

*Our Congregational Heritage*  
*1732 - 1982*



*The First Congregational Church*  
*Georgetown, Massachusetts*  
*Fall 1982*

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A company of approximately twenty families and their guide, Rev. Ezekiel Rogers, left Rowley, Yorkshire, England, and arrived in Salem, Massachusetts, early in the winter of 1638-39. In the spring they moved to a location between the towns of Ipswich and Newbury, purchasing this tract of land for eight hundred pounds from those two towns. This parcel contained what later became the towns of Rowley, Georgetown, Bradford, Groveland, and parts of Boxford. The original settlement, near the present center of Rowley, was given a town charter under the name of Rowley on September 4, 1639.

During the next century, some of these settlers and their families moved away from the original settlement and established new homes within the Rowley territory. One group found home sites in the west end of Rowley within the Parker River basin that lies between Baldpate Hill and Long Hill. In 1666, the town laid out three thousand acres for village settlement. Many of these re-established people had to travel over six miles to attend church and other meetings at First Parish, Rowley, or at Byfield Parish.

In 1728, the West Rowley community, consisting of about fifty families living within a radius of two or three miles of Union Cemetery, decided to build a meeting house. They cut oak timber west of Rock Pond, sledged the logs across the pond on the ice, and sawed them into lumber at the Harriman and Plummer Sawmill located on Rock Pond Brook. The frame of this proprietors' building was raised on June 5, 1729. The following year, a petition for a district parish was signed by forty four people and presented to the General Court. Authorization to set off land from the Town of Rowley and the Parish of Byfield and to convene for the purpose of electing officers was received on October 1, 1731.

The residents of this new precinct assembled for the first time on October 5, 1731. Lt. John Spofford, moderator, and Jonathan Boynton, clerk, were the first elected officers. This marked the beginning of the Second Parish of Rowley, later to become the First Congregational Church of Georgetown.

Parish members voted on November 9, 1731, to employ Lt. John Spofford to complete the *Galery flore* and to construct seats in the meeting house. The building was plain and without a steeple. There are no pictures or floor plans available. It is believed that there were two sections on the floor. One side was for the men; and the other, for the women. This building was located at the corner of East Main Street and Pillsbury Lane.

After the completion of the meeting house, the members turned to the selection of a minister. They voted to call Mr. James Chandler of Andover, Massachusetts, on January 4, 1732. Following his acceptance, the efforts of the parish were directed



toward the organization of the church. The Second Parish of Rowley was formally organized on October 4, 1732. Rev. Mr. Chandler was ordained in the newly formed church on October 18, 1732. Representatives from the churches of Byfield, Boxford, Bradford, Andover, Rowley, and Second (Newbury) participated in the service.

The first meeting house was used by the parish for about four decades. The members voted, in March 1768, to erect a new building at the junction of Elm and East Main Streets on the triangular lot where the Firemens' Monument is located across the street from the present Brocklebank Museum. The old meeting house, sold to a group of Separatists in 1769 and moved to Quaker Hale Corner, Groveland, later became a Baptist church.

The second church and its steeple, was raised on "Old South Green" *in a day* on June 5, 1769. The building was fifty five by forty feet with an eight square tower. The spire reached one hundred and two feet, and was topped by a gilded *Wether Cock* which was made by Daniel Thurston at a cost of four pounds and sixteen shillings. This weathervane was considered an "emblem of courage". The South Church pews were eight feet square, and the seats arranged with hinges so that they could be raised during prayer time. There were twenty five pews on the right, twenty three on the left, six in the east, and seven in the west end. The minister was perched on one side of the room on a high pulpit with a sounding board overhead. The church was dedicated in September, 1770, with the famous English evangelist, George Whitfield, as a speaker.

South Church was renovated at least three times. In 1816, the Paul Revere bell was purchased. The eight hundred pound bell was cast in Canton, Massachusetts, at a cost of four hundred and fifty dollars. The Second Parish book records seventy five donors with Capt. Benjamin Adams heading the list, and Cuffie Dole at the end. In 1822 and 1826, stoves were purchased and installed. Until then, there had been no heat in the building with the exception of charcoal foot warmers. The sanctuary was completely renovated in 1832. The sixty year old square pews were replaced with "slip style" pews, and the pulpit was moved from the side to the east end of the building. The structure was widened in 1844 by two eleven foot, single story extensions added to both sides of the audience room. The first furnace was installed at the same time.

