

In thinking of the history of the Congregational Church in Georgetown one has to think of the history of Rowley, because Georgetown for many years was a part of Rowley.

About 1637 or 1638 a group of people came over from England under the leadership of Ezekiel Rogers, who sometimes is spoken of as Mr. Rogers and sometimes as the Reverend Ezekiel Rogers and spent a number of months, perhaps a year, in making up their mind where along the Massachusetts coast they would settle. They decided on Rowley and the settlement of Rowley was made in 1639. Rowley included about the same width on the coast that the town now includes but extended back to the Merrimack River so that Bradford and Groveland and Georgetown and a narrow strip of Boxford were all included in the *Rowley* area. Very shortly, surveyors and exploring parties were sent into the western part of the area looking for suitable cattle pastures and perhaps looking for building sites, but ~~perhaps~~ not paying much attention to that at that time. Probably the first grant was to one Rader (?) whose land was over in the area at the south of Baldpate Pond. And ^{then} the family named Brockelbank had a grant that was along West Main Street, perhaps between Pentucket Pond and Rock Pond. But there was no permanent settlement on these until John Spofford had arranged with the town to move into this area and bring his family and ~~had~~ established a permanent home. They came, I think, in 1669, thirty years after the town had been settled. They went up on to Spofford's Hill as we called it and built their home.

Everybody went to church in those days. If they did not they were punished and Spofford was fairly quickly followed by other families so that there were ten or a dozen ^{families} living in this part of the town by 1700.

The parish of By field had been set off from Rowley a year or two before Georgetown, or this village decided that they wanted to be set off as a separate parish. And Bradford had been set off and Bradford included Groveland. Groveland did not become a separate town until much later than we were separated

from Rowley. People here had to go to the mother village, ^{Old} ~~or~~ Rowley, or to Byfield, which ever was more convenient. Apparently many of them went to Byfield as when they got ready to form a church in this area our present Congregational organization, those who were original members, came out from the Byfield Church. In 1731, possibly they had started it the year before, but in 1731 there was built down on East Main Street near what we call Pillsbury lane a small building to serve as a church. That lasted for some 35 or 40 years and for a number of years before they abandoned that church there had been the feeling that they should have a better church or a larger church and the second church was built in the area between Elm Street and Chestnut Street and East Main Street, and the place is today sometimes known as Church Green.

The Church chose as its first minister, James Chandler and James Chandler seems to have been one of those who were included in the original founders of the Church. He was a graduate of Harvard, a young man, full of energy and he served this Church, I think, 57 years. He had interests outside of the Church that have left an impression on various ^{walks} of life. He was an expert on fruit, he had many varieties of apples and did a great deal with grapes and did a great deal with gardening. Always the minister was a leader in civic affairs as well as in church affairs so that it is not surprising that he took an active part in all the activities of the town. I do not know anything about schools of theology but the people here, probably few of them were blessed with what we call high^{er} education, but they gave a great deal of thought to their religion and some of them were Calvinists and some of them were Armenians and there were heated discussions over the sermons, over the doctrines that were preached and it led to perhaps, you would say, a good deal of friction and yet the church clung together ^{pretty well} through the early years.

There were some people that felt they wanted a different doctrine and a few left the Church, spoken of as Separatists and they went over into the edge of Groveland - what we call Quaker Hale Corners - and after the First Church was abandoned they bought the frame and moved it ^{there} over and they built a church for themselves. They ^{eg} later became associated with the First Baptist Church of Haverhill and later they were formed into a Baptist Church and were the forerunners of the present Baptist Church in this town. After Mr. Chandler died there was a period of eight years during which the Church heard over 60 candidates. Several were called but for one reason or other declined and finally they called Isaac Braman. He was a Harvard graduate and although the Church had voted to call him, he had accepted the call, when it came to a council to examine him as to ordination, the council met in the forenoon and convened for the whole day and it was not until very late in the day that a vote was passed to authorize his ordination. As I say, he became the second Pastor and he had a long pastorate. I think that before Mr. Chandler had died they had called one Associate and during Mr. Braman's tour or term of office they had several Associates who took much of the load off from the Senior Pastor.

