

St. Mary's-by-the-Sea  
(Chapel)  
Borough of Fenwick  
Old Saybrook  
Middlesex County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-371

HABS  
CONN,  
4-SAYBRO,  
10-

WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

ST. MARY'S-BY-THE-SEA  
(The Chapel in the Borough of Fenwick)

HABS No. CT-371

HABS  
CONN  
4-SAYBROOK  
10-

Location: Borough of Fenwick, Old Saybrook, Middlesex County, Conn.

Present Owner: Trustees are charged with seeing that the chapel is used for religious purposes only. Otherwise it would revert to the heirs of the original owners. The present trustees, who were appointed by the Probate Court of Old Saybrook, are Peter Bulkeley and Charles E. Brainard.

Present Use: Religious purposes

Statement of Significance: What is today the Borough of Fenwick in the town of Old Saybrook was originally a 19th-century summer community. The entire community is of architectural interest because it is actually a collection of very fine shingle and stick style "cottages". It is now being established as an historic district and when this has been accomplished, the entire district will probably be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The chapel, St. Mary's-by-the-Sea, is of particular interest because it serves the whole Fenwick community and its site and architecture blend well with the surrounding cottages and landscape. Part of the chapel was built before 1887 when the structure was moved a short distance to its present spot. After it was moved, it was enlarged and the bell tower was added.

The architect and minister for the chapel was Rev. Francie Goodwin who had a cottage in Fenwick. Rev. Goodwin was a skilled amateur architect and a close friend of America's most influential landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted's belief in the need for environmental planning to run with the natural contours of the land, his emphasis on visual beauty and his antipathy toward the 19th-century idea of Social Darwinism are of great interest to architects and planners today. By the time Rev. Goodwin designed the Fenwick chapel Olmsted had already prepared his plans for New York's Central Park, the planned community of Riverside, Illinois Mt. Royal Park in Montreal and many others. During the 1880's Olmsted was collaborating with the architect H.H. Richardson on railroad stations and private estates in the northeast and he was also producing plans for the public beach and many private estates in Newport, R.I. Since Olmsted was a friend of Rev. Goodwin, it is difficult to believe that America's most visionary landscape architect did not have some influence on all of Fenwick and hopefully this might be the subject of future research.

The interior of the chapel is of particular interest because of its fine woodcarvings done in the 1940's and 50's by John Gregory Wiggins. Wiggins' carvings decorate a number of other churches and chapels including Trinity Chapel in Hartford. Since Wiggins' death, additional woodcarvings have been designed by C.E. Taylor and carved by Erwin Dressel.