By the time South Church neared the age of one hundred years, the parishioners began to think about replacing it with a third building. The final service was held on Sunday, December 14, 1874, and a year later the building was razed. There are few remains of this building. A Georgetown Historical Commission survey shows

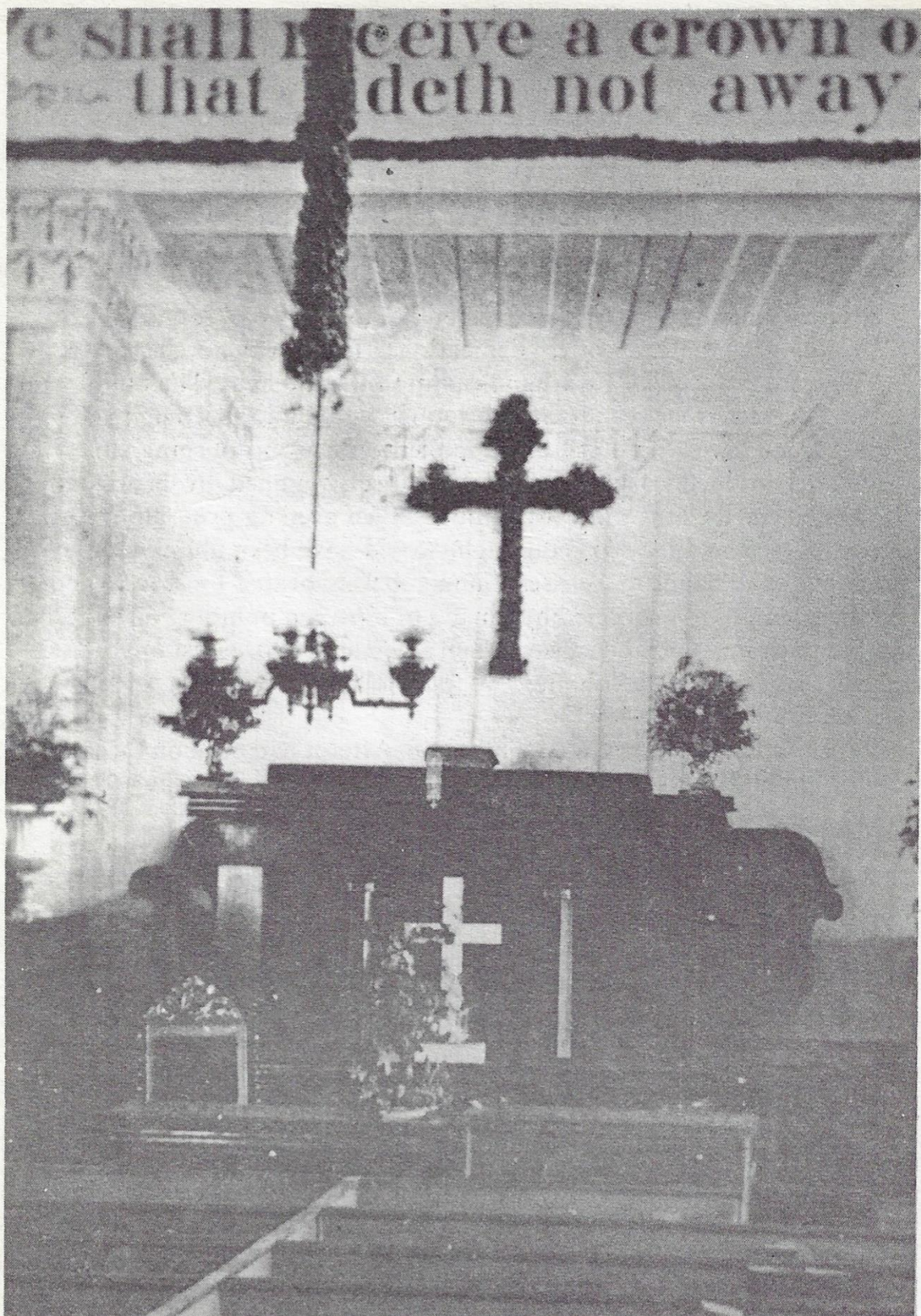




*Old South Church, showing the 11' extensions on both sides of the church.*

that some of its pew doors were used to panel rooms in the house at 5 Union Street. The rooster weathervane became the property of the Haverhill Historical Society for a short time, and was returned





*Altar, Old South Church, photographed Sunday, December 14, 1874, on the occasion of the final service in this nearly 100-year-old edifice.*

to the church in the early nineteen hundreds by Allan H. Wilde, a church member. The bell was moved to the new church spire.

