

## A Brief History of Saint James Episcopal Church

Many have wondered why our church was established in the tiny village of Ponsett, instead of the much larger population center of Higganum. The answer lies with local resident William Clark Knowles who, as a recently baptized young man of 20, felt a calling to establish a church in the local community.

In 1861, he began by establishing a Sunday School at his own home in Ponsett. The school ran for several years and in 1863 was recognized as a mission of The Episcopal Church in Connecticut. In time, worship services were conducted by visiting clergy.

By 1871, it was time to build a church. An account of the construction is given in *Connecticut, A Guide To Its Roads, Lore, and People*. " The Rev. Mr. Knowles, who served the pastorate without pay, built the church himself with the aid of his congregation, and branded the names of the donors of each stick of timber onto the lumber before it was put into the structure. Native mills sawed the logs, local farmers turned carpenters for the job, and a church rose in the wilderness."

The building was completed in 1873 and was named "Saint James Chapel". The bell tower was added in 1889.

William Clark Knowles was ordained as a Deacon in 1875 and as a Priest in 1886. He stayed active in our church until his death in 1933. During this period he also spent time with Emmanuel Church in Killingworth and with two mission churches, Saint Paul's in Shailerville and Saint Phillip's in Tylerville.

The early congregation was made up mostly of old Higganum families. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, their ranks were joined by European immigrants and in the late twentieth century by former city dwellers that were attracted to the country lifestyle.

In the early days, Saint James was the only church for many miles and Father Knowles ministered to anyone in the area regardless of their church affiliation and some who were without any official church connection. This tradition continues today. All are welcome.

There was no parish house until 1938, when the diocese and congregation purchased the Ponsett schoolhouse on the west side of the road. It had been abandoned when the town decided to consolidate the smaller schools and transferred the pupils to Higganum. Additions and improvements were completed in both the sixties and seventies. The parishioners did most of the construction work.

During the eighties, Saint James joined with other small churches to form a cluster, now called Middlesex Area Cluster Ministry or MACM. Churches in a cluster share a clergy team and an administrative office. Membership in the cluster now includes Emmanuel Church Killingworth, Saint Andrews Church Northford and Saint James. Our clergy team includes James Bradley, Bryan Spinks and Ellen Kennedy. The team regularly rotates among the cluster churches so we get to see all of them on a regular basis.

With the cluster came a new church organizing principle called Total Common Ministry. Briefly, Total Common Ministry is defined as: “The cooperative effort of all the baptized to accomplish God’s purpose in their lives as best they understand it.” At Saint James, the most visible result of this is more active participation of our membership in our worship services. We have about twenty members who volunteer for scripture reading, serving communion, leading prayers and a few who occasionally preach sermons.