Mr. Braman lived up on Spofford's Hill. I had been told that he lived in a house that stood about ^{opposite} where George Bartlett lives now and it is said that he had no time piece, that on the Sabbath morning he watched for the going down the hill of one of the Spoffords ^{who} ~~that~~ lived father out than he did, a man who in some way kept track of the time and was always in time for the service. So when that man went by the Reverend gentlemen knew it was time ^{for him} to start for church and he arrived.

All through the ministry of Mr. Chandler and through the ministry of Mr. Braman it was the custom to have ^{rather a} ~~a real~~ long sermon in the morning, then an adjournment for perhaps two hours and then a long sermon, but not quite so long as the morning sermon, in the afternoon and in the two hour recess it

it was the custom to listen to a lecture; sometimes the minister delivered the lecture and sometimes the deacons, or some of the older members of the church, conducted it. And I gather that that was a free-for-all discussion. When the sermon was being delivered there was no discussion but during the lecture period they could discuss the sermon and whatever points the lecture brought up.

Much attention was given to the conduct of the members. If one reads the record of the early days they see that members were sometimes disciplined and on one or two occasions, I think, they were cast out of the church because of their conduct. The attitude of the early parishoners as to intoxicants was different than it later became but there still was a strong feeling in support of temperance. But everybody had some stimulant in the house and it is said that sometimes when ministers carried out the long established custom of calling on as many of the parishoners on New Year's Day as they could that each goodwife served something to refresh him and that Mr. Braman did not always get home without some assistance.

And the Church during Mr. Braman's period had fallen very low in membership. It seems to me that in some address that he made, or in some letter that he wrote he stated that ^{at one time} there were only twelve male members left on the rolls. He doesn't say how many females members. But they took on more members, of course, and there were some who left because of, well, there was a Universalist feeling grew up here and as you know the Universalists early in the 1800's built a church and there were other sects which flourished for a time but did not last long but took strength from the Congregational church.

The early church had no bell. It wasn't long after 1800, I think, that they took up a subscription and bought a bell. I have always understood that the bell was a Paul Revere bell and there is a motto on the bell that

indicates that it was made in the Revere Bell Casting Works. I think Groveland claims that they have the only true Revere bell in this area and someone has said that possibly our bell was made by the firm when it was conducted by Paul Revere's sons after he had passed on.

The church that stood on ~~the~~ Church Green out in front of Everett Spaulding's house had a cupola and weather vane, and the weather vane was a large cockerel; and when the Church was torn down, in some way, ^a that weather vane got into the hands of somebody who donated it to the Haverhill Historical Society. One day a few years ago when Allen Wild was visiting the Historical Society he saw the weather vane and the curator or whoever was showing him about said to ^{them} ~~him~~ it was a nuisance and said he should think that we would want it and Allen Wild very quickly grabbed it and brought it home with him and we have had it ever since. We acquired in a somewhat similar way a rather beautiful cross which stood atop the Central Congregational Church which stood about opposite the City Hall in Haverhill and various organizations were trying to get the cross and somebody suggested to the mayor of Haverhill that the Georgetown Church would like it and he said "Take it; take it with you. That will relieve me of a great burden." I don't think that we have ever been able to make ^{any} use of that and it has no connection with our history in any way.

Associate Pastors that came ^{here} ~~^~~ were a Mr. Prince, Mr. Pond, and a Mr. Marsh, I think. And either Mr. Prince or Mr. Pond had weakened his health by over-study and ended a very short life while he was serving this church and is buried in Harmony Cemetery. A few years ago relatives came to Church one Sunday morning and made themselves known and asked to be directed to the cemetery so that they could see the grave and at that time we had a number of ^{portraits} pictures on the wall of the room called the Minister's Study (which now I guess is called the office) and were able to show him a picture of his deceased relative, which pleased him very much.