Construction of the present building was begun in 1873 at the



corner of Andover Street and the court that connected Andover Street with Middle Street. The construction was under the direction of Joseph Watson of West Newbury, a contractor-architect. The Victorian style building was dedicated on Thursday, December 18, 1874. The Paul Revere bell that had called worshippers for fifty eight years to the South Church rang out its welcome from a new steeple. At the dedication service, the new tracker organ, built by Joel Butler of Boston, was used for the first time.

Few amenities considered essential today were found in the building at the time of its dedication. There was no electricity. Water was supplied by a hand pump in the kitchen. The building was heated by stoves. A church supper would have been lighted by kerosene lamps, and the meal cooked on a wood burning stove. Water for dishwashing would have been pumped by hand and heated on the stove in a wash boiler. An evening program in the upstairs sanctuary on a cool night would have been illuminated by either candlelight or kerosene lamps, barely heated by stoves, and the organ music supplied by the aid of a person pumping air in the pump room. On an occasion when a demanding organist might use all stops with full volume, two people were needed to keep the bellows filled with air.

The entire building had a slate roof. After it had been on the roof for about fifty years, the slate began to break falling to the ground in small pieces. The main roof was changed to asphalt shingles in the mid nineteen forties. The churchyard was surrounded by an ornate wooden fence with gates at the walkways. Arborvitae hedges grew behind the fence. These hedges grew very tall, and storms eventually toppled them, breaking many parts of the fence. The church stands today with slate on the steeple only, and a completely different landscape.

Improvements and additions have been extensively provided. Electricity and central heat were installed in 1917. This enabled the organ to be electrified. Two large Crawford hot air, hand-stoked, coalburning furnaces were located in the long room and the vestry. These heaters served as social gathering points during winter church events. Major renovations and a rededication of the sanctuary were carried out in 1923. Town water was installed in 1940. A new hot water heating system replaced the hot air furnace in 1949. A memorial carillon, with outside amplification, was added in 1964. The decades have shared in bringing ordinary wear to this structure. After almost one hundred years of constant use, the organ was rebuilt in 1967, and the steeple reframed in 1972. An automatic fire detection system was also added in 1972. Rapidly rising fuel and exterior maintenance costs in the nineteen seventies





*The First Congregational Church, photographed shortly after completion of the building which was dedicated Thursday, December 18, 1874.*

caused the trustees to undertake a study of ways to remedy the situation. As a result of their research, vinyl siding and combination windows were installed in 1980, and the walls were



insulated. Two efficient, automatic coal furnaces were installed in 1982.

Many organizations have assisted the church both financially and spiritually. The Sunday School was formed in 1817. The New Rowley Female Benevolent Society was formed in 1834. This society was incorporated by an act of the legislature as the "Women's Benevolent Society", which gave the church continued support for one hundred thirty years. In 1878, the Missionary Society was formed and is still a functioning group. The Christian Endeavor Society was started in 1905 and was succeeded by the Pilgrim Fellowship in 1953. The Guild was begun in 1923 as an outgrowth of Miss Elizabeth Noyes' Sunday School class. The Couples' Club became active in 1953.

The church and parish have had many important real estate transactions. It purchased the Jophanas Adams house in 1849 for eight hundred dollars. This Elm Street house is now used by the Spaulding Colonial Reproductions, Inc., as a showroom. It can be recognized by the pillars on its front. The second floor had a hall which was used as a vestry; in earlier times the lower floor had been used as a store. The Adams house was used until August 25, 1852, when it was sold and became the residence of Rev. Mr. Prince. The Chapel that still stands at the junction of Elm and East Main Streets was built to be used as a vestry in the autumn of 1852. These two buildings were purchased and built under the auspices of the Women's Benevolent Society. For many years, this group acted as stewards of a fund that was realized from the disposition of this property. Many times they forwarded money on "loan" to support church projects without interest. The Orthodox Memorial Society conducted services in this building between 1864 and 1868. It was sold in 1870; and in October, 1870, Archbishop Williams dedicated it as a Catholic Church. The Chapel stands in a slightly different position today and is used by the Spaulding business for storage.

