with the GREENWICH CHORAL SOCIETY in 1975.

Dave and Iola Brubeck are creative, patient and considerate, and Dave's hands and mind make music for all ages, especially children. I think there's a reason: he's the oldest little boy I know.

Welcome, DAVE AND IOLA BRUBECK!

RICHARD VOGT.



THE CROSS ON THE COS COB FIREHOUSE...

This spring of the year has brought local controversy and sudden interest in the central symbol of Christianity, the cross.

For several years, a friend and I have decorated the cross suspended in our chancel at Palm Sunday and Easter. There have been palms and purple ribbon for Palm Sunday, and lilies and white ribbons at Easter...grosgrain ribbon...the most beautiful ribbon.

Michael Harris portrayed Jesus in our Good Friday drama, CHRIST CRUCIFIED, several years ago. The cross that held Michael was constructed by a choir member in his business workshop. It was the work of a craftsman. It was also very large and very heavy, and it took many men to raise it with Michael's body. The last words of Jesus and the descent from the cross were a moving conclusion to the events of that Holy Week. Easter seemed brighter.

The cross, in my opinion, does not belong atop the Cos Cob firehouse. It belongs in the churches and hearts of Christians. The crèche belongs on the church lawn, not the town square. Church and state: the strength of each is in their separation one from the other.

An article by a resident in last week's Greenwich Time suggested that the Cos Cob cross was suitable because America was founded as a Christian nation. Where does that leave my friend Rabbi Richard Block? Am I, a Christian, a better American than he? The coins in my pocket say IN GOD WE TRUST, not IN CHRIST WE TRUST.

The symbol for Cos Cob, if it needs one, should be a dove, the universal symbol of peace. The Catholic mass concludes with DONA NOBIS PACEM...grant us peace; and one of many beautiful prayers in the Hebrew prayerbook begins...GRANT US PEACE, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace...

With a dove in Cos Cob, we can turn our attention and energy to handguns and the NRA, star wars, memories of concentration camps, and how best to honor those who died for us, including a man on a cross.



RICHARD VOGT

HARVEST HOME, GREENPEACE AND THE NRA...

Another spectacular autumn season draws to a close. The myriad colors and an abundant harvest have benefited all of us. The sheaves are in; the harvest is home. Pete Seeger has rolled down the mighty Hudson to the South Street Seaport, his Clearwater sloop filled with a seven-ton cargo of pumpkins. And all the apples... especially two favorites: Stayman Winesaps and Macouns. And against this October/November backdrop we had the dashed hopes of Reykjavik and an interesting election... and Sarah Brady.

Sarah Brady is James Brady's wife. James Brady was President Reagan's press secretary before he was shot in the head by John Hinckley during Hinckley's March 30, 1981 attack on the President. The President almost died. Jim Brady remains paralysed. Sarah Brady remains angry, and when the Senate recently voted (79-15) to weaken the national handgun law, she decided to speak out for Handgun Control, Inc., in The New York Times and through letters of appeal.

She has a battle on her hands. Namely, the NRA...the National Rifle Association; allegedly, as we say these days, the most powerful lobby in Washington, through its "obscenely massive campaign contributions and high pressure tactics."

And then there's Greenpeace. Certainly not a powerful group, but active all over the world in a constant, non-violent struggle for a safer environment; a struggle toward awareness of the senseless slaughter of whales and baby seals, and countless similar efforts...dangerous efforts. When the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior was sunk (and a man killed) a year ago, we discovered that the highest echelon of the French government was involved.

I'm for apples, Greenpeace and Sarah Brady.

How about you?

RICHARD VOGT.



AH, SWEET MYSTERIES OF LIFE



On Ted Koppel's ABC/NIGHTLINE a few nights ago, Sissela Bok (author, philosopher, wife of Harvard University's president) commented on a question about what principles remain that persons can practice and promote, in the light of stock scandals, Iran/Contra hearings and recent political events. Her immediate response: a refusal...an abhorrence...of violence; and a refusal of deception and lying.

And then we have Jerry Falwell. Recently he said the cause of Christ was at an all-time low. I think the cause of Christ is doing just fine. It is the cause of Jerry Falwell and his ilk that, mercifully, is at an all-time low.

When William J. Casey, former head of the CIA, died last week, his obituary notice suggested that in lieu of flowers donations could be made to the William J. Casey Fund for the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters. How sad. Money for guns and violence...and a stunning contrast to the Stewart McKinney family's compassionate request for donations to an AIDS Research Fund or the American Red Cross. The presiding minister at Mr. Casey's funeral, Bishop John McGann, made his feelings, his abhorrence of violence, known in the presence of President Reagan.