The Church, after Mr. Braman had finished his long pastorate, called Charles Beecher, one of the celebrated Beecher family, a half brother to Henry Ward Beecher and a half brother, I think, to Harriet Beecher Stowe. The

Beechers were a very forward thinking group and some of Mr. Beecher's doctrines were altogether too advanced for a great many of his hearers - it led to a split in the Church. I have been told that the Church voted to dismiss him and the parish voted to retain him and he stayed. And of those who were dissatisfied, a large number of them withdrew.

I suppose because it was difficult to heat ~~such~~ so large a building as the Church they had built a chapel which stood, I think, just across Elm Street from the Church itself right where Elm Street leaves East Main Street. I have heard that questioned and I may be wrong as to the location but it was ^{immediate} in that vicinity. And they took that and used that as their place of worship until they were offered an edifice by George Peabody and of course when the Memorial Church, as some of us remember it, was built on East Main Street where the parking area now is, they worshipped there and the chapel was sold after a number of years to the Catholic organization, the arch diocese, or whatever it's called, and they built it over into a Catholic Church. We still have among our funds a thousand dollars known as the Chapel Fund and it is said that that is the money that was obtained from the Catholics for the little chapel.

Mr. Beecher felt that his efforts ^{here} were not such that he should continue and he offered to resign but the Church declined to accept his resignation. An Associate came, a Mr. Beeber. Mr. Beeber was here for a number of years and Mr. Beecher was not here. Normally he was the Pastor of the Church but he had other fields; I think he preached in Pennsylvania for a while. Members of his family were here - one of his daughters married and spent her life here, Mrs. George W. Noyes, so that he came back from time to time to visit his relatives and whenever he returned he offered ~~in~~ his resignation, but it was many years before the resignation was accepted. Mr. Beeber did not stay here very long and naturally the people that had left the Church had a strong feeling against the mother Church and those who remained with the mother Church had ^{perhaps} an equally strong feeling against those who had withdrawn. But I

was pleased to see in reading an account of the dedication of the Peabody Memorial Church that the First Church Minister took part in the proceedings. The feeling was such that they did not care to belong to the same Association of Churches and we had always belonged to Essex North so the Memorial Church belonged to Essex South and I should have stated that in speaking of Mr. Chandler that it was in his parlor that the Essex North Association was formed. He was active in bringing that about and it is undoubtedly true that the first meetings were held in his house.

After Mr. Beecher had resigned and Mr. Beeber had gone, the Church called Reverend Levi Rogers and he is the first of our ministers that I remember as the pastor of our Church. I met Mr. Beeber years afterwards but it was long after he ceased to be connected with Georgetown. Mr. Rogers was here for six or eight years, his wife died while they were living here and after two or three years he resigned and the next minister was Reverend Henry R. McCartney. Mr. McCartney was young and full of life and a born fighter. He was prepared to fight vice, or juvenile delinquency or anything that came up in the community. He had a lot to do with the formation of what was called the Georgetown Improvement Society. They opened a reading room and had a game room, checkers and various games and they had a number of magazines and a number of daily and weekly papers and it was much patronized for a number of years. Then interest in that fell off and things that didn't go. But he was very much interested in the schools and on several occasions when a teacher was needed as a substitute he was very glad to be the substitute. I was in the high school ^{about} ~~at~~ that time and I remember Mr. Fickett had some illness (the principal) and Mr. McCartney came and took Mr. Fickett's classes for a number of days.

He was succeeded by Reverend Frank P. Estabrook. Mr. Estabrook had a wife and two or three children. They did a great deal of work with the young people and his wife was a very active worker in the Christian Endeavor which was flourishing in those days. And thinking of Christian Endeavor, it makes me think of a story that I have told that I have never been able to back

up. I think that the second Christian Endeavor Society in Massachusetts was founded in this town. I expected that Herbert Palmer's aunt, Miss Mary Palmer would back me up in the statement but she wasn't able to tell me that that was true. She was a member of the Society but she did not know that it was the second in the state. The first was in Newburyport, the first in this state, and I am quite sure that the Memorial Church had the second one.