The first church-owned parsonage was at 8 Andover Street. It was purchased in 1918 and it served ten ministers and their families for forty-seven years. It was sold in 1965 when the present parsonage at 5 Hart Circle was purchased. In the immediate area of the church, five separate parcels have been annexed. Metcalf House, which was purchased in 1960, was renovated and serves as a Sunday School and thrift shop building. Three other houses on Cottage Street have been purchased and razed. Their lots, plus one additional lot, have greatly increased the church's holdings between Cottage and Clark Streets.

The First Congregational Church and the First Congregational Society (Parish) merged under the name of the First Congregational Church of Georgetown, incorporated in 1954. A second



organizational change came in 1961 when the membership approved the Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ and voted to affiliate with that national organization.

A significant part of the church story centers around three of its ministers who collectively served about one hundred fifty years. Rev. Mr. James Chandler served the parish from 1732 until 1789. Rev. Mr. Isaac Braman's pastorate extended from 1797 to 1858. Rev. Mr. Charles Beecher led the church from 1857 to 1881, serving as associate pastor before assuming full responsibility for the parish following the death of Mr. Braman. Each of these men led the parish through separate eras and encountered many different types of problems.



*Chapel, built in autumn of 1852 as a vestry for the Parish. Later dedicated by Archbishop Williams as a Catholic Church. This structure, minus its portico, is now a storage shed for Spaulding Colonial Reproductions, Inc.*

Rev. Mr. Chandler, who formed the parish and led the community through the Revolutionary War, was a graduate of



Harvard College with the class of 1728. His beliefs were founded on Calvinistic principles, yet his approach and interpretation were open-minded. His avocation was agriculture and husbandry, and he introduced several new varieties of fruit trees. His people looked to him for both spiritual and physical assistance. The Essex North Association was organized in his home on September 8, 1761, on the site of what is now 144 East Main Street. The original house burned 35 years after his death on April 4, 1825, while most of the men of the parish were in Rowley Center attending a town meeting. Mr. Chandler saw the West Parish Militia organized and watched them leave his parish under the leadership of Col. Daniel Spofford to meet the *Red Coats* at Cambridge. Those remaining at home could distinctly hear the artillery barrage at Boston, thirty miles away. Their alarm and anxiety must have been intense.

As early as 1754, the young parish became divided, some members withdrawing as Separatists and forming a Baptist church.

Mr. Chandler gradually became incapacitated by age, many of the parishioners losing touch with his philosophy. He died Sunday morning, April 19, 1789, in his eighty-third year, having completed fifty years of ministry. His grave in Union Cemetery, across from the Baptist Church, is marked by a granite sarcophagus.

Sixty three candidates for minister came to be interviewed between 1789 and 1796. The inability of the membership to agree on a candidate reflects their divided beliefs. Mr. Isaac Braman, the sixty-fourth candidate, preached his first sermon at West Parish on November 13, 1796. He was called to become the second minister on January 26, 1797. His ordination "resembled more the appearance of a Roman festival". People came great distances to attend this service, and many homes in the village were opened to them.

Rev. Mr. Braman was a graduate of Harvard College, class of 1794, and he brought strong leadership to the community. He directed his attention to the family. It was not uncommon for him to visit as many as twelve families during one afternoon; and at every house, a table was set for him. He saw to the formation of the Sunday School in 1817, and to its growth to a membership of more than two hundred and fifty. Rev. Mr. Braman died December 26, 1858, after sixty two years of ministry. He is buried beside his two wives in Union Cemetery.

The third long time minister was Rev. Mr. Charles Beecher. He was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, and was a brother of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. He attended Bowdoin College and Lane Theological Seminary in Ohio. Before coming to Georgetown, he had occupied pulpits in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Newark, New Jersey. In his younger days, he had worked in New



Orleans, Louisiana, and taught music and elocution at a college in Illinois. He also traveled with his famous sister, Harriet, throughout Europe and helped her prepare papers which appeared in some of her books. His experience with slavery in Louisiana formed the basis from which she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Rev. Mr. Beecher began his pastorate in Georgetown on November 19, 1857. Controversial, he re-awakened dissension. In January 1863, the church filed a petition asking that a council be formed to examine both his beliefs and the shortcomings of the membership. The petitioners expressed their dissatisfaction with his views concerning pre-existence of souls and the state of souls after death. He was tried by a biased ecclesiastical council on August 15, 16, and 22, 1863, and was found guilty of heresy, a verdict that was overturned by a different council called by dissatisfied clergy and laymen. A thirty eight page account of the proceedings may be found in nearby libraries.

