

The 179 Year History of the Lincroft Presbyterian Church 1846-2025

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The Lincroft Presbyterian Church began as a new church development project of the First Baptist Church of Red Bank in the mid-1800s and was called the Baptist Church of Leedsville. Four trustees were named to start a new church in the farming town of Leedsville (now Lincroft) three miles to the west of Red Bank. They were James Grover, John N. Johnson, Daniel Polehemus and Horance Gleason. The date was October 10, 1846. The United States was at war with Mexico, James Polk was President, and a telegraph line had just been installed between Philadelphia and New York City.

The church was incorporated on February 25, 1847, as the Lincroft Church Society. The First Baptist Church supplied the pulpit. Robert Thompson provided land for the construction of a meeting house and timber was made ready for its construction. Financial difficulty forced the abandonment of the project, and it was not until 1868 that construction began. A chapel was built and was dedicated on February 17, 1869. Leedsville officially became Lincroft in 1891.

Establishment of a Sunday School was the chief aim of the sponsors and trustees. Lincroft Chapel was used primarily for Sunday School from 1869 to 1951. Church services were held on Sunday afternoons, as pulpit supply continued to be from the First Baptist Church. The Sunday School program was robust with Children's Day and Christmas being the highlights of the year. On Christmas, a large Christmas tree was decorated, and many families brought their presents and exchanged them with family, neighbors, friends, and relatives.

As the Sunday School grew, the need for continued religious training and devotion also grew, and in July 1950 a charter dinner was held at the chapel to enlist new members for the establishment of a community church. The church was incorporated as Lincroft Community Church on March 28, 1951, as a non-denominational church. Stanley Stilwell, who had been serving as Sunday School Superintendent since 1930, was appointed lay pastor. On June 3, 1951, a large three-story addition to the chapel was dedicated in Lincroft Center. This addition made it possible for Sunday School and church services to be held at the same time.

The church continued to grow, and on June 3, 1951, Rev. Howard Johnson was called as the first trained minister. He continued in that capacity until his retirement in 1956, at which time Rev. F. Howard Lloyd of Matawan was called. The Sunday School grew to where classes had to be held in the nearby firehouse. Rev. Lloyd served until the Community Church joined the United Presbyterian Church in 1960.

In the late 1950's, many members began to feel the need for stability and backing that being part of a denominational church would provide. Correspondence with Rev. Carl J. Wolfe, Associate Executive of the Synod of New Jersey began. Rev. Wolfe's affiliation committee had conducted a survey of the Lincroft area residents, and the Lincroft Community Church joined the United Presbyterian Church on January 31, 1960, chartered as Lincroft United Presbyterian Church. At that time, Rev. Harlan Durfee of the Westminster Presbyterian Church was appointed to serve as moderator of the new Session. Not long afterwards, Rev. William Mills was installed on October 9, 1960.

Our first Chapel:



Historical photo of the Leedsville Community Chapel, later to become the Lincroft Presbyterian Church, as it once was in the center of Lincroft on Newman Springs Road



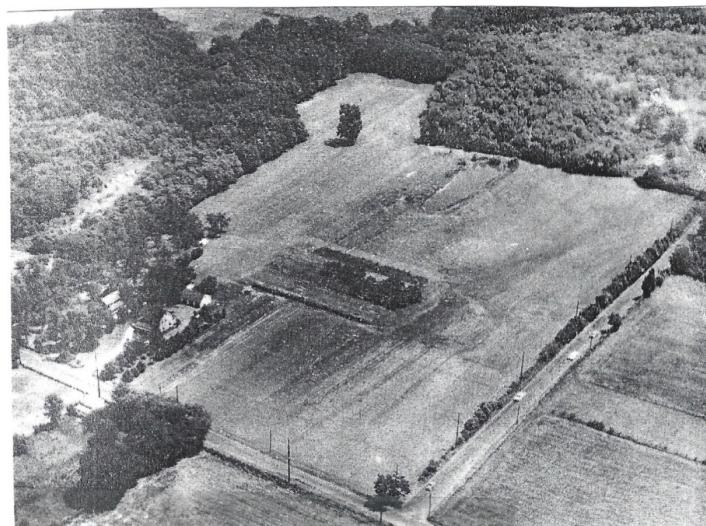
The Chapel viewed from the Acme Shopping Center across the street.



