

Probably no prison here has ever had to live without full enjoyment of religious freedom, in fact of many freedoms. None of us can sense what must have been the faith and devotion to religious ideals and zeal for them that caused so many people in England to want everything they had enjoyed and participated in, in order to obtain freedom to worship God as consciences dictated. We know the Pilgrims left England and went to Holland, then came back to England as a stopping stone to the new land where they could foresee their desired liberty of living. But we know less about the Puritans, who were the people who settled in Boston and Salem and from whom the Essex County towns and most of New England and through them, much of the country was settled.

Rev. Ezekiel Rogers was Pastor of one of those devout groups and he with about twenty families came to Salem, Mass. His group was followed by many more families and shortly Rev. Rogers with about sixty families moved out of Salem and settled, the General Court incorporating the area as the Parish of Rowley in 1639. The parish extended from the ocean to the Merrimack River, so including most of Bradford, a part of Boxford, all of Georgetown; Groveland was included in the area later called Bradsford. Almost at once, grants were made in various parts of the area. The 'Falls' later to be incorporated as Byfield, then the 'Merrimack lands' later called Bradford were occupied and set off from the parish very early but there was no permanent settlement in our part of the land until John Spofford moved with his family onto a large farm near the 'BALD Hill'; this was in 1669. Other families followed so that by 1700 there were twenty and by 1730 over forty families scattered over what is now Georgetown. Everyone went to meeting, by law as well as by inclination, and it was six or eight miles to the Rowley meetingplace and nearly as far to that in Byfield. In 1729 a rough building was put up to serve as a meeting house; this stood on East Main Street near Pillsbury Lane. In 1730 a petition was sent to the General Court, seeking the establishment of a new parish. This petition was signed by forty-four with twenty-two family names included.

The petition was granted October 1, 1731 and the first meeting of the Second Parish in Rowley was held October 5th.. The next year a group withdrew from the Byfield Church and this church was institutedd

Most of my information I have obtained from Gage's History of Rowley published in 1840 and from papers prepared by yhe late Forrest P. Hull of this town and Society and published in 1938. Very little is learned about the town from the Church or Society records. I do not know when Town as distinguished from Parish meetings were first held. The Parish was concerned for years with the school business, acting on the hiring of teachers, locating and buiding school houses and fixing the terms and the apy of the teachers.

Well into the time of my own recollection our Society had in its membership many men who never untied with the Church they were active workers They kept a close hold on affairs and the strength of this group was factor in keeping back the few attempts made to do away with the Society and have only one organization, the Church..In recent years the Society membership has changed in t is respect and few members were not also Church members, so it was easier to bring abo t the consolidation of Society and Church we we now enjoy.

The original church building seems to have been used about forty years as a new buildi gn was raised July 5, 1769, the raising being done all in one day. This buildi g stood where Main Street, Elm and Chestnut come together and even today the spot is sometimes spoken of as 'Church Green'.. The second church was enlarged three times before it was decided to make a new home. Little is said in the records, but this building we are in now was built in 1873 and 74 and dedicated in 1874. The money to build it came hard and some of thw Collectors were looked uponas very severe. One man was so pressed for payment of his pledge he sold oneof his exen to get the cash. He was never able to replace the ox and h s financial affairs sliped lower and lower so that when he died there was nothing to pay for his burial. The

The Society appointed a committee to canvass the members and in this way money enough was raised to pay the expenses.

This Society was fortunate in many respects in its choice of Pastors; the men who served were leaders in thought, highly respected among the neighboring churches and by townspeople generally.

Mr. Chandler the first minister and Mr. Braman the next were interested in many things; they raised and propagated fruit and vegetables carried on profitable farms. However the preaching did not suit everyone and from this group went out a small group who called themselves Separatists, then they attached themselves to the Baptist Church in Haverhill and later became the Baptist Church in this Town.

Mr. Chandler died in the fifty-seventh year of his pastorate and Mr. Braman died in his sixty-first year of service here.

In 1864 Rev. Charles Beecher was called and settled as it was called. He was undecided as to coming and it is said that an appeal from a large group of young men decided the question for him. His theology was very advanced from that the Town was accustomed to and many of his people were disturbed. There were many meetings held to consider the matter and it is said that he had greater strength in the Society than in the Church.

He tendered his resignation but it was not accepted. A split in membership took place and a large number withdrew. Shortly after they withdrew there came an offer from George Peabody the great financier, to build a church in memory of his mother who was born on Bailey Lane, her name being Judith Dodge. I have heard that Mr. Peabody did not know of the split and thought he was giving a church to the mother group but I think there is no writing to prove that. Anyway the new group got the new church and moved in January 1868. The church was a stately edifice but it had some defect that made rebuilding of the outer walls necessary in about twenty years and again in a shorter period more work had to be done. It was coming to a third overhauling which the people could not meet. Costs of repair had risen and the people had less means than formerly. The result was that

reunion with the mother body was arranged and carried out in 1903

The disturbance over Mr. Beecher had been taken to the local Association of Churches and the decision seems to have been against him as this church lost its good standing. Mr. Beecher tried to resign in 1867 and again about 1870; each time his offer was declined and he was given extended leave of absence.

Who preached during these leaves does not appear but in 1872 Rev. Thomas Beeber was called as an Associate Pastor. He was here about four years then a Mr. Marsh was called and he was here three years. Mr. Beecher again offered a resignation and in 1880 it was accepted. Rev. Levi Rogers was the next minister and he was followed in 1888 by Henry R. MacCartney. Mr. MacCartney was a forceful preacher, and active in community as well as his own church. He was instrumental in forming the Georgetown Moral Improvement Society a group that did much to clear up some bad matters in town. Mr. MacCartney more than once was one of the raiding squad when raids were made on alleged liquor holes. The Asso. opened and conducted for a number of years a reading room and a game room. These both were enjoyed by many men and boys.

The records are not very helpful in showing what the Society and Church have done for the Town. It is clear that for many years the Church looked out that members attended Communion and censured them if they failed to attend and that some cases of immorality were dealt with, several being excommunicated for such behavior. A new church was built in the early 1870s and was dedicated in 1874. The feeling between this and the Peabody Church had subsided somewhat as the Pastor of the Peabody Church as well as the Baptist Pastor took part in the closing service in the South church so called and in the opening of this one. Through the period of my remembrance the feeling has been very fine, as evidenced by the many series of union meetings we have held.

Mr. Coulthard is the twenty-first regular pastor of this organization. Some have been installed but of late we have not done that. During its existence the Peabody Memorial had six pastors. The day of long pastorates seems to have vanished.

Of our twenty-one ministers sixteen have been with us within the last fifty years, that is five men served three fifths of our life period and the others have covered only two fifths.

It is a fact of no particular value but to me, of this list of twenty-seven there are only five whom I never saw. Mr. Beecher and Mr. Beeber I knew only slightly but the others I was well acquainted with.

I have said nothing about our many societies that have done so much for local and more distant fields, as I understand each group is to speak for itself during the evening.