After a long and bitter controversy, approximately eighty members withdrew their membership, forming the Orthodox Memorial Society. The remaining members encouraged Mr. Beecher to continue as their pastor until he resigned in 1881.

During his pastorate, he was on leave of absence for some time for reasons of health, and his duties were performed by associate pastors. While on leave of absence, he took up residence in Florida, where he wrote for his sister, Harriet, and worked in several small churches. After the Civil War, he was appointed Superintendent of Schools for the State of Florida, and helped to rebuild schools in that state.

Tragedy touched Rev. Mr. Beecher's life on two occasions. Two of his daughters, Esther and Harriet, and a nephew, Albert, son of Rev. Dr. Edward Beecher, were drowned in a boating accident on Pentucket Pond on August 27, 1867. His son, Fred, was killed in the Yuma Territory of Colorado while on active military duty fighting an Indian skirmish on September 17, 1868. This came to be known as the Battle of Beecher Island; and Beecher Island, Colorado, is named in his honor.

Rev. Mr. Beecher died in 1900 at the home of his daughter, Mrs. George Noyes, who resided at 85 Central Street. His grave, located on the northerly side of Harmony Cemetery, is marked distinctively by twin crosses. One cross is a monument to his children. The larger Celtic cross marks his final resting place.

The members dissenting with Rev. Mr. Beecher, including Rev. Mr. Braman's second wife, Sarah, withdrew from South Congregational Church and formed the Orthodox Memorial Church on January 27, 1864. George Peabody of London, England, and his sister, Judith Peabody Russell Daniels, made a



joint gift of approximately one hundred thousand dollars to be used for the construction of a church as a memorial to their mother, Judith Dodge Peabody (a former Bailey Lane resident). This building was built on the site of the present town parking lot between 25 and 31 East Main Street. The corner stone was laid September 9, 1866, and the building was dedicated January 8, 1868. John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a special hymn for the occasion. A small town of two thousand people could no longer support two large Congregational churches and the financial plight of the Orthodox Church forced its membership to liquidate. Memorial Church and the First Congregational Church merged on September 8, 1908. The town purchased the Memorial building and it was used for town affairs until it burned in 1920. A wrought iron fence with granite posts on the front of the town parking lot along East Main Street and the large communion table in our sanctuary are the legacies of a devoted group.



*The Orthodox Memorial Church, dedicated January 8, 1868, as a memorial to Judith Dodge Peabody by her children.*

The Second Parish of Rowley - First Congregational Church of Georgetown has had some outstanding historical celebrations in addition to building dedications and ordinations. Rev. Mr. Braman delivered both the Centennial Discourse in 1832 and his Jubilee Discourse in 1844 at the fiftieth anniversary of his pastorate. Both of these documents are available at local libraries, and they



afford an excellent description of the church and community as he saw them. During the pastorate of the Rev. Mr. Warren Low, a mortgage burning ceremony was held on May 8, 1907, in the presence of three hundred people. The observance of the bicentennial anniversary was held during the first week of October, 1932. An extensive historical pageant was written and directed by Boston Transcript journalist Forrest P. Hull. The program was produced with the assistance of a professional director from Boston. The centennial of the present building was marked in 1974 by a month-long series of special programs designed to illustrate the lifestyle and activities of those who first used our building. The celebration culminated in a special worship service featuring a string quartet from Boston. A formal dinner in the vestry followed the service.

The history of the town and the church are closely interwoven. This two hundred and fifty year old parish has lived through eight major wars and forty presidents. It has shared the joys and sorrows of nearly ten generations spanning an era from colonial footsteps in the sand at Rowley River to footsteps on the lunar terrain. The bonds of colonial heritage are strong. Since 1966 five churches from three towns of the original Rowley territory have joined together in an annual ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve Service.

The *Wether-cock* and the silver communion service from South Church are still with us; the Paul Revere bell still tolls. They remind us of the faith of our fathers.