The Memorial Church had among its members a Bateman family. There was Louis Bateman, who ran the drug store for many years and his sisters, Sarah and Elizabeth, and they were very much missionary minded. They were well-to-do and gave a great deal ^{of their} ~~and~~ substance to missionary efforts, but they did a great deal to instill missionary ideas into the minds of the young and they carried on a program in the ^{Memorial} Church known as the Wide Awakes. They did not limit its membership to attendance at the Memorial Church; they were glad if any of the people from the First Church, the young people, cared to join and a few did but largely it was a Memorial Church effort and they did a great deal of work that children could do, getting stuff together to ship to schools and what have you. I remember that they brought to town a woman who was for the time being living in Groveland. I don't know how long she lived in Groveland. I don't believe there are many people who remember her; but a strapping, big, black woman came down to Memorial Church and spoke at a number of services. Her husband was a white man and they had a little girl who was, while she showed some of her mother's features, her color was ^{about} ~~as~~ white as her father's. I don't remember what the man's name was but the wife's name that she saw fit to use was Madame Ombrey Louie Esperanze Jay. That name has stuck in my mind all these years. And the efforts of the two churches were similar and as long ago as Mr. McCartney's pastorate here there were people who felt that something should be done about bringing the two groups together and inasmuch as the Memorial Church appeared to be a beautiful brick and brownstone edifice, it was thought that we, with a wooden

structure, should abandon our church and go to that church. There were those in our midst who felt very differently about it and nothing came of the effort, although it looked at one time as if it was going to be brought about. Then it developed that the church wasn't such a fine church as it appeared because there was something structurally wrong with it and before Mr. McCartney had left town, Memorial Church had had to have a contractor come and peel most of the outside off from the Church on all sides. They discarded much of the brownstone and laid a new course of brick over the whole of the edifice with the result that it was never quite so beautiful a church afterward as it had been before. And though that cost a number of thousands of dollars, it did not cure the defect and over ^{the next} ~~maybe~~ ten or 15 years, every year or two, they had a big (BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG, BONG) bill of expense and in 1908 the conditions were such that it was going to take another major operation which the members of the Church felt they could not stand. As one of them said "Unless you shut the door in our face, we are coming" - and they came to our Church and united with us in, I think, September 1908.

The United Church enlarged its list of officers. I think we had three deacons and I think they made it five. We still had the double organization and the trustees were made five instead of three. And members who had been active in the Memorial Church were given office and every effort was made that we seemed to find available to make both sides happy and people were very much surprised that we did not have a double attendance, that is, a congregation twice as big as it had formerly been. But on both sides, people who had gone to the First Church and people who had gone to the Memorial Church, there seemed to be a letting down after the union. We had a better congregation ~~but~~ than we had had in our Church but it wasn't the great numbers that they had hoped for. But it was a stronger church and it was undoubtedly a good move for the congregational body in this town that we had one church instead of two because in many respects we were much stronger.

Many people know the history of the Church. It had ^{by} ~~been~~ the

abandonment of the religious party, it had reverted to the heirs of George Peabody or to the trustees under the will of George Peabody and an effort was made to have them turn it over to the town to be used as a town hall. We had a conditional gift, it hadn't been completely turned over, but we were allowed to use it and a number of town meetings were held in the Church and a number of social activities. In some way, the Church one Sunday morning just after some organization had had a three-day carnival or fair, Sunday morning the Church was found to be afire from one end to the other and every nail hole and every crevice around the windows, smoke was pouring out and in gusts that indicated that little could be done to save the building. Just at that time the selectmen and fire department had been having some kind of a controversy and most of the Georgetown Fire Department had gone down river for an outing and the selectmen called upon Haverhill and Haverhill sent down a pumping engine and they did what they could, but the thing was too far gone so that there was nothing left but the walls.

The Church after Mr. Estabrook had called Reverend Warren Francis Lowell and he was the Pastor ^{when} the Church union was made and he was here for about ten years. I think he was followed by the Reverend Arthur Burroughs, and after Mr. Burroughs, Rev. David Pike -- then Rev. Hugh Penney, then Mr. Conrad, and Mr. Renner and Mr. Peterson, Mr. Anderson and Mr. Monroe and I guess Mr. Monroe and Mr. Anderson was the order -- and then Mr. Billings, and then Mr. Coulthard, and then Mr. Fleming.