

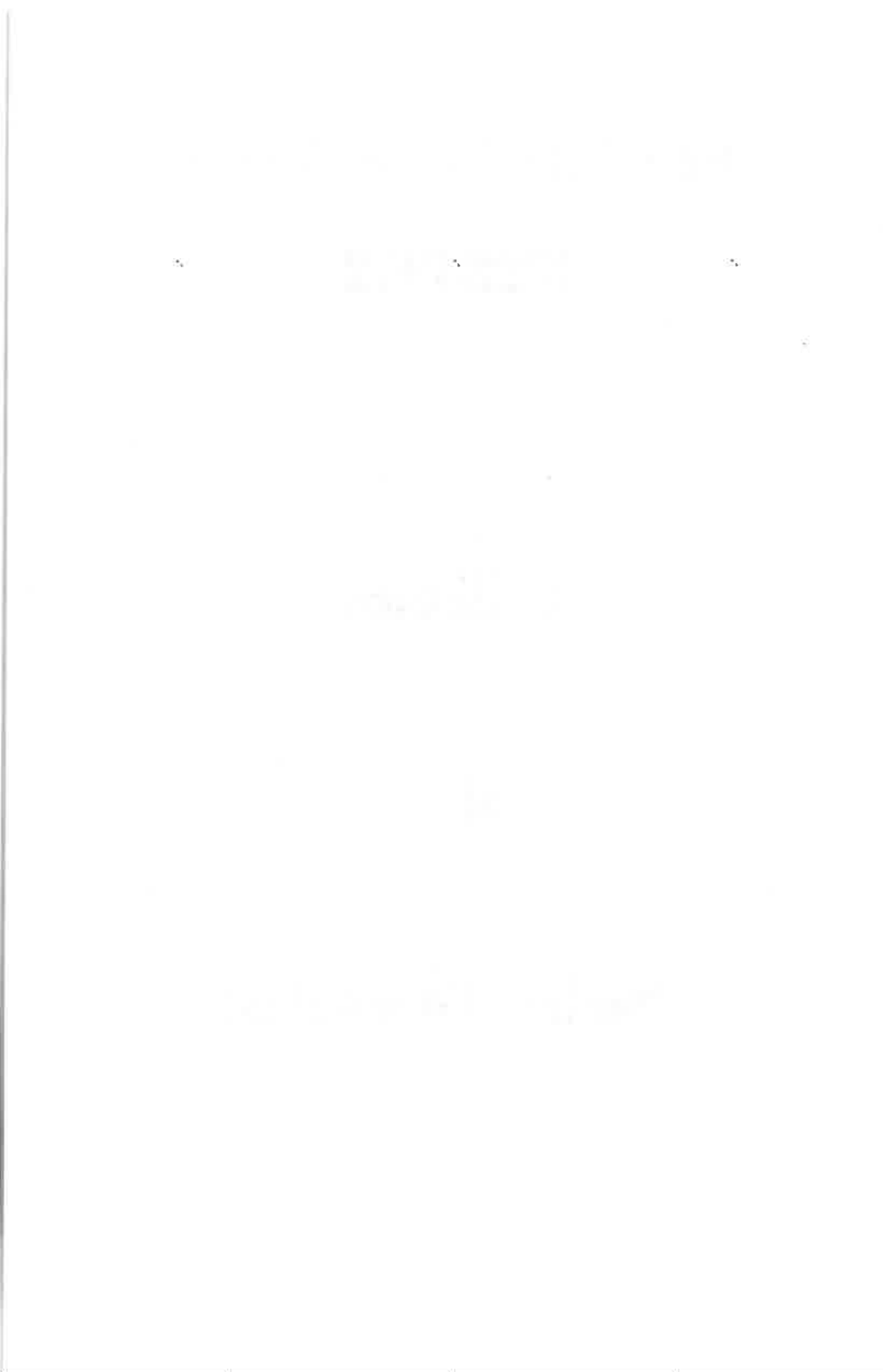
**BEN CHAPLIN'S TOWN**

**1822-1972**

**A History**

**of**

**Chaplin, Connecticut**



BEN CHAPLIN'S TOWN

1822 - 1972

A HISTORY  
OF  
CHAPLIN TOWN

BY

GORDON R. NASER, M.Div.  
CHAPLIN, CONNECTICUT 1972



BRAE RAFFERTY, M.D.  
1901 - 1972

*This history is dedicated to the memory of Brae Rafferty, M.D., a member of the original 150th anniversary committee of the town of Chaplin.*

## FOREWORD

*A lot of unseen elements and background facts go into the preparation of a town history, especially if one is not a native of the area. Much of the background was furnished by long-time residents, and because of this there are many contributors to this history. Special thanks go to Martin Navin, George Crane, and Bernard Church, members of the original 150th Anniversary Committee, who remember the Chaplin of yesteryear.*

*Odd bits of information came from many places. The fact that Origen Bennett, Jr. was an old school Baptist, who put the fear of God into the pupils he taught at Bedlam district school, helped in the understanding of former teaching methods. The fact that the Natchaug district was the only one of the original districts that did not have a cemetery came out in a conversation with a town worker. I also learned that the Griggs family loaned the land in South Chaplin for the Chapel building, and when it was moved the heirs gave the land to the fire department. And Ruth Snow Bowen, a former POSTMASTER, informed me that the title Postmaster has always been the correct title for the lady guardians of the mail.*

*My thanks also go to my wife, Janet, for the criticism and corrections, along the way, and the patience with me that she has shown during the writing of this history.*

GRN  
Chaplin, Conn.

CHAPLIN HISTORY  
1822-1972  
INTRODUCTION

*Although the separation of church and state is now a cardinal principle of our American society, it was not always the case. The founding of the United States of America in the first place was because of religious principles and our state and local histories reflect these principles. Until 1818 in Connecticut the Congregational Church was the state church, supported by tax money. It was that great preacher from Litchfield, Lyman Beecher, father of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who at the time foresaw doom for Connecticut Christianity when state funds were cut off. He later came to see that the freedom from state domination helped rather than harmed the churches.*

*In writing the early history of Chaplin it is impossible to separate church and state because for many years the only history of what is now Chaplin was the history of Ecclesiastical Society in the area. The town of Chaplin gets its name from the man responsible for the founding of the Society, Deacon Benjamin Chaplin. Chaplin settled along the Natchaug River, coming from Southwest Pomfret (now Hampton) about 1740. He accumulated a large estate and upon his death in 1795 left the sum of 300 pounds (\$1500) for the support of a learned orthodox ministry in the area. This led to the formation of the Ecclesiastical Society in 1809 and the town itself in 1822.*

## THE DEVELOPMENT

In the early days of Connecticut history the section of land that is today Chaplin was part of the so-called Joshua's tract, lying between the Willimantic and the Appaugue Rivers. This tract made up the towns of Windham, Hampton and Mansfield. Joshua was the son of Uncas, an Indian chieftan. When Joshua died in 1676 the land was willed to sixteen persons, among whom was a Captain John Mason.

