

*In July of 1899, Rev. John Woodbury Scribner, pastor of the Epsom Freewill Baptist Church, gave four lectures on the history of the church as part of its 75th anniversary. His original notes are housed at the NH Historical Society (277.78b E664) as "Historical statement of the church in Epsom." It is quoted by a later article by the Rev. Donald E. Macomber. Included here are the first two lectures covering the early history of the church.*

## **HISTORICAL STATEMENT OF THE CHURCH IN EPSOM**

### Sermon 1

Rev. John Woodbury Scribner

Next week this church completes 75 years of its ministry. As there seemed no desire to celebrate the event, several ministerial sermons will be delivered. The sermon today will relate to events preceding the formation of this church.

The town of Epsom was incorporated May 18, 1727 and this year is now 172 years old. It is supposed there were several families living in town before the incorporation.

Charles McCoy from Londonderry, William Blazo, a Frenchman, Andrew McClary from Ireland, Samuel Blake and one Whitaker were among the first settlers. What I am interested to know is were the first settlers a religious people?

My impression is that religion was not a characteristic of the early settlers as a whole. Andrew McClary, the distinguished military officer who fell at Bunker Hill is represented as very profane; Mrs. McCoy is represented as receiving better treatment from the Indians who captured her than from her husband. The McClary's are spoken of as very noted in a military and political sense, but not in a religious sense. It does state that one John McClary, brother of Andrew, was a stern Presbyterian, that Margaret, daughter of Andrew McClary, married Ebenezer Knowlton, a minister.

It is said that a house for public worship was to be built in 6 years from the year of incorporation, that is, by 1733. But this meetinghouse does not appear to have been built until 1766, 33 years after the time it was to have been completed. There was not settled minister until 1761. 100 acres of land was to be given by the town for a parsonage, 100 acres for the first gospel minister, and 100 acres for public schools.

When they secured a minister they feared they could not support him. The population was not yet 200. These were frightening days, there were Indian wars, and the mutterings of the Revolutionary war could be heard. The times were not favorable to religious impressions. State and church were united. The town built their meeting house

and their parsonage at a later date. The town called their minister and supported the minister, the town gave land to the minister and land for a parsonage.

John Tuck, a graduate of Harvard College, was the first pastor for 13 years from 1761 to 1774. There does appear to have been a meetinghouse before there was a pastor for in 1761 the town stated that the meetinghouse shall stand on the same lot, there the old meetinghouse formerly stood, at or near the burying place. Money was also voted for a minister in 1742, 30 pounds for the support of a minister, that the gospel might be permitted in the town of Epsom.

In 1743 40 pounds old tenor

In 1750 50 pounds old tenor

In 1760 100 pounds old tenor

In 1761, when they secured a minister, the town voted to pay for ordination expenses. Salary of Mr. Tuck 30 pounds sterling, 5 additional pounds after first year, 30 cords of wood hauled to his house monthly. Voted 600 pounds old tenor towards building a minister's house to be paid in labor.

Tuck accepted. His letter of acceptance would indicate a decent mind, a desire to do good, possibly his Seraphim reference, "They which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel and this we shall expect as long as he labors with them" may indicate a certain disposition, especially when taken in connection with the close of his ministry, for it was voted in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his ministry that a committee be appointed to talk with Mr. Tuck, our minister, respecting to some of his proceedings. The charge is supposed to be stealing. The following summer he was dismissed and it was voted that the meetinghouse be shut up until the town sees cause to open said house.

At the close of Tuck's pastorate the membership of the church was supposed to be almost 20, which would be less than 1/18 of the population (362). Tuck died soon after [he was] on his way to the Revolutionary war as chaplain. Ten years passed before another minister was secured. The whole period of the Revolutionary war was in these 10 years.

Soon after Tuck's dismissal it was voted to raise 6 pounds for preaching, and Ephraim Locke was to procure a minister. They could hardly expect more than 2 months preaching from so small a sum of money.