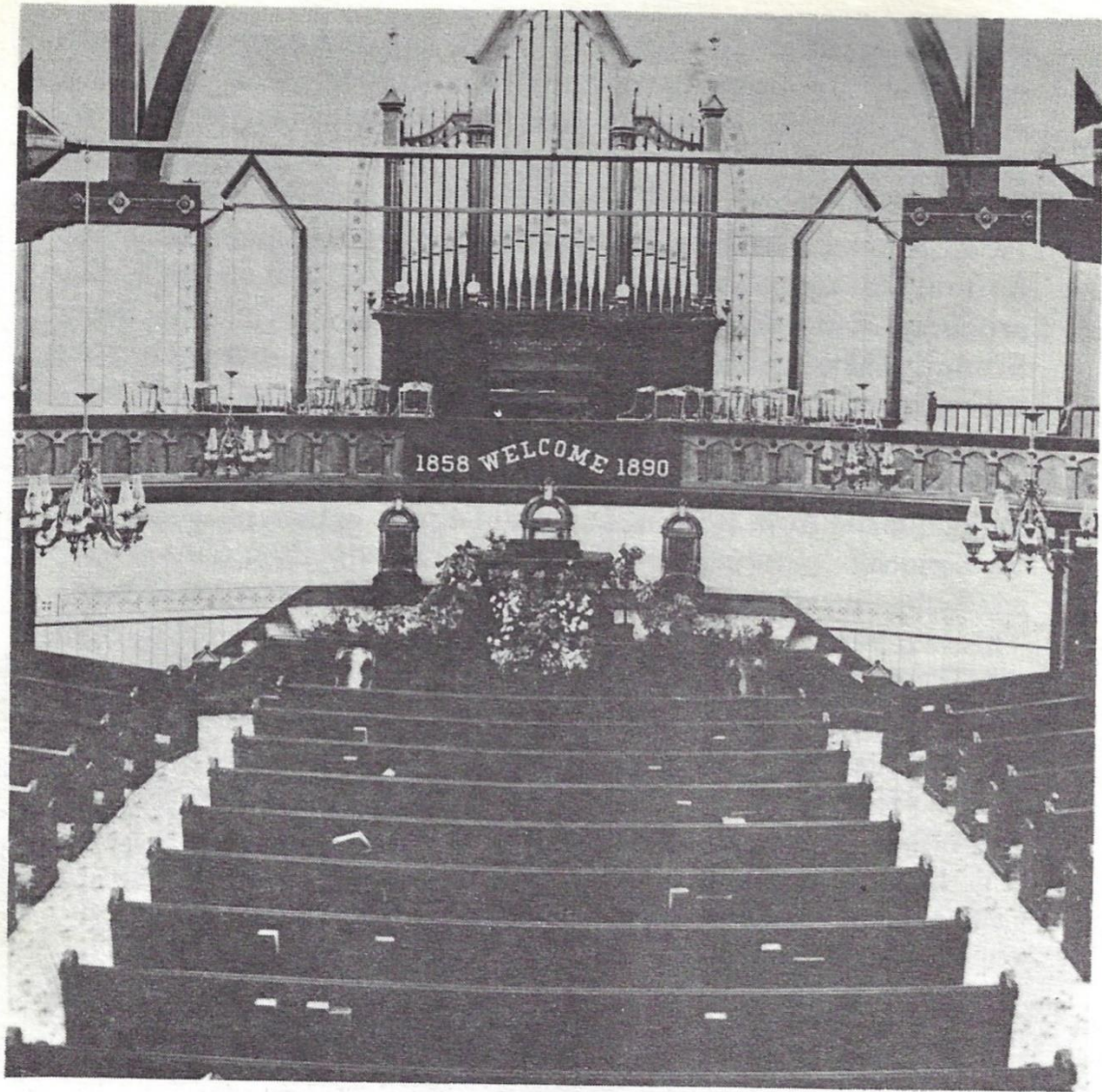
Prepared by the Two Hundred Fifty Year  
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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INFORMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHS.





*The Sanctuary, First Congregational Church, in 1890 on the occasion of the return of the Rev. Charles Beecher from a leave of absence made necessary because of health.*

#### Sources for Additional Reading

*The Beechers, An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*, Milton Rugoff, Harper Rowe.

*History of Essex County, Massachusetts*, D. Hamilton Hurd, 1888.

*Municipal History of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Arrington, 1922.

*History of Rowley*, Thomas Gage, 1840.

*Souvenirs of Old Home Week, 1909*, at Georgetown.

*Georgetown - A Story of One Hundred Years*, Forrest P. Hull.

*A Brief History of Georgetown, Massachusetts 1838-1963*, Jane Field.