The present town of Chaplin was formed from former sections of Hampton, Mansfield and Windham. The southern section of Chaplin was a section of North Windham called Chuink (old spelling). One source says that the name "Chuink" honors a type of bird that frequented the plains of New Boston, as North Windham was called. Quite a number of people must have lived on Chuink plains for in 1757 it was noted that it was a place "where several persons are buried." The cemetery land was deeded for a burial ground by Clement Neff, according to an old deed. Traces of the old burial ground can be found on land now controlled by the Fur, Fin and Feather Club.

Before Chaplin was formed the land north of Chuink was divided between Hampton and Mansfield. The land east of the Natchaug River was part of Hampton, and the land west of the river belonged to Mansfield. Into this wilderness area along the Natchaug Benjamin Chaplin moved about 1740. He cleared the land along the river banks and supported himself by making baskets and wooden trays. In 1747 he married Mary Ross, a widow, who was the daughter of Seth Paine of Brooklyn. The Chaplins had four daughters and a son. They built a large house north of the present center of Chaplin near the Natchaug River. Like his father-in-law, Benjamin Chaplin was a skillful surveyor and became familiar with all of the land in his vicinity. This familiarity made it possible for Chaplin to buy land at very advantageous prices. One such purchase occurred in 1756 when he bought 1,765 acres along the Natchaug for 1,647 pounds. The tract crossed the river nine times. This acquisition, along with others, gave Chaplin a princely domain. Some sites were sold to settlers, but most of the land was retained. Chaplin divided his land, built houses and barns, and ran his estate as the lord of a manor. He grew quite rich in the process.

Like many successful men in his day, Benjamin Chaplin was religious in the traditional Calvinistic sense. Eighteenth Century Calvinists held the view that one's success or failure economically in this life was a true indication of eternal salvation or damnation. Using

*this standard Chaplin must have felt sure of salvation. Benjamin Chaplin was well versed in religion and attended church in South Mansfield. He travelled the six miles to church on horseback with his lunch in his saddle bag. In 1767 he became a member of the First Church of Mansfield and ten years later was chosen to be a deacon. For the last twenty years of his life he was addressed as Deacon Chaplin.*

*Deacon Chaplin died on March 25, 1795 at the age of 77. He left an estate valued at 8,500 pounds (\$42,500). The estate consisted of 2,000 acres of land, four houses, and eight barns. Deacon Chaplin's son died in 1780, so the largest portion of the estate went to his widow and four daughters. Under the terms of Deacon Chaplin's will 300 pounds (\$1,500) was left to support a clergyman in the area. A church was to be established within a mile and a quarter of the Chaplin homestead before January of 1812. Regular preaching (forty Sabbaths a year) was to be done by a minister who was orthodox and adhered to the old Calvinistic Doctrine, the Westminster Confession. If there was no preaching for seven years the money was to revert to the Chaplin heirs. The will provided that the preaching fund was to be enlarged by public subscription until the fund contained 800 pounds, subject to the same limitations as the original bequest.*

*Inhabitants of what is now the town of Chaplin were scattered, with settlements in the Natchaug, Tower Hill, Bare Hill, Chewink, and Bedlem sections. Few residents lived in Chaplin center, but Benjamin Chaplin must have considered his home to be the natural center of the area. This evidence is found within the terms of his will.*

*The Ecclesiastical Society gained approval from the Connecticut General Assembly in October, 1809. The school house in the Chaplin District was to be the place of public worship, and steady preaching under the terms of the will, was to begin in December, 1809. The 1809 meeting was the second attempt at the formation of an Ecclesiastical Society. The first was in 1796, but this fell through probably because not enough money was subscribed, and also because the residents of the various areas of town worshipped where it was more convenient.*

*A committee was formed to seek the services of a minister and at the second meeting of the committee the Chaplin Ecclesiastical Society took an advanced step. A woman, Mrs. Lois Robbins, who managed a large estate, was admitted as a committee member. The church was organized on May 31, 1810 at the old Chaplin homestead, where the Reverend David Avery, Chaplin's son-in-law lived. Representa-*



tives from churches in Tolland, Ashford, Mansfield, Westford, and Eastford were present. Fifteen members were enrolled, of which the Reverend David Avery was the first. Avery was the occasional preacher in the early years. He did not become the regular pastor because of doctrinal difficulties. One view is that Avery had Socinian leanings and could not fulfill the terms of Chaplin's will as to orthodoxy. In any event it seems that Avery's theology was too liberal for the Ecclesiastical Society.

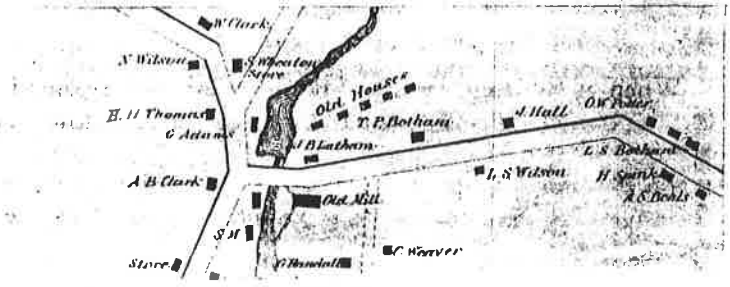
The location of a Meeting House was a thorny problem—one that was finally settled by the County Court. On August 14, 1810 it was voted to build the Meeting House, but the site was changed several times. Permission was granted by the General Assembly to hold a lottery to raise \$2,000 to build the church. The effort was successful and subscriptions in money, building materials, and labor were received. The Meeting House was accepted according to contract on September 14, 1815. The interior was unfinished, although public worship could be held. Pews, slips, and pulpit were to come later. The land that the church occupies was deeded to the Ecclesiastical Society by Erastus Hough.

It was not until 1820 that the church secured its first settled pastor, the Reverend Jared Andrus of Bolton. Andrus, who entered the ministry when past thirty, received \$300 a year salary in addition to fire wood.