Further contrast to last week's unfolding deceptions in high places was an operetta song that concluded the Greenwich Choral Society's cabaret concerts at SUNY/Purchase Saturday night..."For 'tis love, and love alone, the world is seeking; for 'tis love, and love alone, that can repay!...'Tis the answer, 'tis the end and all of living!...For it is love alone that rules for aye!"

This Sunday...MUSIC SUNDAY 1987...we who sing, ring, play, dance and wave our arms around will celebrate spring and the beauty of the land. We hope to maintain and even advance the cause of Christ...that concept of "universal love and everlasting peace," in the words of that forthright bishop over there on Long Island.



RICHARD VOGT.

PARDON ME, BUT WOULD YOU HAVE ANY GREY POUAPON?

Some people make fun of my love of soap and water. I'm sure I inherited this trait from either Lady Macbeth (Out, damned spot! out, I say!) or my father, who enjoyed two showers per day (more, come summer). Water helped him (helps me) function better. Look what it did for Noah and his rainbow coalition: a newly-washed world...such a cleansing thought. In New York City, in the old days (!), I used to watch the sanitation trucks spray the streets toward midnight on hot summer nights. Quiet and cool. Like a shower.

As the leaves fall, our thoughts turn to harvest days, Advent and Christmas. Some stores are already caught up in their Christmas \$pirit. But we look forward to music and words that lift our hearts: harvest home; snow on snow; the Prince of Peace. Choirs are practicing special anthems and carols; sheaves are being gathered from the fields; we privileged people will try to prepare some sort of way for the Lord. Life goes on, made brighter by the faces of children.

Life goes on, but we know the homeless don't care about Dow Jones, and soap and water are luxuries. Our government drags its big feet over the disease of the century, and most accept this and sit idly by, while Wall Street gets quick attention. We smile as we borrow Grey Poupon from fellow travelers in Rolls Royces and Venetian canal boats and paddle home to peace, prosperity and Perrier. Peace...fragile; prosperity...fragile; Perrier...expensive. But those coming days still capture the imagination: All Saints; All Souls; Thanksgiving; Advent; and Christmas. These will blot out thoughts of nuclear weapons and handguns for a time. Perhaps the gulf is not Persian, but American. On TV over the weekend, all those brokerage firm presidents said they were "bullish on America." They'd better be, or their million-dollar houses could be converted to condos. Just think: condos in Greenwich for the homeless from New York and Stamford. Every valley would be exalted. Every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.



RICHARD VOGT.

WAY TO GO, JESSE!

It's interesting to my ears to hear The Rev. Jesse Jackson's lively and compelling way with the English language. His words reach the bare bones of the subjects he addresses. He strips away the gloss with rhymes and reason. The language comes alive. William Safire (the NY Times's "On Language" columnist) might be on the opposite end of the political spectrum, but I bet he smiles when he hears Jesse take off.

Duncan Boothby, son of Derek and Catherine Boothby here at First Church, recently won a town-wide Shakespeare Competition sponsored by the local chapters of the Smith College Club and the English Speaking Union. Duncan travels to Cleveland for the finals this weekend. Congratulations and good luck, Duncan! Shakespeare (his 424th birthday was 23 April) is alive and well in Greenwich, CT.

TV advertising presents a storehouse of language abuse, and this summer's political conventions are sure to contain similar misuse, plus a wealth of hyperbole and invocations for aid from above. We're all among the guilty at one time or another. Safire frowns, and so should we. The Bible, on the other hand, is a joy for both linguistic and liturgical reasons, and never more so than in this spring of the year:

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak;
and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
My doctrine shall drop as the rain,
my speech shall distill as the dew,
as the small rain upon the tender herb,
and as the showers upon the grass.

Deuteronomy 32



I am the rose of Sharon,
and the lily of the valleys...
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For, lo, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone;
the flowers appear on the earth;
the time of the singing of birds is come,
and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

Song of Solomon 2

Safire is smiling.

RICHARD VOGT

ADVENT: MAKE THAT PATH STRAIGHT!



Somehow Christmas is coming. The calendar is relentless. It doesn't breathe. It makes us keep going, keep doing. And suddenly there is something a bit more important ahead: Christ is coming. He is visiting us again on His birthday, even a Sunday this year. We must prepare His way. "Good people, the bells begin! Put off your toiling, and let love in."

And where could this love be if not in our comfortable homes, condos, apartments and church?

"I am come to preach the gospel to the poor, and heal the broken-hearted." Luke 4:18

Heavy words, no matter what our commitment to the poor, the homeless, and the AIDS sufferer. And not only checks to causes will do, nor fancy benefit dinners. The commercial says, "reach out and touch someone", and it's not a bad idea.

"When you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and you shall be blessed." Luke 14:13-14

One person, one family, could be your (my) project for a moment during these holy days to celebrate the event: Christ(mas) is coming.