### *Ministers Serving the First Congregational Church*

Rev. James Chandler	1732-1789
64 Candidates	1789-1797
Rev. Isaac Braman	1797-1858
*Rev. Enoch Pond	1842-1846
*Rev. J. M. Prince	1846-1857
Rev. Charles Beecher	1857-1881
**Rev. Thomas Beeber	1873-1875
**Rev. Alfred F. Marsh	1876-1877
Rev. Levi Rogers	1881-1889
Rev. Henry R. McCartney	1891-1898
Rev. Frank P. Estabrook	1898-1901
Rev. Warren Low	1902-1910
Rev. Arthur S. Burrill	1912-1916
Rev. David Pike	1916-1920
Rev. Hugh Penney	1921-1923
Rev. William O. Conrad	1924-1933
Rev. Hammond I. Peterson	1933-1935
Rev. W. Irving Monroe, Jr.	1937-1939
Rev. Bernard G. Renner	1939-1941
Rev. H. Gardner Anderson	1941-1944
Rev. Osmond J. Billings	1944-1952
Rev. Arthur Coulthard	1952-1957
Rev. William C. Fleming, Jr.	1958-1965
Rev. Philip H. Southwick	1965-

\*Colleagues for Rev. Braman because of dissatisfaction with his performance.

\*\*Assistants for Rev. Beecher while he was traveling and ill.

*Review of Proceedings of a Council at Georgetown, August 15, 16, 22, 1863, Edward Beecher, and Charles Beecher.*

*Centennial Discourse 1832, First Congregational Church, Georgetown, Mass., Rev. Mr. Isaac Braman.*

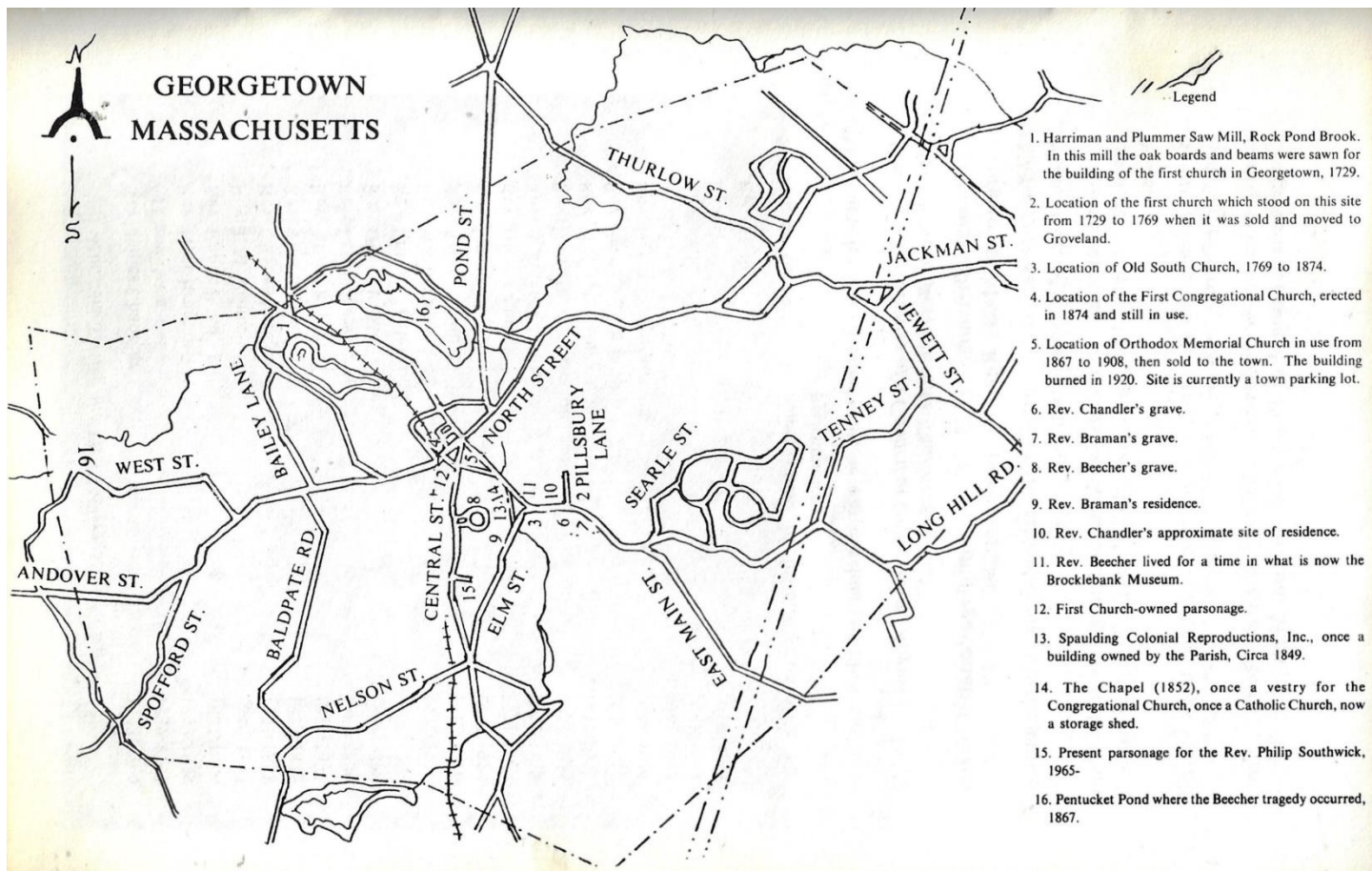
*Jubilee Discourse 1847, First Congregational Church, Georgetown, Mass., Rev. Mr. Isaac Braman.*