In 1773 Benjamin Thurston was visited to become pastor. His salary was to be 60 pounds first year, after three years 70 pounds, one half to be paid in currency, the other half in wheat, rye, corn, beef, pork. He was allowed to keep a horse, two cows and 8 sheep, for which the town must see that he has 6 ½ tons of good English hay. With all these enhancements, he declined. But, in 1784, Ebenezer Hazeltine accepted a call. He was graduated from Dartmouth College six years before, and then took a divinity

course. It was a lifelong pastorate, extending into the 30<sup>th</sup> year. He married in town, Margaret, the daughter of Andrew McClary and died in 1813. This statement is made concerning him "He was a man of great modesty and diffidence, unassuming in his carriage among his own people and others; a man of strict integrity, and uprightness in all his dealings; a man of a quiet spirit; a promoter of peace and love among all; a man of hospitality and charity, so far as his ability permitted; kind and friendly to all mankind; and in consequence of his virtues, was respected by all his acquaintance." Jesse Smith, who preached his funeral sermon, said of him, "He was found in the faith; The Bible was the man of his counsel; His discourses were correct, substantial, instructive and evangelical, he was himself a bright example of those moral and religious duties he inculcated upon others." He died in his 59<sup>th</sup> year. The town voted to bear the funeral expense, and pay his widow the salary to the end of the year and the use of the parsonage.

Notwithstanding, the church did not grow very fast. The population of Epsom has increased from the time of Tuck's dismissal to Hazeltine's death from a little over 200 to over 1200. A thousand persons, but the membership increased from about 20 to about 50. Son only 1 to 24 was in the church. When Hazeltine began his Epsom ministry, the Free Will Baptist denomination was five years old. [Benjamin] Randall had been waking the dead unto life. More than 100 churches have been organized with several thousand members, but none was organized in Epsom for 10 years to come. The Congregationalists had had full sway here for over 50 years, or if we go back to the year of incorporation, to 86 years.

About a year after Hazeltine's death, Jonathan Curtis was visited to become pastor of the church. The town refused to concur. A religious society was organized which concurred with the church. Mr. Curtis accepted the call and was ordained in Feb. 1815. Note the results of separation of church and state. The town sold the parsonage in 1817 and Curtis bought it for \$1005.00. Other denominations appearing in town demanded [use of] the meetinghouse built by the town one half of the time and obtained it.

Concerning Curtis, nothing said about his education, age or previous condition. But there were six added to the church the first year, 11 the second year, 16 the third year, and the 4<sup>th</sup> a general [revival] took place, without enthusiasm or tumult, a great work of grace was carried on, through which 47 were added to the church. For several years after this revival there were additions to the church every year. Here then in four years 80 were added to the church, probably the number exceeding 100 made Curtis' 10 year pastorate. Apparently the results were greater in four years after the separation of church and state then in the 52 years preceding.

The Congregationalists had voted to build a meetinghouse during Curtis' pastorate, but did not until 1845, when it was built at Slab City. The old meeting house built by the

town was sold and moved to Concord. Soon after this the interest on the money obtained on the parsonage farm, which all denominations had been securing accounts at the wish of the voters, was refused payment by the town, Since then the church has been supported by \_\_\_ offerings. Curtis closed his letters Jan. 1, 1825, six months after the Freewill Baptist church had been organized. The membership must have been about 100 and the population of the town about 1377, 1/12<sup>th</sup> of the population in the church. This would seem to be a great improvement over 1/24 of the population in the church at the end of Hazeltine's pastorate.

Summary – at the close of Tuck's pastorate, 1774, about 1/18<sup>th</sup> of the population in the church.

In 1813 at the close of the second pastorate, Haseltine's, about 1/24<sup>th</sup> of the people in the church, a decline.

At the close of Curtis's pastorate, the third, 1825, 1/12<sup>th</sup> of the population in the church.