We are blessed, and together with myriad material blessings we have a church celebrating the season with music, word and tradition. But is that enough? Not really. Because we can never do enough. But we can make a difference - one-on-one - this Christmas.



We can make straight in the desert of our hearts a highway for our God. We can give committees and Neighbor-to-Neighbor a brief rest. This Christmas, you and I can be that neighbor...in our homes, at our clean hearths and festive tables.

The quest...the guest...is Christ.



RICHARD VOGT.

SHIFTING SANDS: FOR THE BIRDS

When you sit at the table in the Choir Room, you look out (8 February) to an American flag, pine cones on high branches, ice in Binney Park, and large and small memorial stones covering acres of ground, barren now of color. "It is winter. The world turns on its dark side." But the sun is shining.

Karen Watt sends a colorful card from Florida: "Flamingos aren't real. They're only for postcards, ashtray decorations, and Miami Vice commercials." Can it be that our senior deaconess, that tireless worker in First Church's vineyard, doubts the existence of flamingos?

An "anchor" man revels in confrontation with our Vice-President. Some senators throw roadblocks in the path of a treaty that would limit nuclear weapons by 4%. The House defeats (mercifully) a request for more money for more guns, and the major disease spreads further across our land. Life goes on, sort of.

And Lent begins, a time for reflection. A time to refrain not only from too much food and drink, but also from prejudice and intolerance (except against the NRA). And we look for a leader to rise up from the snowy wilderness of Iowa or New Hampshire.

But we have a leader, for Lent and for life. "What of the man who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them? He is like a man who was foolish enough to build his house on sand. The rain came down, the floods rose, the wind blew and beat upon that house, and down it fell with a great crash." Matthew 7:26,27

Yes, Karen, there is a flamingo. Sometimes it stands on one leg. I've tried that, and you can't get very far. Then there's the ostrich, swift-footed, which often buries its head in the sand. I've tried that, too. I know you are a bird. I've known you were a bird for a long time, a combination of eagle and dove: strong, with clear vision, gentle, at peace. And there are others like you. But what about the rest of us chickens?

O for the wings of eagles and doves, shining in the sun.



RICHARD VOGT.

MIRACLE AT ELCHE, 1989

Many years ago I toured England, France and Italy as part of New York Pro Musica's production of THE PLAY OF DANIEL, a musical drama that originated at Beauvais, near Paris, in the thirteenth century. After that ten-week tour ended I went on to several places on my own, and finally to Elche, Spain, on the southeastern coast, near Alicante. Elche is well-known for its forest of date palm trees and also for its own centuries-old miracle play on The Feast of the Assumption, 15 August, each year. The highpoint of this music drama was the opening of the cathedral roof and God's descent with angels to take the Virgin Mary into heaven. It was a fantastic event: a village come alive with local musicians and actors taking leading roles in a folk-like representation of a Holy Day in Catholic liturgy.

I returned to Elche this past August, and I can report that the Virgin Mary is once again safe in heaven after her breath-taking ascent with God and singing angels through the domed roof of the cathedral...plus firecrackers to greet her arrival and great shouts from the assembled throng, hot and happy in 95°. Forget air conditioning.

Knowing my predilection for colorful events, some persons have suggested that I may wish to bore a hole through the roof of First Church in order to duplicate events at Elche. It's an interesting idea, but I imagine the trustees would object. Our approaching BOAR'S HEAD AND YULE LOG FESTIVAL (Sunday, 10 December, 7:30 p.m.) will tend to raise the roof anyway.

Still, you must admit that the conclusion of our Christmas pageant - ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY - would certainly be more effective if the angel came down from the ceiling somehow.

Miracle in Old Greenwich, 1989.

RICHARD VOGT.



MUSIC & GREENWICH: 'Twas A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT...

Many of you know that our annual Christmastide performance of Handel's MESSIAH and Britten's NOYE'S FLUDDE (every four years) are First Church music events that mean most to me: they bring great numbers of people of all ages together, and this week's MUSIC SUNDAY 1989 (+ FISH & CHIPS) brings this festive year of both MESSIAH and NOAH'S FLOOD to a lively, tasty close.

Next year FIRST CHURCH celebrates its 325th anniversary as the town of Greenwich heralds its 350th. At church we will move ahead with plans to enhance the music program and many special events.

In my wider music world there is the GREENWICH CHORAL SOCIETY, the great 150-member community chorus I direct. There is also one big problem: no space in which to rehearse and perform. Norwalk, Stamford, and countless other cities and towns all over the country have moved ahead with new and/or refurbished performing spaces while Greenwich drags its cultural feet. The Choral Society blesses Christ Church for its hospitality and great acoustics. The auditorium at Greenwich High School is not a space for large music events. There are myriad problems involved. Ten years ago the Choral Society decided to move to the new theaters at SUNY/Purchase for many of its concerts. Now, as Greenwich still languishes in makeshift facilities, SUNY is overbooked, more expensive each year, and unavailable even years ahead... roadblocks at every turn.