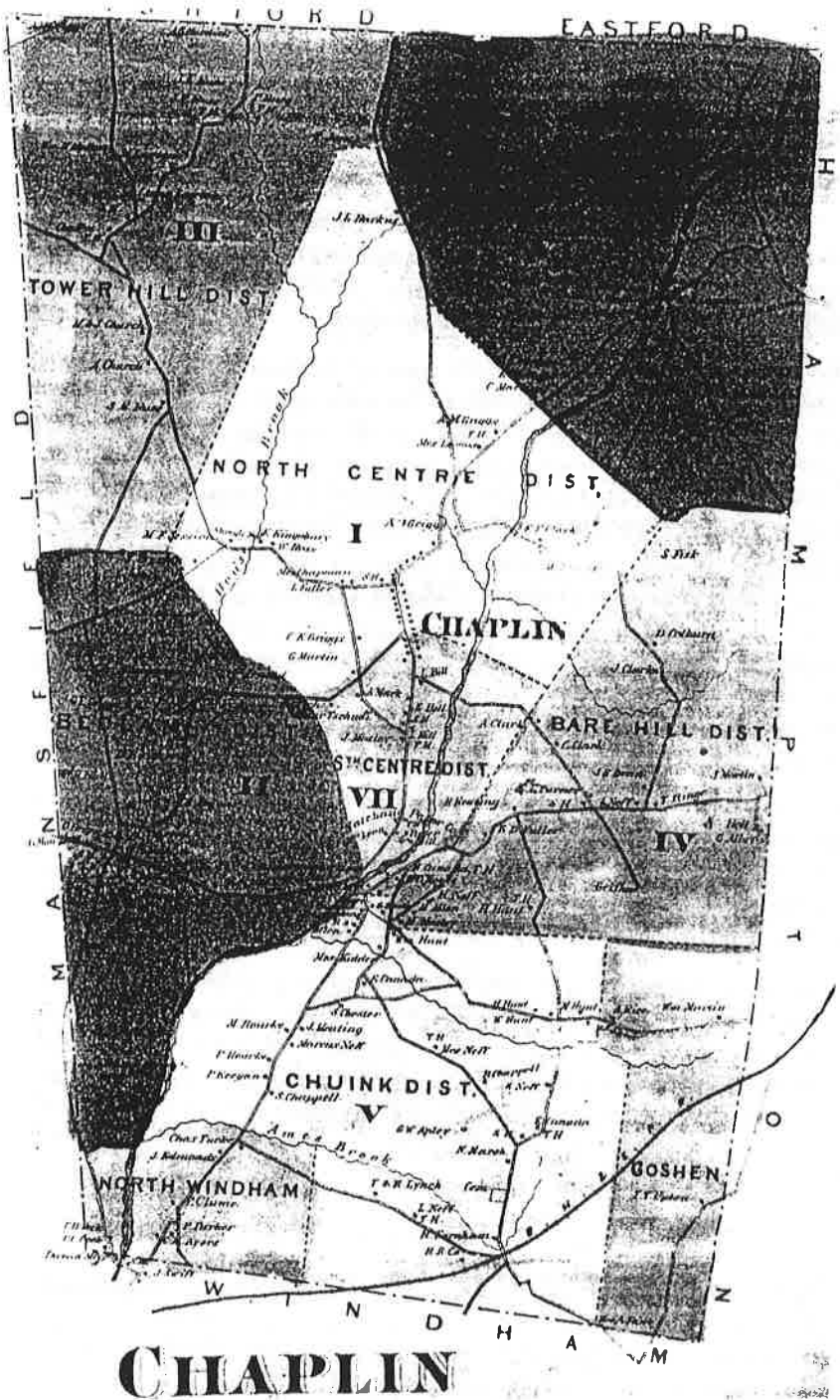
There is evidence in the records that Chaplin Ecclesiastical Society boundary lines and the school district lines were about the same, and in 1822 the Societies petitioned the state legislature for town privileges. These were granted in May, 1822 with the boundary lines of the Ecclesiastical Society taken as the town boundary. The Town of Windham fought the petition because it meant that Windham would lose Chuink, as Chuink was part of the Chaplin Ecclesiastical Society. The following call was issued to the citizens of Chaplin:

When as the Legislature of this state at their session in May last appointed the subscriber to warn of the first town meeting of the new town of Chaplin—

This is therefore pursuant to sd (sic) appointment and directions therein given to warn all the inhabitants of sd town who are legal voters in town meeting to assemble at the meeting-house in said town on the 4th day of July next at 9 o'clock in the forenoon—then and there to act on the following articles



Map of Chaplin Street, 1869



Map of School Districts, 1869

(viz) 1th to chose all necessary town officers for the present year 2nd—to do any other business necessary to be done at sd meeting.

Chaplin June 15th, 1822

Erastus Hough  
moderator

*At the first meeting Erastus Hough was chosen moderator; Orin Witter, clerk and treasurer; John Ross, William Martin, Origin Bennett, Luther Ashley, and Nehemiah Holt.*

*The population of Chaplin at the time of its institution as a town was about 800. Records show that at the time of its institution agriculture was the main industry. Present in the town at that time were a paper mill, tannery, a boot making industry, silk culture, palm leaf hat industry and several lumber operations. The state register of 1826 shows that there were in Chaplin one Congregational minister, two Baptist ministers, two Christian ministers, but no churches other than the Congregational Church. Chaplin was the smallest town in area in Windham County, covering 12,399 acres. It was five and a half miles in length from north to south and averages about three and a half miles in width, containing nineteen square miles. Three Windham County towns are younger, Eastford, Putnam and Scotland.*

*By 1870 Chaplin had several distinct community centers for neighborhoods: Natchaug in the north, Bare Hill to the east, Tower Hill in the west, the north and south center districts, Chewink in the southeast and Bedlam in the southwest. These areas followed the school district lines and will be mentioned later.*

*On a map owned by Mr. and Mrs. Martin Navin there is the indication that the B., H. and E. Railroad passed through the Chewink section of town in 1869. This was part of the rail line that went from Willimantic to Putnam and on to Boston. The railroad was an important factor in the area until the flood of 1955 destroyed the bridge in Putnam. The bridge was never replaced and the tracks were removed several years ago.*

### CHAPLIN EDUCATION

*In the early years the several school districts operated independently of the town government. In fact the actual records of the school districts predate the town by several years. The oldest recorded school society was formed in the Chaplin Ecclesiastical Society on October 12, 1815 at a meeting in the Meetinghouse. Joseph Martin was moderator and James Utley was the clerk and treasurer. There are some indications that there was a school earlier in Chuink*

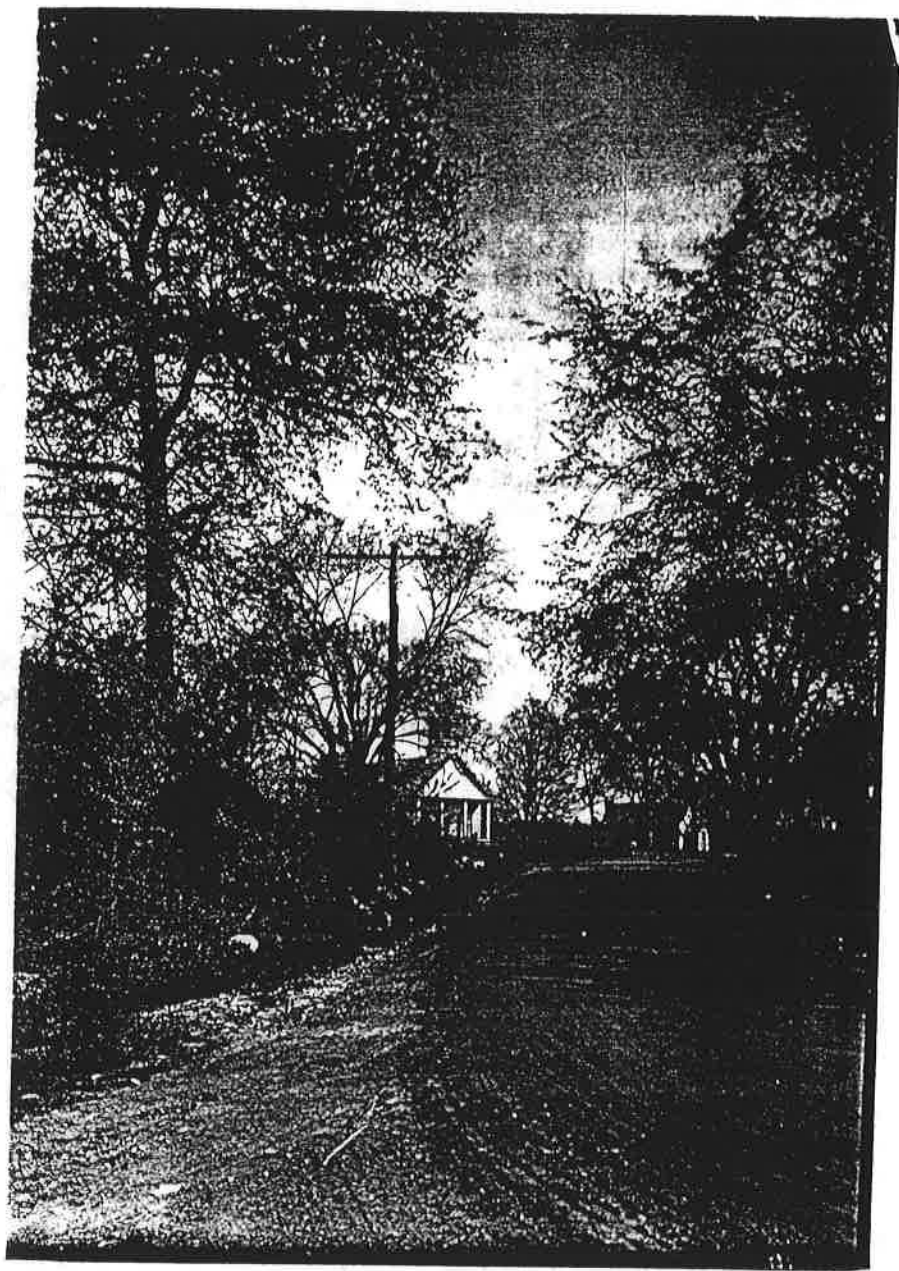
but the facts cannot be verified. We know also that people at an earlier day were concerned with education for Benjamin Chaplin's will calls for a learned clergyman for the area.