Today at least 1/6 of the population in the church.

Epsom, June 25, 1899

## SERMON 2

Tuck 13 years 1761-1774, membership at close about 20

Hazeltine 1784-1813, nearly 30 years, membership at the close about 50

Curtis 1815-1825 10 years membership at the close about 110

A.D. Smith May 1825 to May 1826

A. Burbank age 35 1827

J.M. Putnam age 33 between 1827 17 additions

No person from May 1830 to April 1831

Abel Manning April 1831 to April 1833 23 received into the church

No person from April 1833 to February 1835

F.P. Smith from Feb. 1835 to Jan. 1837, age 40 34 added to the church

Winthrop Fifield from Jan. 1, 1837 to the Spring of 1846, 30 added May 27, 1838, 43 during pastorate. Church built in 1846/5, 103 members

R.A. Putnam from Sept. 1846 to May 1852, only 6 added to the church

#### FREEWILL BAPTIST CHURCH, EPSOM

The F.B. Church of Epsom was late in the field. The first the New Durham church only 22 miles distant, was formed in 1780. Pittsfield 1791, Canterbury 1798, Sanbornton 1799, Deerfield 1802, Barnstead 1803, Candia 1816, Allenstown 1818, Barrington 1820, Sanborn 1823, Raymond the same time as Epsom, 1824, Chichester a year later 1825, Nottingham 1831 or 1832 and Northwood still later, 1843.

By 1824 it was high time that another church should be formed in Epsom. It could not be said that the Congregational church was meeting the needs of the town. It does not appear that there had been any marked revival of religion in town until 1819, more than 90 years after the first settlement. There was a growing sentiment against a state church, against taxing all the people for the support of a church they did not believe in. It is that time when Curtis came in 1815, the Congregational church became independent of town support, and a great revival followed, and the town voted in 1820 to give the meeting house half its time to other denominations, [which] shows the place was ripening for another church. The population of this town justified it, there is probably today in New Hampshire one church for every 600 people and Epsom had 1300. The place was growing, and sin was growing also, for there was in 1827 9 open taverns. Our main road, what we call the turnpike, was a road of great travel, oxen from far off Vermont, the teams passed through this town for Portsmouth and Portland.

Epsom was a place of business. There were 8 grist mills, 10 saw mills, 4 bark mills, 3 carding machines and 3 clothier shops.

The demand for another church was manifest from the start. It appears that in June 1824, there were preliminary meetings in which the propriety of forming a church was discussed. Arthur Caverno, who was ordained a few months before, was teaching in town and was ready for a pastorate. On the first day of July 1824, a meeting was held at the school house near the meetinghouse, on or near the spot where the Epsom Center School house now stands. It was Thursday, Elder Ebenezer Knowlton of Pittsfield was there, and there were 8 persons ready to be organized into a church.

[missing page]

McCutheon (cont?)

He was not a pastor in the \_\_\_ but lived six miles away. He was I think a former preacher in all doctrinal preachers, a strong anti-slavery man. 10 received into the church during 6 years and the first meeting house built in his last year 1834, cost \$800. I cannot learn that McCutheon had anything especially to do in building this church. The notable thing

is that we had a church of our own 11 years earlier than the Congregationalists, though they met 63 years earlier in the field. I know of but one thing against McCutheon, and that is that he should help men float logs down the river on Sunday on his way home from church. McCutheon baptized 5 in 1834 in the Manson revival and others after that (Wm Goss years later). He may have had charge of the church in vacancies, and it said preached half of the time when Manson was here. I may have seen him once. He was the first of the 19 pastors to die, it was in 1855.

## BENJAMIN MANSON

This church owes very much to him. He caused the election of deacons, bringing the subject of temperance before the church and probably introduced the Sunday School. The first Sunday School in our denomination is supposed to have been in 1819. Many Sunday schools were formed in 1832. Manson also introduced some missions.