So I am forming GROUP/12...twelve positive persons from Town, Church, Symphony and Choral Society who, with the help of concerned persons in Greenwich, will make a PERFORMING ARTS CENTER a reality. We will work with other groups and organizations which share that positive vision. We must put our money where our arts are: in Greenwich, CT. We must build a solid Ark for the performing arts, and like Noah, two-by-two, plus a host of unicorns, drag Greenwich into its 351st year, kicking and screaming, full of new life...and a blueprint for an arts center, great space(s) for performers and listeners in our own backyard. 'Twill be a bright and sunny day.

RICHARD VOGT.



BEN HOLT, BARYTONE
BORN, 24 SEPTEMBER 1955
DIED, 5 MAY 1990



I met him on Friday, 21 December 1984, at the orchestra and soloists' rehearsal for Handel's MESSIAH two days later. My tenor-friend John Aler had told me about him some months before, and we nailed down dates and times over the phone. He came to the rehearsal in Banana Republic fatigues and a baseball cap. He carried a thermos bottle and a cassette recorder, and he didn't look wide enough to make a decent noise, much less a Messiah-bass-type sound.

He sang through the two recitatives and arias early in the rehearsal because he had to catch a train back to the city. The orchestra players erupted with applause. The music sounded different, filled with emotion, absolutely compelling. He had his own ornamentation for the arias and used the full range (a huge range) of his voice. During the break I told him I was mightily impressed. Also, that the Greenwich Choral Society was set to make its second tour to England the following summer, with concerts at the Aldeburgh Festival, London and other cities...and would he consider being the baritone soloist on that tour. That night I know he wondered who I was and what I was all about. But after Christmas he checked dates and it all worked out, and there began a very close association with Ben Holt.

He became a frequent soloist at First Church and with the Choral Society. I arranged a West Indian Calypso carol for him at the close of our 1986 Christmas concert...THE VIRGIN MARY HAD A BABY BOY. He performed it coming down the center of the aisle of Christ Church as planned, with guitars (Bobby Fortunato & Tim Hughes) and marimba as the opening accompaniment. With my back to him I could not see the sun glasses...but this was Ben Holt. He did what he wanted the way he wanted, and you did not interfere. And he wove his island magic. He had an electric personality. His singing was charged, his whole body filled with life. He was a theater person, conscious of every move. He also had that rare gift: he could take familiar music and make it sound different, make it his own. Plus that range, more than two and a half octaves, and high notes used with thrilling abandon.

Many moments stand out in my memory, but three remain especially vivid. One was his performance of the powerful Revival Scene from Carlisle Floyd's opera, SUSANNAH, on that tour to England in '85. Suddenly he was that lust-filled revival preacher, complete with rolled-up sleeves and bright red suspenders. Another was the spiritual, MY GOD IS A ROCK. He was the first person to perform it with me since Thomas Pyle died in 1976. I felt it was the right time, and he was the person to do it justice. And then GOD BLESS THE CHILD, a song I wrote for him and our choirs for the close of MUSIC SUNDAY 1987. He made it special.

Ben Holt demanded great things of himself. He was an exciting, sensual performer and person. He was never afraid to give you a big hug and a juicy kiss anywhere, anytime. We had great concerts together. I admired him and I loved him. Not everything between us was constant sweetness and light. Now way. But Ben could make music, and he moved people. And that's really what it's all about.

I'm sure he's making lots of people happy somewhere, with that voice, that light body and quick mind. He was Sportin' Life. He was one of a kind. Ben Holt dead is impossible to fathom.

God bless that lively child.



RICHARD VOGT.

SWORDS, PLOWSHARES, GAS, TAXES, GUNS...and CHILDREN...

Glasnost came to First Church 20 & 21 October. The Leningrad Radio & TV Children's Choir charmed our ears, hearts and homes. We rejoiced in their bright faces, their land, music, and the good will their visit created. Earlier in the week, the man who basically made it all happen, Mikhail Gorbachev, that unique person who turned the world around, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, a fitting and deserved tribute.



And now the Soviet children are gone and we are back where we were, living in our own great country, with thousands of our young men and women scattered across the Persian gulf, so that we can enjoy cheap gasoline and other signs of an over-abundant way of life. And the Brady bill for a mere hint at gun control is tabled again by an inept Congress, while children living in NYC tenement apartments are gunned down through the walls, and drugs rule city streets and many workplaces.