On January 25, 1819, before Chaplin was a town six school districts were formed. They included: District 1, Center District; Districts 2, Bedlam; District 3, Tower Hill; District 4, Bare Hill; District 5, Parish District; District 6, New Boston (North Windham) including Chuink. After Chaplin became a town the school districts remained about the same for several years. Between 1826 and 1855 the boundaries of the school districts were redefined several times and another district added to make a total of seven districts in the town of Chaplin. According to a map dated 1869 the seven districts, all within the town of Chaplin were as follows:

Tower Hill District  
North Center District  
Natchaug District  
Bedlam District  
South Center District  
Bare Hill District  
Chuink District

The operation of the schools under the district plan was very different from the present day operation of the schools. The residents of each district were responsible for the operation of the school in their particular district using a school tax levied by the School Society. All evidence indicates that the schools were run independently of the town government until 1857. The School Society consisted of the eligible voters in town. A moderator, clerk, treasurer, society committee, and school visitors were elected. The business was usually brief, because the districts were responsible for the day to day operation of the schools. The people of each district heated and maintained each one-room schoolhouse, hired the teacher, and took care of other details that arose.

The procedure of school operation changed drastically in the mid-1850s. On March 3, 1857 a meeting was held at which the selectmen, town treasurer and town clerk were present. It appears that the town took over the operation of the schools because the interest from the town Deposit Fund was turned over to the school visitors to operate the schools. This was to comply with the state law. In the last recorded minutes of the School Society the selectmen made the decision to change the Tower Hill district. Such decisions were made previously by the Society.



Old South Center School, Left; Chapel, Right

Gradually as the years went by school consolidation took place, and the state-appointed visitors oversaw some operations. A total of seven schools, consisting of eight grades each, were in operation in 1869. In 1875 a new school building was built on the corner of what is now Cross Road and Route 198. The new school replaced the old South Center, Bare Hill, and Chuink Schools. Sometime in the 1870s the Tower Hill School closed and the pupils attended school where the present town garage is at the foot of Tower Hill Road. The records do not seem to show when the Bedlam and Natchaug Schools closed, but Origen Bennett, Jr., the Bedlam teacher for forty years, reportedly taught for a few years in the then new South Center School. From this evidence it would seem that the Bedlam School closed before 1900. In the early part of the 20th Century three of the former seven schools remained open, the Natchaug School, the Center School, and the South Center School. All three buildings remain standing. The Natchaug School is a dwelling, the Center School is the town garage, and the South Center School is the Community Hall. The consolidation of the elementary schools was complete in 1948 with the building of the Chaplin Elementary School on Chaplin Street. An addition to the school was later built and 200 pupils now attend classes there.

Before 1900 secondary education was the exception rather than the rule. Those attending school past the eighth grade went to one of the several academies that were scattered in various places in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Mt. Hermon School and Woodstock Academy were two of the schools attended by young Chaplin residents.

When secondary education became more popular and when the state and local governments began partial payment of the costs of this education some students from Chaplin began attending Windham High School. In the early days of this century Chaplin students attending Windham High School boarded in Willimantic during the week, often working for their board, and returned home on weekends. By today's standards tuition costs were extremely low. Town Clerk Bernard Church recalls that his tuition to Windham High School was about \$60 a year with half the cost being paid by the town.

In later years the cost of tuition was paid fully by the town with the costs rising each year. Students were bussed to and from Willimantic every day. Those students who decided to attend the Technical School in Willimantic were, and still are, transported to Willimantic daily.

With the school population explosion of the late 1950s and early

1960s uncertainty grew about how long the outlying towns could continue to send students to Windham High School. Many towns around Windham were trying to get together to form regional schools. School consolidation that started 100 years ago was continuing at a rapid pace as the costs of education rose. By the mid 1960s the towns of Hampton, Scotland, and Chaplin decided to pool their resources and establish educational District 11. Parish Hill High School opened its doors to students in September of 1967. The school is located in the Northeast corner of the town of Chaplin and its enrollment is about 470 students in grades seven through twelve from the three towns.

The prime responsibility for the governing of school affairs has shifted over the years. In the early years the school society, independent of the town, levied taxes for schools. Visitors were chosen—one from each district—to see that the schools operated properly. When state statutes forced the town to take over the responsibility for schools the selectmen were at first responsible. Later school committees and boards elected by the town voters came to oversee school operation and policies in line with the State Board of Education policies.

Today two groups elected by the voters are responsible for the Chaplin schools. The local Board of Education sees to the operation of the Chaplin Elementary School, while the Parish Hill Board of Education, consisting of nine members, three from each town, is responsible for the Parish Hill High School. The boards of education selects the various administrators, teachers and staff necessary to insure a proper educational system.

#### INDUSTRIES IN CHAPLIN

When Benjamin Chaplin first moved along the Natchaug River he made his living making wooden trays and baskets. As he gradually acquired more land and cleared it, his main occupation was agriculture. From the indications it appears that agriculture was the main business conducted on his land for he had eight barns at the time of his death. Agriculture, including lumbering, was the industry of first importance in the early days of Chaplin.