The Leedsville Chapel stood in the center of Lincroft until 1966. Since then, the building has had many occupants, including a Chinese restaurant for many years. It is now a fine-dining restaurant named Facone's.

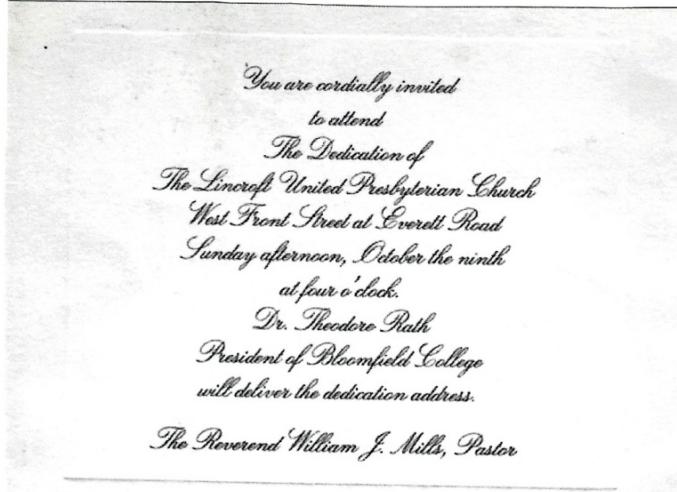
Within two years of Rev. Mills' arrival, the membership doubled to 164 members. Session, under the leadership of Stanley Stilwell, began searching for property in the Lincroft area on which to erect a new church structure. The search took him from Tinton Falls (then called New Shrewsbury) to Colts Neck, and north to Middletown. Session finally chose an 18-acre parcel of farmland, owned by the Mendres family, on the corner of Everett Road and West Front Street, which had a house on it suitable for a manse. The congregation approved the \$53,000 purchase of the property on September 16, 1962.

Architect's plans were drawn and fund drives were started to construct a church building. Not all members were happy with the plans to move, and to complicate matters further, many members were employees of Bell Labs, which was opening a new software development facility in Illinois and moving the software operations based in Holmdel to Illinois. Employees were given the option of relocating or leaving the company. Once the dust settled, almost half of the membership of Lincroft United Presbyterian Church had moved to Illinois, and the remaining congregation was left to fund and build the new church building.



This aerial view of the future homesite of Lincroft United Presbyterian Church shows cars on the western end of West Front Street (right side) and the manse on the far corner of the property (left side) on Everett Road.

After more than three years of fund raising, planning, and working with architects, ground was broken on December 5, 1965. The Three-Phase plan was partially implemented. Phase One consisted of two offices, a kitchen, several classrooms, a lounge, bathrooms, and an all-purpose room to be used for worship. The new church was dedicated on October 9, 1966. The other Phases were to be built as the membership increased.



This is the Invitation to the new church Dedication on October 9, 1966. Past and present ministers, local clergy and dignitaries were invited to the celebration.

Our Community Involvement and Outreach:

Through the years LPC has gladly hosted other churches in our facilities. The first was the Monmouth Chinese Christian Church (MCCC) from 1978-1989. They subsequently joined Monmouth Presbytery. The second was the Korean Church of New Jersey (KCNJ) from 1989-2025. During both residencies, we shared occasional services and holidays. The third rental was a very temporary situation to the Hope Worship Center from September through November 2024 while their home church was having mold remediation and we were no longer worshipping in our building.

Having started as a Sunday School, it seems logical that we eventually organized our own Lincroft Cooperative Nursery School to encourage families to come to our church. This lasted 21 years, from September 1972 through June 1993. Our facilities were then rented to Little Chief Learning Center, a nursery school that operated from September 1993 through June 2012. Next, from July 2012 through June 2013, we rented to the YMCA Nursery School. Lastly, from August 2023 to August 2024, we rented to the Branblewild School, an outdoor-oriented pre-K school.