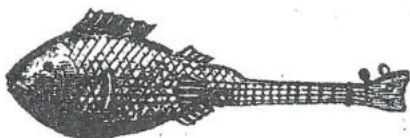
We sit on the sidelines and watch and wait for leaders who will say "enough, already!" Leaders who will call a halt to this thing we call the "good" life; who will say it's time we paid for guzzling gas; who will say that guns and drugs must go; who will stand up to the National Rifle Association and its costly, cunning lobby. And I won't dare mention the environment, or the economy and the ridiculous budget process.



Just imagine what could happen if we, as a nation, put as much care, organization, money and swiftness into ridding ourselves of drugs, AIDS, cancer, etc., as we have in scattering tanks, guns and lives in a strange and foreign land, a part of the world for which we have ourselves to thank for much of the situation that now exists.

Thanksgiving and Christmas draw nigh, traditional times of gratitude, compassion and good will. We will gather together, but will the Prince of Peace, that "brightest and best of the sons of the morning" dawn on our hearts, on our darkness? Do we deserve that dawn? The Shakers had it right: "'Tis the *gift* to be simple, 'tis the *gift* to be free, 'tis the *gift* to come down where we *ought* to be..."

The children from Leningrad are gone, but their faces and music linger on. And those other children's faces - innocent, afraid, hungry, here and all over the world - linger on. But for a fleeting moment, in late October 1990, in a little corner of Connecticut, we captured peace and good will. Thanks be to God!



RICHARD VOGT.

SOMETIMES YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN



Our MUSIC SUNDAY 1990 (20 May) celebrates the lively music/worship life of First Church and the freedom our heritage proclaims. It is a firm, rock-solid foundation that has lasted three hundred and twenty-five years. There is cause to celebrate, to go home again.

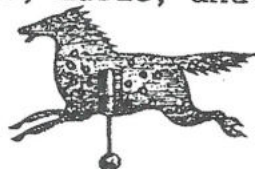
We will honor two outstanding American musicians, DAVE BRUBECK and ALICE PARKER. Dave Brubeck...a legend in his own time...born 6 December 1920...his jazz has brought joy to millions all over the world, from Old Greenwich to Moscow. He will take part in a performance of his own piece, THEY ALL SANG YANKEE DOODLE, a work for which I arranged the chorus parts in '76. And ALICE PARKER...internationally recognized as composer, conductor and educator. My friend Alice first came to prominence as arranger for the Robert Shaw Chorale. Today, she tours throughout North America conducting concerts and workshops of choral music. We will perform excerpts from Alice's MELODIOUS ACCORD, old hymn tunes and texts that take us home again.

I returned to Rochester, NY, 30 April for two days. It was my first visit since I journeyed forth from the Eastman School of Music years ago. Downtown Rochester is a tangle of new inner loops and outer roadways. The Eastman Theater remains as spectacular as ever. The "big" main entrance hall at the school seemed small now. The studios - high ceilings and beautiful wood paneling - were just about the same. Students looked young, and younger. And the lilacs were about to cast their fragrant spell over Highland Park.

I visited my German teacher, now retired, age 86. She still sparkles and speaks her mind. She made a difference in my life. So did Herman Genhart, who taught conducting and coached art songs. He is gone now, and many others, including a nervous professor who put a piece of chalk in his mouth one day and tried to write on the blackboard with a cigarette.

Sometimes you can go home again. It hurts a bit, and the memories are mixed. But certain people, music, and lilacs... they all help.

RICHARD VOGT.



Wednesday, 27 February 1991
Yellow Ribbons in the Snow

I hope that by the time you read these words a cease-fire is firmly in place and operation Desert Storm is over. It may be presumptuous for me to write about the tragedy of war, particularly this war, but so be it; the futility and hopelessness of it all are overwhelming.

Saddam Hussein, whom this country "courted and supported" once upon a time, is (was?) clearly a threat to humanity. But was he worth the price we've paid in the unparalleled massive movement of men, women and weapons? What of the 100-plus families in Farrell, PA, whose sons were killed and wounded two days ago by that Scud missile? Will the yellow ribbons help? And what of the Iraqi people, and the cradle of civilization they inhabit? Where was the compelling gesture toward peace on the part of this country, or are guns and missiles our only and eternal answer?

I am an American, proud of my heritage, and I support and honor our troops. But, for me, this was not my country's finest hour, and I wonder at the havoc we have wrought. And the military, with its "collateral damage" and "K.I.A.'s." Those are people they are talking about, each born in the image of God, caught up in death and destruction.

I remember three articles from this past month. Quotes from each follow.