Because Chaplin was cut in two parts lengthwise by two streams of water, the Natchaug River and Stone House Brook, water for power was available for the other industries that soon grew up in town. Several mills stood along Stone House Brook. On the east branch of the brook was a shingle mill. The shingles were cut from blocks and then shaved and shaped by hand. Near what used to be the Kingsbury Bridge was an old style up-and-down saw mill with an undershot wheel. Below the bridge was another mill that was



used first as a carding mill where farmers took wool to be carded into rolls for spinning. Afterward it was a shingle and finishing mill for the sawmill upstream. There was also a grinding stone there for grinding sumac for dye material. Water for the mill was held back in several ponds that overflowed the meadows. Water was let down from one to another by a series of sluice gates. The law required that the meadows be drained by May 10th of each year.

Another up-and-down sawmill was situated downstream and near it was more machinery for grinding sumac. A large mill for sawing heavy timber was placed below the bridge on Palmer Road.

Lower Dam, South Chaplin, Conn.



Lower Dam, South Chaplin

The greater stream, the Natchaug River, provided power for much more industry. During 1835 a paper mill was erected a half mile south of the village by the Lyon Brothers. This was a major mill and it manufactured \$65,000 worth of paper annually. The Ross mill which ground grain, made spools, and did other operations stood opposite Kennedy Corners along the Natchaug. Records show that the town had two grist mills, five saw mills and three shingle mills. About forty people were employed in 1850 in the manufacture of calf skin boots and shoes.

*The culture of silk was important in the mid 19th Century. Women in Chaplin and Mansfield reared silkworms, reeled and spun the silk and prepared it for market. About 1,200 pounds of silk was prepared annually.*

*In 1850 there were 1,000 people in Chaplin. Chaplin village consisted of thirty houses, a church, a school, post office, three mercantile stores, a jeweler's shop, one tavern and a hat factory. Some small shoemaking establishments were present also. The mail was carried three times a week, connecting with the Hartford to Providence stage.*

Milk Train, Hampton Station, Hampton, Conn.



Milk Train, Hampton Station

*Shortly after the Civil War the railroad started traveling through the south end of town. It was the line that ran from Hartford to Boston through Putnam and Willimantic and this railroad must have helped some of the manufacturers in town get their goods to market. The railroad ran until the flood of 1955 took the bridge out in Putnam. It was never replaced and the tracks were removed some time later. The old Hampton Station just over the town line from the Bare Hill District was used for years by Chaplin residents. Farmers used this station to ship their milk and other products to market.*

Three years after Chaplin became a town the first postmaster, Ivory Soule, was appointed. Chaplin was on the old mail route between Providence and Hartford. Mail in the early days was carried by stage and the north-south stage route between Southbridge and Norwich also went through Chaplin. The turnover of postmasters was great in the early years because the job was under the patronage system of the federal government and the postmaster was of the same political party as the President of the United States. Because of this Jared Lincoln was postmaster three times, under three separate appointments, between 1863 and 1897. The system changed after World War I, and the postmasters, when once confirmed, held the posts until retirement. Alfred Siswick, appointed in 1925, was postmaster for 25 years until Mrs. Ruth Bowen took charge in 1950. Mrs. Lenora Hicks, the present postmaster, explained that the appointments are made under the civil service regulations after examinations are held.



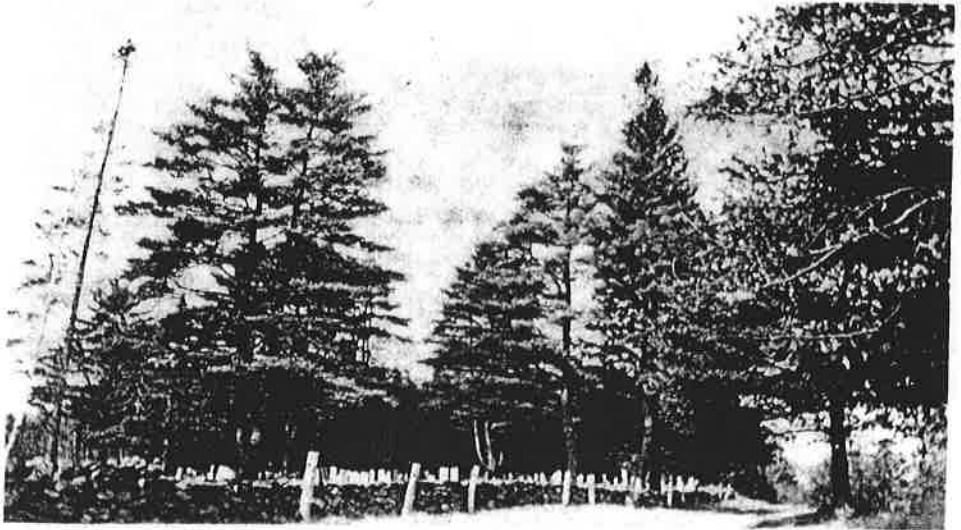
Main Street Chaplin, 1915

The location of the post office seems to have changed with the change of postmasters. In years past the post office occupied either a section of a store or a room in the postmaster's dwelling and this changed when there was a change of postmaster.

*Most of the old industries in Chaplin are now gone. Even agriculture, once so important in town, is the occupation of a few residents. There are many reasons why the occupational picture has changed. The automobile has made it possible for people to seek employment in other towns. The University of Connecticut is a large employer of Chaplin residents. The small mills and factories became unprofitable to operate with the changes in the economy. Changes also took place with the demise of the railroad. Chaplin is now a bedroom town. There are a few businesses such as restaurants, food stores, and businesses concerned with servicing autos. Most families earn their income away from Chaplin and return daily for their rest. Chaplin has become part of the suburbs.*

### CHURCHES IN TOWN

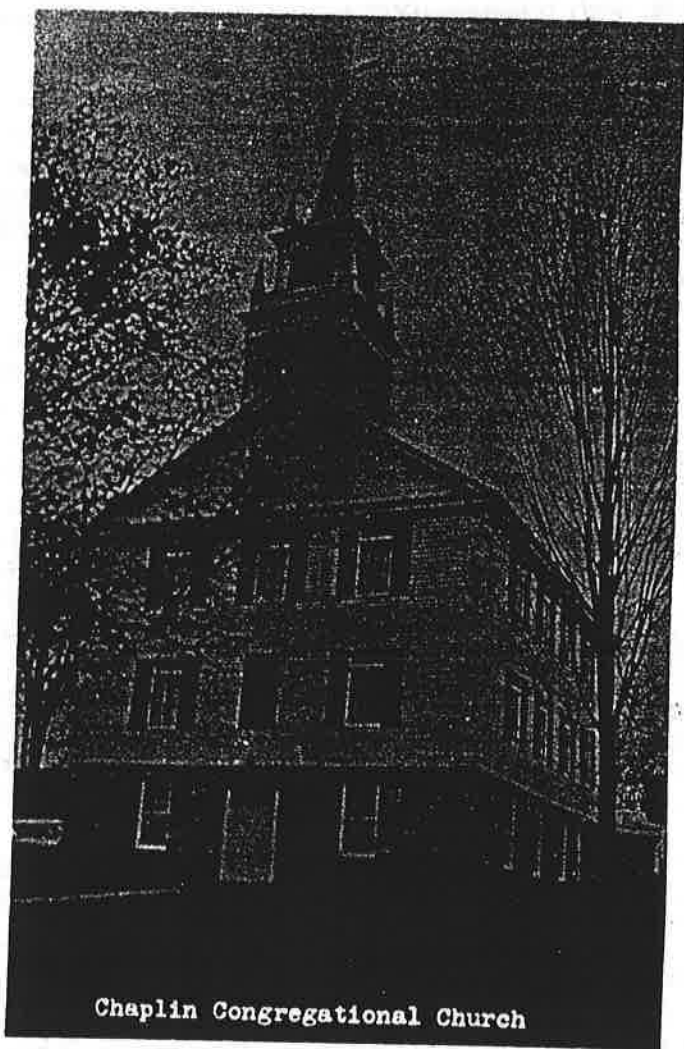
*Benjamin Chaplin had to travel six miles to church so he made provision in his will to establish a church in the area, and in fact the town of Chaplin is a direct descendant of the Chaplin Ecclesiastical Society that was inspired by Chaplin's will. The Congregational Church, however, was not the first church in the area now the town of Chaplin.*