Through the years, LPC has supported many organizations, a few of which are: Aslan, Interfaith Neighbors, Family Promise, Lunch Break, 180 Turning Lives Around, Community Outreach Group, Crop Walk, Earth Cares Congregation, Scouting (both Boys & Girls), Love Thy Neighbor, and other local and PCUSA entities.

Our Pastors:

Rev. William Mills, our first Presbyterian pastor, served until the end of 1966. Rev. George M. Watson served as interim pastor until Rev. Turner's ministry began on January 1, 1968.

Rev. Harold Turner, our second pastor, served for fifteen years before receiving a call to Oklahoma. Rev. Nancy Hicks served as interim pastor from May to September 1983. Then Rev. Charles Hartman served as interim pastor from October 1983 to August 1984.

Rev. John DeVries was installed on September 9, 1984 as the third pastor of Lincroft United Presbyterian Church and served until August 1988. Rev. Roy Weeks began as interim pastor in September 1988 and served until October 1989.

Rev. J. Scott Miller, the fourth pastor at Lincroft Presbyterian Church, was called after an extensive Pastor Nominating Committee search. He was installed on October 15, 1989. During his tenure the church made several official changes: the name was changed from Lincroft United Presbyterian Church to Lincroft Presbyterian Church; the address of the corporation went from a Red Bank mailing address to the actual address of 270 Everett Road; and the specified number of Trustees was removed from the By Laws and replaced by a percentage. The church also installed a 28-foot-tall steeple crowned by a 3-foot-high Celtic cross as a memorial to John Flockhart and Velma Fleet. Rev. Miller served until November 2002, when he accepted the call of a congregation in Ferndale, Michigan. Rev. Alan Schaefer was called to be the intentional interim pastor as the congregation began its search for a new pastor. He served from June 2003 to August 2005.

Rev. Brian Croak was installed on October 2, 2005, as the fifth pastor of Lincroft Presbyterian Church and served until April 14, 2012. During his tenure, the church held another fundraiser and renovated the Narthex in the American Craftsman style, added an ADA-compliant bathroom, replaced the inner stairs with a ramp, and made the church fully handicapped-accessible. Rev. George Betz began as the interim pastor on July 1, 2012, and served until June 30, 2014. Monmouth Presbytery supplied ministers while the Pastor Nominating Committee compiled the results of a member survey, wrote the church's Mission Information Form, and began the process of reviewing Pastor Information Forms and interviewing potential candidates.

On April 26, 2015 the church extended a call to Rev. Diane R. Ford, who accepted and became the sixth pastor and the first female pastor of Lincroft Presbyterian Church. She began on June 1, 2015, and served until April 7, 2024. She was instrumental in helping our dwindling congregation develop a Congregational Vitality Group that ultimately determined that the church's best future would be to find another Presbyterian church to join. That process took over three years of discernment, polls, decisions, and multiple church visitations before the church voted in favor of the First Presbyterian Church of Matawan.

The Future:

From April 2024 to the present, Lincroft Presbyterian Church has been welcomed by and is worshipping with the congregation and the pastor, Rev. Natalie Bell, of the First Presbyterian Church of Matawan. With the blessing of Presbytery of the Coastlands (formerly Monmouth), Lincroft Presbyterian Church sold its building and grounds to Middletown Township for \$5.2 million in September 2025. The LPC Corporation will be closed in 2026. And 67.5% of our congregation, or 27 members, joined the First Presbyterian Church of Matawan on November 23, 2025. We plan to hold a Welcoming and Joining Celebration on Sunday, January 11, 2026.

Lincroft Presbyterian Church:



The West Front Street façade shows the Memorial Steeple and Celtic Cross.



This is the parking lot entrance to the church showing its American Craftsman style, with enlarged glass entrance to the Narthex, new landscaping, and the new glass peak and Celtic cross of the attic dormer, with the steeple (hidden from view) and Celtic cross above.



1/4/26