Extensive newspaper clippings, booklets, and programs at the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass., and Haverhill Public Library, Haverhill, Mass.

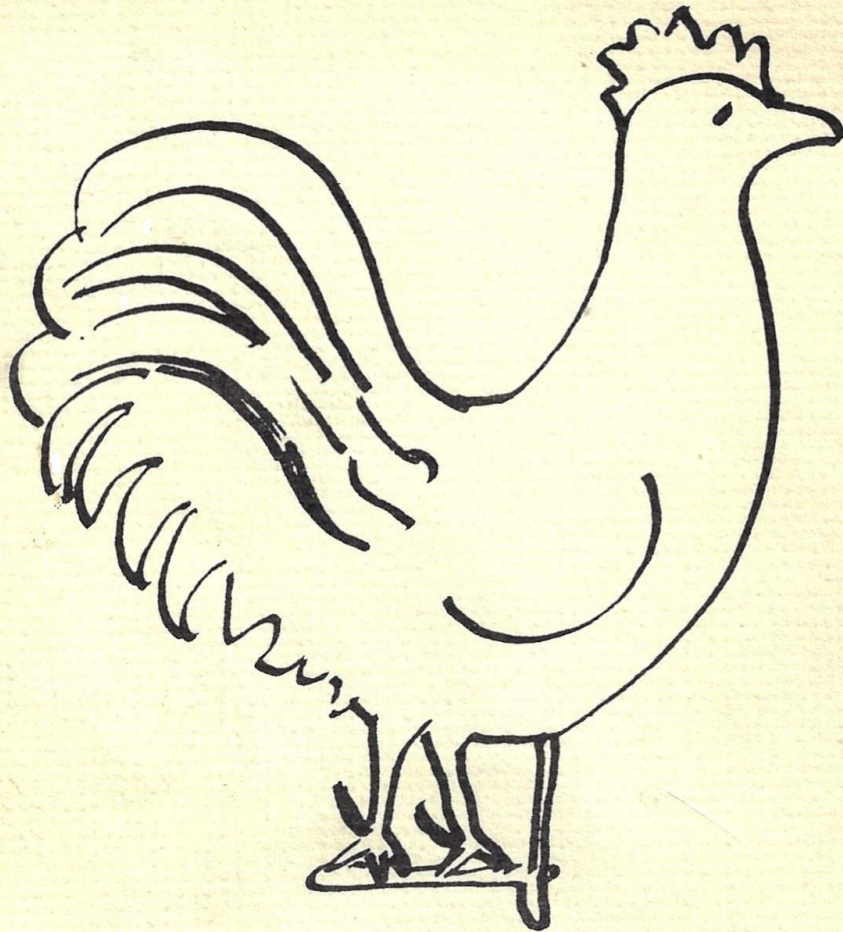
*Saints, Sinners and Beechers, Lyman Beecher Stowe, Bobs Merrill Co., Indianapolis, Indiana, 1934.*

*Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Mass., Congregational Board of Publication, Boston, Mass., 1865.*









*Courage!*