Chewink Cemetery, 1900

*Some people worshiped in a church in the Chuink section of Windham. The land for the church was given by the Ames family in 1780. This Ames Meeting House was in existence for about sixteen years and the Reverend John Storrs was the only pastor. The old burying ground in Chewink is near the site of the church.*

*There was an attempt soon after Benjamin Chaplin's death to take advantage of the provisions of his will in the formation of an Ecclesiastical Society, but the plans fell through. People worshiped where it was convenient for them for the next thirteen years. The*



**Chaplin Congregational Church**

Chaplin Congregational Church

*Ecclesiastical Society came into being in 1809 and regular Sabbath services were held under the terms of the will in the school house. The Meeting House was completed in 1815 and the first settled pastor, the Reverend Jared Andrus, was chosen in 1819.*

*The original plan of the Meeting House was without a steeple and the church did not have one until the middle 1830s. A bell was obtained in 1837, and shortly thereafter the pews and pulpit were constructed.*

*In the years that followed the pulpit was lowered twice to its present height. The pews as they are now seen were placed in the church in 1891, replacing the box pews that were in the church for over fifty years.*

*When it was first constructed the church stood fifty feet farther up the hill than it stands today. In 1868 the congregation saw the need for more room. The side of the hill was excavated and a foundation was built of stone. The whole church structure was then moved forward on large rollers onto the new foundation. This provided a room under the main church that serves as the vestry today. The present building has been used continuously since 1815.*

*In 1836 a committee was formed to procure a house to serve as a parsonage. Land was purchased in 1837 from Luther Ripley for \$175 and the parsonage was erected on it at a cost of \$1,400. The committee decided that the rental fee for the pastor was to be six per cent of the cost, or \$84 a year. The Reverend Erastus Dickinson was the first pastor to live in the parsonage. He started his pastorate in 1837 after his ordination. The salary at that time was \$500 a year. The parsonage has undergone several renovations since, the latest being in 1970, when an inside-out-top-to-bottom job was done under the direction of Mr. Oliver Bolduc. The church records show that both church and parsonage were wired for electricity in 1932.*

*The 19th Century was a century of church revivals and several very successful ones were held in the Chaplin Congregational Church. The most successful revival was held in 1840 when sixty people united with the church at one time. Another successful series of revivals in 1894-95 added thirty-six members.*

*The longest pastorate was that of the Reverend Francis Williams. He was called to serve the church in 1858 and remained its pastor for thirty-four years. Williams emphasized temperance, revivals, and missions. No saloons or dance halls existed then in Chaplin. Several revivals were held, and the Chaplin Church was known as a missionary church in this area. This attitude was a far cry from the behavior of society sixty-five years earlier. One account of Benjamin Chaplin's funeral reads:*

"His funeral was conducted with all the ceremony befitting his means and position—a great assemblage of people with dinner and liquor for all, and so much time was needed for these preliminary exercises, that it was nearly night before entering upon the ordinary services."

*In the summer of 1888 two brothers from East Haven held revival meetings in the area. This led to the building of the chapel in South Chaplin—near the school house, on land owned by the Griggs family. A Sunday School was held in the chapel building for many years, and there was some rivalry between the chapel goers and the members of the Congregational Church. In 1954, after services were discontinued, the chapel building was moved to its present location behind the Congregational Church where it serves as a church school room for preschoolers and a child's nursery during the regular church services in the main building. The last remnants of the old horseshed was converted into a storage building about the same time. It is known as the "Old Sentinel" building.*

*A close association between the Chaplin Church and the North Windham Church existed since the start of the North Windham*



Old North Windham School

Ecclesiastical Society in 1895. The two churches shared pastors several times until the present yoked situation was formed in the late 1920s. The Reverend Paul Sanger served both churches and pastors of the Chaplin Church have also been the pastor of the North Windham Church since that time.

Several members of the Chaplin Congregational Church have gone into Christian service. The Reverend William Sanford and the Reverend Walter Lanphear became ministers. Mr. Lanphear served the Chaplin Church as pastor from 1919-1921, and in 1935 wrote an historical sermon on the 125th anniversary of the church that was printed in the WILLIMANTIC CHRONICLE. Another former member, Zilpa Burdick Booth, became a missionary, with her husband, to South Africa. Mr. Booth is now Associate Minister of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Reverend Charles Saarion, a former pastor from 1954-57, has recently been appointed to serve as a missionary to Turkey.

Over the years changes were made in the interior of the Meeting House. Beside the lowering of the pulpit and the change in the pews, heating stoves were added in 1837. Prior to this the only heat in the building was in the form of small foot stoves. Sometime after the electricity was installed in 1932 central heating made the building more comfortable. Kitchen and bathroom facilities were also installed. In 1955 an electronic organ was installed, made possible by many contributions to a memorial organ fund.

In May of 1960 the 150th celebration of the church was held. On May 22, 1960 the historical service featured solos by Mr. Wesley Howard, a long time member of the church, and the reading of the history of the church compiled by Mrs. Mabel Church. At the anniversary service a week later the Reverend James English, Minister of the Connecticut Conference, delivered the sermon. The Reverend Raymond E. Fiedler was pastor of the church.

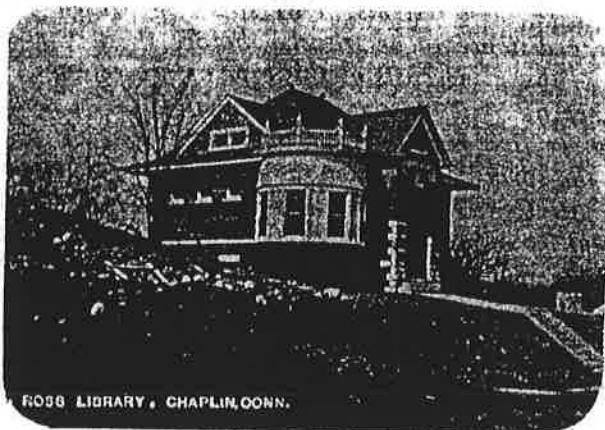
The Chaplin Congregational Church became a part of the United Church of Christ in 1961. The United Church of Christ was formed by a union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches. The cornerstone of the new denomination is the autonomy of the local church together with a larger sense of mission and purpose in the world of today. In 1970 the Chaplin and North Windham churches entered the Developing Churches Program of the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ. Under this five-year program the Conference provides program, training, and leadership aid to churches in areas of the state where changing conditions indicate that a different approach is needed.