"I feel the United States will be seen as a first-rate power when we provide for the human needs of people, beginning with our own people right here in the United States, as an example for the rest of the world. When our country stands at the top of the list in providing adequate housing, education and medical care that construct society instead of destroying it, and addresses the kind of concern for the environment that it deserves, then our country will be a first-rate power, worthy of emulation...It is when we give up the antiquated idea that we have to be feared to be revered that a real beginning will be made in establishing what so many countries are calling a "New World Order." Bludgeoning other countries, such as Panama, Granada, Iraq, Libya, Guatemala, Nicaragua, etc. into submission is not the way." Ellen Jane Steen, Greenwich Time, Feb.5.

"Napal, which allied aircraft have reportedly begun dropping on Iraqi fortifications and tank obstacles in Kuwait, is one of the simplest but most effective weapons against enemy troops sheltered in caves, bunkers and other enclosed places. Invented at Harvard University in cooperation with the United States Army during World War II, Napalm is essentially jellied gasoline...(it) burns with intense heat, and it sticks to

(continued)

anything it touches, sometimes causing terrible casualties. One of its chief values...is its ability to deplete the air of oxygen. A wave of napalm-fueled fire splashed across the mouths of a system of caves or trenchworks may fail to burn the occupants but can remove so much oxygen from the air that the defenders suffocate. For this reason, some opponents of its use have argued that napalm should be classified as a chemical weapon and banned." (Malcolm W. Browne, NY Times, Feb. 23.)

"We woke up this morning scared, and all I can think about are the families of everyone out there, whether they are Iraqi, American or whatever. They all have sons, they all have daughters, they all have husbands in the battle. I hope that peace comes soon to all of us, and I hope that we are as quick to accept peace as we were quick to accept war." (Mariannette Suarez, NY Times, Feb. 25.)

I pray for our troops, but I do not pray or sing that God bless America. I pray that God help America, and crown her good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the dessert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land spring of water. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return with songs and everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. *Isaiah 35*

A TRIBUTE TO HIA YOUNG

by Richard Vogt, from the memorial celebration, 29 March 1992

She was a formidable, determined, classy woman...full of beans...the mother of us all...with a laugh that cascaded like rushing water. She had strong opinions on everything, from George Bush to geraniums.

It seems impossible that I knew her for almost twenty years...from a Christmas Eve in the 70's, when Cynthia Clarey, Bob Shiesley, Seth McCoy and I walked up to the Riverside Avenue house before supper at the Williams' to sing Christmas carols and "O Holy Night"...with Dick Young an attentive, silent tenor in a wheelchair, and Hia, eyes twinkling, close at hand. It was a Christmas Eve not one person there would ever forget. And those twinkling eyes, a story in themselves, became part of my life.

I was completely irreverent with her. She was one of that select few who understood my grunts and groans. She put up with my "Hiya Hia!" Through the years she used to ask where I found the time to stop by. Little did she realize that a visit, or a call to 637-1824, was complete therapy for me. I used to tell her I was attracted to older women...."Well, she said, you've come to the right place!" And just two weeks ago I greeted her with my usual "How're you doin', kid?"...and she answered... "Well, kid isn't doing too well at the moment!" In the early years we talked a lot about Emily Lent, a similar person in the life of this church.

We both loved Hay Day. Hia liked to drive over and tour the aisles and sample all the free samples, and then come home with one perfect tomato. We were also dog people, both convinced that wagging tails really ruled the world. But in reality her world revolved around her husband, her children and her grandchildren.

Hia outlined her wishes for this service carefully. She and Dick loved music, as his unique collection of songs testifies. For this service she compiled a list of 40 favorite hymns, so we might be here awhile. On the cover of the resource pamphlet she helped create, she wrote: "I want it a joyous celebration of a happy, blessed life."

We're trying, Hia.

Hymns, and Walt Whitman's America

Certain hymns take a powerful hold on me, and I'm sure many in our congregation have close associations with particular hymns. I think of ETERNAL FATHER, STRONG TO SAVE, often called the Navy hymn, and Britten's strong use of it in NOYE'S FLUDDE. At Christmas, I treasure ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY, a poem by Cecil Frances Alexander, one of her *Hymns for Little Children*, 1848. And the soaring glory of Easter would not seem right without Hymn 182, CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY.

ABIDE WITH ME. We have included it in our MUSIC FOR GOOD FRIDAY NIGHT for many years, and on ALL SAINTS Sunday, 1 November, it seemed especially appropriate in remembering those who have died. The text was written by Henry Lyte (1793-1847), the curate in a small fishing village in England. Some writers believe Lyte wrote ABIDE WITH ME in 1820 after the young clergyman visited a dying friend. Through the years his words undoubtedly brought comfort to the fisher folk in that little Devonshire village, and to countless troubled lives since then -- "I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness; Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if thou abide with me."

