

Our Revere & Son Bell

A talk given on November 15, 2015, at the First Congregational Church by church historian Christine Comiskey on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of our Revere & Son bell

Long ago, before this beautiful church building was constructed, before Georgetown was even a town, our congregation worshipped at the Rowley West Parish Meeting House, later known as Old South Church, on the corner of East Main and Elm Streets here in Georgetown.

In 1815, it was decided that the Meeting House, built in 1769, was in need of major repairs. The residents of the Parish voted to allow the Assessors to raise their taxes to cover the expenses (over \$700) needed for the repairs, which included removing the old steeple and building a new one. And yes, local taxes supported churches back then.

When the repairs were done and the new steeple put in place, the people of the parish decided that the new steeple should have a bell. Instead of raising taxes again, they chose to raise the funds by donation. Seventy-nine men made donations, raising a total of \$474.57. The largest donation was \$61.00, the smallest, fifty cents. There is a list in our church records of the seventy-nine "Proprietors of the Bell," as they were called. Many of their descendants still live in town and attend our church. Now, lest you think the women had no part in this, they raised funds for new pulpit curtains.

Having raised the necessary funds, some men from our parish traveled to Boston to negotiate with Colonel Paul Revere, and on October 31, 1815, they paid \$389.37 for an 874-pound bell. Weeks later, the bell was raised into the steeple of the old meeting house. Records show that another \$82.92 was spent to get the bell raised and properly mounted in the steeple. This included expenses for such things as the rope and hardware to hang the bell, as well as the all-important *six quarts of rum* for the thirsty workers! Although our church records make no mention of the event itself, we can assume that it drew quite a crowd. Imagine the joy on that autumn day two hundred year ago, when the hard work was done and our church bell rang out over the parish for the very first time!

In 1874, our congregation moved from the Old South church into this newly constructed edifice. The bell was removed from the Old South steeple and re-hung in the new steeple, where it continues to this day to call us to worship, toll for our dead, and ring out in celebration.

As we listen each Sunday morning to the ringing of our historic bell, let us pause for a moment to think of the generations of parishioners who have been called to worship by this same bell. Let us make a promise to them that we will continue to carry on with their work.

(At the close of the service, all who were able were invited to join Chris in the balcony to ring the bell.)