*The Chaplin Church tries to meet the needs of the community. Its church school program is open to the whole community. The Junior Choir is very active, and the teen fellowship was formed in the summer of 1971. The Women's Fellowship meets monthly and is open to all Chaplin women. It is the policy of the church to make its worship life and program available to all who care to partake.*

### WILLIAM ROSS LIBRARY

*In the report of the town meeting of October 7, 1901 there is an item thanking Seth Moseley for a gift of \$100 toward the establishment of a free library in Chaplin. At the same meeting the town voted the sum of \$200 for the library plus \$25 annually for maintenance and increase. The library was first kept in the Davenport house by Nettie Snow. The library was kept in several places in the early years. Among them was the building that now houses the town hall. Support from the town in the early years totalled \$50*



### William Ross Library

*annually. To this was added \$50 from the William Ross Trust Fund. The librarian's salary in the early years was \$25 annually.*

*When William Ross died his will provided money for a library building. His widow added some money to the fund and the library building was erected for \$6,500. It was dedicated as the William Ross Public Library in 1911. The building was built by George Eastman Snow.*

*In 1920, when Ruth E. Snow was librarian, the library contained*

1915

some 2,000 volumes. The number of volumes has grown so, that now the library houses about 6,000 volumes. Total budget for the library is about \$2,800 a year with the state paying about one-third of the cost. The library regularly receives books on revolving loan from the Connecticut State Library and a large supply of children's books are readily available to the children of the community.

The William Ross Library contains much information about the early history of Chaplin. The warning of the first town meeting in the hand of Erastus Hough is framed and hanging on the wall, and a corner cupboard from the old Chaplin mansion was given to the library by Judge King. There are two histories of Windham County and an atlas with early maps of the area in good condition. The chairman of the present library board is Mrs. Dorothy Shipton, the librarian is Mrs. Mary DiCecco.

#### CHAPLIN FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fire protection for Chaplin prior to 1948 was handled by the Windham Fire Departments. This situation caused problems because of the distance to be traveled before the department got to the fire, and the rising costs of this type of protection. At a meeting in December of 1948 it was decided that Chaplin would have its own volunteer fire department. Construction on a Fire House was started in the spring of 1949 on land next to the Community House (the old South Center School). The first pumper, on a Federal truck chassis, went into service shortly before the Fire House was finished in 1950. The pumper was housed in the town garage for a short time until it could be placed in the new building. A second truck, a tanker, was purchased four years later by the department and turned over to the town.

The Fire House was erected using no town funds. Donations bought the materials and the work was done by volunteers. From the start the fire department maintained its own building and the town maintains the equipment and telephone service for the control of the sirens. Five sirens are strategically located around town so that they can be heard by all. The fire department operates on an annual budget of about \$3,200.

Fire fighting in the area is a cooperative effort. Nineteen fire departments surrounding Willimantic, and using the Willimantic Fire Department as a base, are engaged in mutual aid fire fighting. This means that there is always help available for combatting large fires, if it should be needed. The departments in the mutual aid group can be in constant radio contact with one another during fires. If additional aid is needed a call goes out to the base station in

*Willimantic and help is on the way in a matter of minutes.*

*There are many advantages to having a fire department in town. There is better fire protection with its side benefit of lower insurance rates, and the sense of community spirit that is generated by the sixty volunteer firemen and the Women's Auxiliary.*

*Connected with the Chaplin Fire Department is the Hampton-Chaplin Ambulance Service. The ambulance is housed in the Hampton Fire House and serves the residents of both communities. The Chaplin Volunteer Firemen assist the Hampton ambulance operators when there is a call in Chaplin. Those firemen who take part in the ambulance work are trained in First Aid by the American Red Cross and contribute a great deal to the community.*

#### VISITING NURSES ASSOCIATION

*The Chaplin-Hampton-Scotland Visiting Nurses Association was organized in 1960 and began its operation in 1961. The Association provides professional nursing service to the schools, shutins, and persons with health problems in the three towns. Personnel available through the Association are a physio-therapist, home health aides, a school health aide, two professional nurses, and a part-time supervisor.*

*The sixteen member board is made up of residents, proportionally divided, from the three towns. Chaplin has seven representatives, because it is the largest town according to population. The Visiting Nurses Association operates on an annual budget of \$30,000 with the state paying about three-quarters of the operating costs. According to the town report of 1970-71, 1,426 visits were made. The work in the schools is divided so that nurses spend one hour per pupil per school in the course of a year. Many people have been helped in the 12 years since the Visiting Nurses Association began.*

#### CURRENT ORGANIZATIONS

*Organizations that are functioning in town are deserving of a mention and brief explanation.*

*The Natchaug Grange meets in the Grange Hall that is opposite the town hall.*

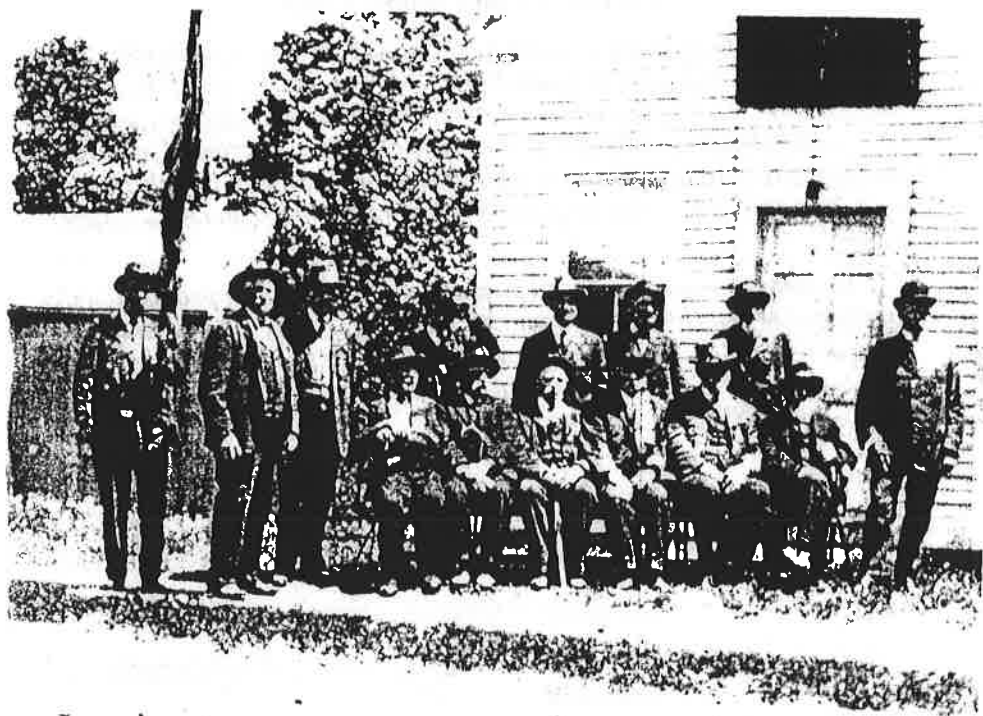
*The Couples Club consists of couples from town who meet together at periodic intervals for food and sociability.*

*The Parent-Teachers Organization is concerned with the Chaplin Elementary School. The group has held work days at the school*

and has helped to make the Chaplin Elementary School a better place.