This year, 1992 -- this tumultuous year -- we honor Walt Whitman, a great American poet, who died one hundred years ago. There was a major observance in New York in the spring, and at our December concerts the Greenwich Choral Society will sing Howard Hanson's SONGS FROM DRUM TAPS, a setting of two of Whitman's Civil War poems, and a third poem that celebrates America. That third text is like a hymn -- "To thee, old Cause! Thou peerless, passionate, good cause... Thou stern, remorseless, sweet idea... These chants for thee, the eternal march of thee..." Whitman stirs our hearts. "I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear..." His words can serve as a healing force for our country, a rallying cry for our new president.

"Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy! Of value is thy freight -- 'tis not the Present only, the Past is also stored in thee!..." "One song, America, before I go, I'd sing, o'er all the rest, with trumpet sound, For thee -- the Future..."

RICHARD VOGT.

CRY OUR BELOVED COUNTRY

When Los Angeles erupted I thought of two friends from my high school days in East Orange, NJ. They are black (Negroes, in those days) and both still live there. One is a lively woman who teaches at Drew University. The other is a successful gentleman pharmacist. I thought about the late Herman Reissig here at First Church and his Sunday sermon ode to a dishwasher, and how our affluent ways of life should make us ever more mindful of others, those caught up in despair and poverty. I thought about Seth McCoy, waiting in vain with his white wife as empty taxis sped by in front of my NYC apartment building late one night, and then, within seconds, one stopped after he had retreated to the lobby of the building. I thought about Cynthia Clarey and Jake Gardner and Quinton, and the shifty glances they encounter as they amble down a street, that beautiful, handsome trio.

On the phone that Friday night ten days ago my teacher-friend in East Orange said, "You know, Dick, one problem is — black or white — a lot of people today aren't raised the way we were, with the moral values we were taught, you and me. 'Bye for now...love you."

I, too, sing America. I, too, am America...
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs —
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.

Langston Hughes

From *The New York Times*, 7 May 1992: Today, Mr. Gorbachev stood at the same lectern as Churchill to symbolize the Soviet Union's peaceful demise and to look no less uncertainly into the future, hoping this time that nations "made wise by bitter experience" might cast aside "egoistic considerations in order to arrive at the exalted goal that is man's destiny on earth."

We are great at desert shields and desert storms and yellow ribbons. But the fire next time is the fire this time, and the outlook — Tuesday, 3 November — is bleak. That, plus guns and the NRA. At least Ross Perot shakes things up a bit.

"At the feet of Jesus, sorrow like a sea. Lordy, let yo' mercy come driftin' down on me."

RICHARD VOGT

Noah's Flood & Thurgood Marshall

Once again we are involved with the prophet Noah, with animals and a rainbow. Benjamin Britten's timeless masterpiece will soon overwhelm children and adults, both performers and listeners, with the story of the Flood. To me it has always seemed to generate a season of thanksgiving...a time for reaching out...a healing time.

Britten composed NOYE'S FLUDDE in 1958 to give children the opportunity to participate in a medieval miracle play with contemporary music. The medieval Chester cycle of plays, from which the libretto of NOYE'S FLUDDE is taken, was performed by ordinary people: local craftsmen and tradesmen and their families. Britten brought this beautiful idea forward to our time, but he retained the early English spelling with its colorful descriptions of birds and animals, and all the lively disagreements between Noah and Mrs. Noah. The congregation becomes involved in the drama through the singing of three familiar hymns.

First Church first produced NOYE'S FLUDDE in May 1968. This month marks our eighth production. We have watched the waters rise every four years since 1969, when we mounted a second production. The Metropolitan Opera bass Ara Berberian has been Noah at every performance, and he returns later this month to proclaim Noah's message once again. A season of thanksgiving.

The Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, that great champion of equal justice, died on Sunday, 24 January. Thurgood Marshall was also a prophet, a prophet in his own time, and President Lyndon Johnson, who appointed him, was, in my opinion, likewise a prophet. The funeral service for Marshall at Washington's National Cathedral was filled with great music: Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man"; "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; and "Lift Every Voice and Sing", a song that is often called the black national anthem. James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) wrote the tune, and J. Rosamund Johnson (1873-1954) the words, compelling words: "Lift ev'ry voice and sing till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty. Let our rejoicing rise high as the list'ning skies; let it resound loud as the rolling sea. Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us; song a song full of the hope that the present has brought us; facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won!" We need prophets. They accomplish great things.

