

Churches of God in New England mark 40th

By John Warren

KITTERY, Maine—Church of God members from a variety of fellowships congregated in this city in the southern part of Maine the Sabbath of Nov. 18 to mark the 40th anniversary of Church of God groups with origins in the Radio/Worldwide Church of God in a six-state area.

The celebration began with church services sponsored by the United Church of God congregation commonly referred to as the Portsmouth church, even though Portsmouth is across the state line in New Hampshire.

The UCG congregation is pastored by Paul Suckling of Shrewsbury, Mass. Mr. Suckling also pastors a congregation in Worcester, Mass., and serves as a regional pastor for the UCG.

Organizing and sponsoring the reunion were

See **NEW ENGLAND**, page 6

Photo by Diane Smith



Reg Platt

New England gathering reunites Church of God families

Continued from page 1
two Church of God members, Denzil Thayer of Farmington, N.H., and Walter Warren of Buckfield, Maine.

Welcome to all

Mr. Suckling noted in a printed invitation that "it was 40 years ago on Nov. 12, 1966, that the first service of the [Radio] Church of God was held anywhere in New England. Manchester, New Hampshire, was the starting place and so much has happened since those early days."

Mr. Suckling concluded:

"The one thing that we ask of everyone is that there be no rancor over what has happened through the past 11-plus years since the major splits of '95."

"I'm sure that we can all enjoy the 40th-year celebration in the right attitude and spirit."

Church services took place at the Roadway Inn from 2:30 to 4:30.

Don Cole of Leyden, Mass., a long-time church member and deacon, offered the opening prayer.

Church development

Mr. Warren gave the first message,

in Passaconaway) first in Farmington, then Concord and finally in Manchester.

Full-time pastor in 1966

The Ambassador College graduates who led these Bible studies included

area was Fred Kellers, a graduate of the Pasadena campus of Ambassador.

Mr. Kellers pastored the congregation beginning in 1969 and remained in New England until the summer of 1973.

Pembroke, Mass., attended the evening fellowship.

Mr. Suckling invited Mr. Kellers to join the celebration and present the main message.

Mr. Kellers and his wife, Lucretia, now live near Nashville, Tenn., and

The service concluded with a closing prayer by Mr. Thayer, a longtime church member and deacon who served in the Radio/Worldwide Church of God congregation from its inception.

Mr. Thayer, who was ordained a local elder in the WCG in 1995, now serves a small group that meets in members' homes on the Sabbath."

Mr. Thayer told this writer:

"The 40th anniversary was a memorable experience."

"I saw a lot of old friends I hadn't seen for years. Most everyone knew me, but I had trouble remembering some because so many were children 40 years ago that have grown up and are now middle-aged adults."

"When they introduced themselves, in some I recognized their resemblance when they were children. I saw Don Cole, who looks the same as he did years ago and is now 85. I am looking forward to the 50th [anniversary]."

Pictures of history

The evening activities began with a pasta dinner followed by fellowship that included historic video presentations and viewing of other pictures.

Cynthia Gordon of Nashua, N.H., and April Washburn of Phillipston, Mass., coordinated the dinner.

One collection of pictures from the early outings and activities of the church was provided by Mary Sweat of Bethel, Maine.

Her husband, Clayton, who died



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40 YEARS IN NEW ENGLAND—Old friends meet Nov. 18 in Kittery, Maine, for a celebration of the 40th anniversary of New England congregations with roots in the Radio/Worldwide Church of God. **Photo 1:** The brethren attend the first Sabbath service in New England of the Radio Church of God on Nov. 12, 1966, in Manchester, N.H. **Photo 2:** In this historic photo, church members Marilyn Conway Jacobs (left), Paula Dresser, Dick Birdo and Winona Davis meet for a meal. **Photo 3:** Denzil and Frances Thayer back in the '60s. **Photo 4:** Julie Ralston (left) and Cynthia Kendall attend the reunion for New England Church of God members. **Photo 5:** Walter Warren (left) and Reg Platt. Mr. Platt

was the original pastor of the first New England congregation of the Radio/Worldwide Church of God. **Photo 6:** Church members (from left) Janet Roberg, Ethel McMullen and Rick Roberg. **Photo 7:** The official 40th-anniversary cake. **Photo 8:** Amber Teitgen, her mother, Elaine Tucker, and Marilyn Potter. **Photo 9:** Ruth Warren Johnson, Rachel Warren Mendola and Fred Kellers. Mr. Kellers pastored the New England congregations from 1969 to 1973. **Photo 10:** Lucretia Kellers (left), wife of Fred Kellers, and Diane Rosenthal, widow of longtime minister Jim Rosenthal. **Photo 11:** Mrs. Mendola and George Wyman. [Photos courtesy Diane Smith and Walter Warren]

Don Cole of Leyden, Mass., a long-time church member and deacon, offered the opening prayer.

Church development

Mr. Warren gave the first message, which included a reciting of some of the early activities and development of the church.

Mr. Warren serves as a deacon in the United congregation and was a driving force in planning the celebration.

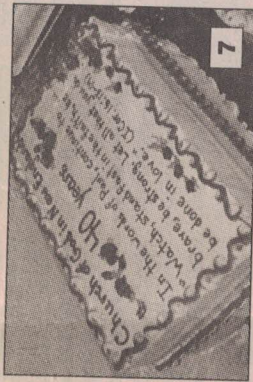
The first meetings of the Radio Church of God in New England were Bible studies, the first of which was conducted in June 1963 in Passaconaway, N.H., with 34 in attendance. Carlton Smith conducted that service.

When church headquarters in Pasadena, Calif., transferred Mr. Smith to a new assignment, Raymond Cole became the first district superintendent on the East Coast for the Radio Church of God.

Mr. Cole would send men from New York to conduct what became monthly Bible studies.

From 1963 to 1966 these studies were conducted (after the initial one

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Walter Sharp, Robert Spence, Gary Antion, Guy Engelbart and Reg Platt.

It was not until 1966 that headquarters assigned a full-time pastor to the area and weekly Sabbath services began at Manchester.

Mr. Cole conducted that first church service, and Mr. Platt, a native of Britain and a graduate of the Bricket Wood, England, campus of Ambassador College, was appointed to serve as the area's first full-time pastor.

The second pastor to serve the

As the Manchester congregation grew, it divided in 1967, and Mr. Platt pastored the new congregation in Boston, Mass. At that time services in New Hampshire moved to Concord.

Mr. Platt, who now resides in

pastor congregations at Nashville and Murfreesboro, Tenn., and Bowling Green, Ky.

Mr. Kellers spoke about patience and how God and humans view time differently.



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Cynthia Gordon of Nashua, N.H., and April Washburn of Phillipston, Mass., coordinated the dinner.

One collection of pictures from the early outings and activities of the church was provided by Mary Sweet of Bethel, Maine.

Her husband, Clayton, who died recently, had taken them over the years.

Mr. Thayer had brought two albums as well as a video of the 25th-church-anniversary observance. Mary Lou Richmond of Hope Valley, R.I., provided another video.

Organizers had encouraged anyone with pictures to bring them for everyone to enjoy.

COG milestones

The oldest person in attendance was 98-year-old Rebecca Pope of Thornton, N.H., and next was longtime church member Ethel McMullen, 96, of Berwick, Maine.

Diane Smith of Somersworth, N.H., expressed her appreciation to this writer for the efforts of Mr. Warren and Mr. Thayer in making the celebration a reality.

"It was wonderful to see old friends and be able to fellowship with other groups," Mrs. Smith said.

"One of the highlights for many was to see our first minister, Reg Platt."