The Parish Hill Adult Club is a sort of PTO at Parish Hill High School. The Adult Club and the Tri-Towners cooperate with the High School every year to try to provide some adult education classes in various areas.

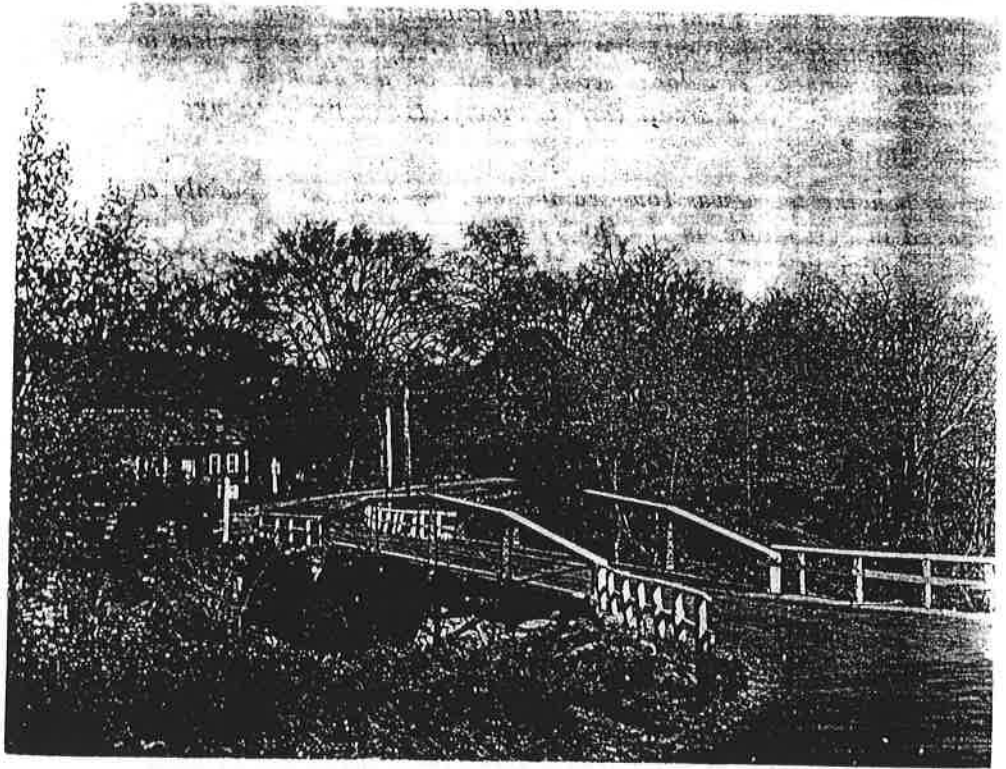
The town of Chaplin also contains active 4-H clubs, a Cub Scout Pack, and a Boy Scout Troop. These together with the youth activities at the church recently prompted an out-of-town real estate company to advertise the Chaplin youth activities as one of the advantages of living in Chaplin.



G.A.R. Post, 1915. In Front of GAR Hall on Chaplin Street

## LIFE STYLES AND ODD FACTS

*When Benjamin Chaplin settled along the Natchaug in about 1740 the whole area from Windham to Pomfret was wilderness. By the time of Chaplin's death in 1795 there were clusters of settlers in several areas of town: Natchaug, Chuink, Bare Hill, Bedlam, Tower Hill and South Chaplin. After the Meeting House was built the area around it began to be the hub of activity and large homes were built on Chaplin Street. Because of the distances and difficulty of travel each district remained a center of activity, except on the Sabbath. Each settlement had a school, cemetery, and some businesses. By the mid 1870s South Chaplin became a center for much business, probably because the Natchaug River at that point was most suitable for power. There was also a dam near Diana's Pool. Bare Hill seemed to be the center of the distilling industry with three cider mills and a distillery. The northwest part of the Chuink Plains was known as "Dublin" because of the numbers of Irish settlers.*



Old Highway Bridge, South Chaplin  
Highway Was Changed in 1926  
Bridge Was Destroyed in Late 1930s by Flood

There has always been interest about how Bedlam district got its name. Some stories are that there were several families in turmoil in this area at one time. Another story is that a flock of geese were noisy and caused the name. At one time there were attempts to change the name to Harmony district, but the old name stuck.

In 1820 Dr. Orin Witter set up practice in Chaplin. He was the town doctor until his son Orin, Jr. started practice in 1860. Another doctor, Dr. Charles Knight, located in Chaplin in 1895 and died in 1912. Dr. Brae Rafferty who moved to Chaplin in 1961, practiced in Willimantic until his retirement in 1969.

According to one source Chaplin in the early parts of the 19th Century was noted for its liberal pay scale and good working conditions. Workers who built the Congregational Church received ten cents an hour for a seven hour day, with six cents additional for a cart and three cents for a sled. The barter system was used extensively to pay debts in this era. Partial payments for school expenses were excused when wood was given for the school stove. Labor was used as payment for debts, and a man could pledge goods or services instead of money. The local economy ran on a minimum of cash. Today we live in a credit card economy. Have times changed so very much?

When the town was founded the 800 residents were mainly engaged in agriculture on the family farms. Travel was difficult and most activities were centered in the neighborhoods. Even a trip to church consumed most of the day for some people in the outlying sections of town. As roads improved people moved around more. Even school consolidation depended upon good roads. As industry in town grew, better transportation was needed to ship goods to market. In its early years the railroad was a help to the residents. As late as 1920 there were four trains a day stopping in North Windham.

The automobile, in Chaplin as well as in other places, really changed the life style and even caused the demise of the trains. Cars made it possible for residents of outlying towns, including Chaplin, to travel out of town to work and to return home at night. The car put Chaplin in touch with the world, and the town would never be the same again. The automobile permitted further school consolidation because bussing was possible. The automobile probably was a factor in causing the small industries along the Natchaug River to become unprofitable. Workers could earn higher wages out of town than could be paid by the local businesses. Gradually then Chaplin changed from a town where workers toiled on family farms or in local businesses to a community where the breadwinner toiled else-

where and came back to Chaplin after the day's work was done. Chaplin is now a town of commuters and the two-car family is a necessity rather than a luxury.

What about the Chaplin of the future and the 1,700 people living there now? Willimantic is growing out along Route 6 toward Chaplin. Route I-84 is planned for Eastern Connecticut and is slated to pass through Chaplin. These two things alone mean that the city is moving closer, and if I-84 is completed, metropolitan Hartford will be 35 minutes away. Chaplin is one of the towns included in the Goldmark Communications Study for areas of less dense population. This study seeks to combine the advantages of city and rural living. Also, what will be the impact on Chaplin if there is ever a jetport in Eastern Connecticut?

The questions are raised. It is too soon for answers. The next few years will be an interesting time in the history of Chaplin.

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7. Chaplin School District Records.

### Interviews

Interviews with people too numerous to mention.

### Picture Credits

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