RICHARD VOGT

MY QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life: the degree of emotional, intellectual or cultural satisfaction in a person's everyday life. We recently endured an election season that added little to my quality of life. I decided to make lists. COLUMN A contains a few things and persons that give quality to my life. Just thinking about them makes me feel good. Some make me smile right now, such as children, seals, penguins, dogs and elephants. COLUMN A could include many more individuals. I've narrowed those choices to several groups, a news combo, and three persons. COLUMN B is a list of things and persons -- (most of which I can avoid) -- that do not bring quality to my life. Mercifully, on 9 November I could eliminate Oliver North, although I'm sure Bob Dole will soon be fighting for that space.

COLUMN A

apples & pumpkins
all animals
clocks
clean sheets
bells and candles
the American flag
my brother
soap & water
MacNeil/Lehrer
many operas
Romans 8:38-39
The New York Times
Hymn 147
The Chancel Choir
Jerry, the doorman
Britten's *Noye's Fludde*
Georges de La Tour
Greenwich Choral Society
coffee & Cutty Sark
birch trees & roses
tennis
all children
list incomplete

COLUMN B

artificial flowers
slamming doors
poor acoustics
cooked cabbage
instant coffee
Pat Robertson
humidity
boxing
Roseanne
latecomers
electronic organs & bells
Madonna
The NRA
Newt Gingrich
long-winded speakers
media hype
wide vibratos
guns of all kinds
iceberg lettuce
Senator D'Amato
overhead lights
poor performing spaces
list incomplete



Will any one thing or person in COLUMN B ever make it to COLUMN A? I doubt it. Certainly not Pat Robertson. No hope there. Maybe cooked cabbage.

RICHARD VOGT.

Good Friday 1994

On Sunday, 3 April, we will sing CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY, with banners, brass, bells and voices heralding the resurrection of Christ. Our church, like most churches, will be filled to overflowing, extra services scheduled. But will Easter come?

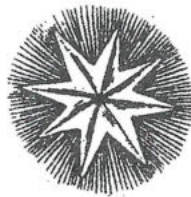
The day before -- Holy Saturday, 2 April -- children and adults will gather in The Daniels Center to color Easter Eggs in anticipation of the joyful dawn. And on Good Friday, 1 April, we will observe Christ's passion and death with a simple service for children and their families in the morning, the SPF's journey with the cross to Greenwich Point, and an evening service of music and readings. Most Protestant churches, including our own, will not be crowded. And without some remembrance of Good Friday, there can be no Easter.

Years ago, in grammar and high school days, I made the Good Friday afternoon performance of Wagner's PARSIFAL at the old Met an annual ritual, particularly when the cast included the Swedish mezzo-soprano Kerstin Thorborg, who was a friend. One year, after the five-hour production, I wandered uptown from 39th & Broadway and across 50th to St. Patrick's. The weather was mild and hundreds stood outside, attentive to a voice coming over loudspeakers. After twenty minutes or so I managed to weave my way through the crowd to find a shoulder-to-shoulder spot near the doors at the rear of the Cathedral. It was very quiet. The congregation was riveted on the speaker, a voice that rang clearly through that great space. It was after seven o'clock, and I discovered that the three-hour service was composed of seven fifteen-minute sermons on the seven last words of Christ, interspersed with hymns and other music. The preacher was Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. I stood there for more than two hours, through the final sermon. Bishop Sheen's words had a profound effect on me, probably made more powerful with Wagner's music-drama still in my ears and eyes.

Late that Friday night, thousands of worshippers slowly and quietly left the Cathedral. I was able to walk toward the altar, suddenly overwhelmed with the fragrance of flowers, but there were none in sight. I circled back behind the altar, and there they were: hundreds of Easter lilies banked on the floor, ready for careful arrangement on the high altar and in several chapels. Crosses were still draped in black. The cleaning women were on their hands and knees, scrubbing the aisles and altar steps. Holy Saturday was an hour away. Good Friday had been observed. Easter would come.

RICHARD VOGT

January 1995



Dear Friends—big and little:

I have decided to retire from my work at First Church, 31 August. I feel it is the right time. I hope to plan and take part in a few activities in December, but that is yet to be determined.

First Church has been my home for more than twenty-eight years. I became part of the staff in October 1966. Duke Potter was senior pastor. Within a short time I could vision what sort of music program there could be in this great church. And those dreams were fulfilled by countless persons and programs, and the beginning of many traditions we now take for granted: candles; the Advent wreath; the outdoor crèche; The Symbols of Christmas; The Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival; Brubeck's *La Fiesta de la Posada*; Harvest Sunday; Britten's *Noye's Fludde*; Handel's *Messiah*; Music Sunday; Sunday Afternoons Live; Music for Good Friday Night; and more. I will miss it all. I will miss the week-to-week schedule tremendously. But it is time.

I thank you for your care and support. You have made music with me. And there are several festive occasions on tap before I bid you farewell. I will not leave quietly. We will still make many joyful noises together.



RICHARD VOGT.