Manson was here about two years, unless he preached here after he accepted the pastorate in Candia, Manson must have been one of the most helpful pastors this church ever had. Ascending in the sketch of his life, he had one 5 year pastorate and one 13 years. He died in my home town in 1855.

Hiram Holmes may have followed Manson one year from 1836 to 1837. This was one of those quiet years. He married while here and was the second pastor to die at the age of 56 in 1863. Of the 12 dead, his was the shortest life. Van Dame seems to have almost immediately followed Holmes and does not appear to have been here more than a year. This was his only pastorate, and he came here to teach which was his profession. He came at the right time to work in the great revival of 1838. He was ordained while here. He was somewhat eccentric. I remember him in my boyhood days, and only remember him in reference to a hymn he composed "My Bible Leads to Glory." He left \$100 to this church, the interest to go to buy Sunday School books, every book must have his name on it. He was one of the first to die after Holmes in 1872, age 65. This was Van Dame's only pastorate. He appears to have renewed his membership with the Deerfield Church.

Van Dame began to preach in Epsom in 1837 at the age of 30. he was born in Holland, was a great student, a noted teacher. He was ordained in Epsom the following April and did not remain long after that, perhaps 2-3 months. The year 1838 was a notable revival year. 30 joined the Congregational Church under Mr. Fifield. The register shows that 36 joined this church (among them J.A. Knowles). The membership of this church is on report as 114, the Congregational Church 111. This number is the highest number in the history of this town, 255 members, 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the population.

For nearly two years there appears to be no pastor, unless McCutheon is considered such. In June 1840, Gorham P. Ramsey became pastor. He is the first minister of this church who received a salary, and was regarded as better educated than his

predecessors (Van Dame must be an exception). His age was 27. He married while here and his wife became more famous than he, she being distinguished as a writer of poetry. She was baptized in Epsom. The most prominent members in the church were not in sympathy with the new notions, and educated ministry, salary, etc., but Ramsey and wife were very much liked, and continued 3 years and 10 months, and would have continued longer had it not been for a small opposition. 27 appeared to have united with the church during this pastorate, but it had not grown in members.

Kinsman R. Davis became pastor for less than one year at the age of 27.

In 1845, Tobias Foss became pastor at the age of 31. I knew him well. He remained two years. The membership of the two churches are basically the same. The Congregationalists 103, the Freewill Baptist 108.

Ramsey begins his second pastorate December 5, 1847 and remains 2 years and 5 months, to September 1850. 25 are added to the church and the membership was 113. In Rufus A. Putnam's pastorate of 5 years at the Congregational Church, there were only 6 additions. The Congregational Church is now on the losing side and has about 100 members, but nearly 1/6 of the population is still in the church.

## BENJAMIN S. MANSON

1834

The Congregational church had no pastor. The Deerfield Association held protracted meetings in all their churches from the last of August until November and a revival in every place. Though they would omit Epsom because there was no pastor, but concluded to possibly come in November, and a glorious and blessed revival was the result; and some 30 were added to the Congregational Church, 34 during Smiths pastorate of two years. Turn now to the Freewill Baptist Church monthly meeting at the new meetinghouse (1<sup>st</sup> time mentioned) Sept. 10, 1834. Some felt that God was about to revive his work. A gathering Spirit had been noticed for some months. The church entered into covenant twice a day for a month that God would revive His work. The record says Elder Manson felt an impression to come and preach to us. He came the 22<sup>nd</sup> (presumably Sept. 22). He visited from house to house and preached every evening in some part of the town. In a few days the Lord appeared among His people in a wonderful manner, souls came forward for prayers at every meeting. Manson was here until Oct. 11 (Saturday when he goes to his own church in Meredith) but returns the 10<sup>th</sup>, Monday. A baptism 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in November, McCutcheon baptizes 5, Manson 14. The next day, Monday Nov. 3, two deacons were chosen at the house of Ephraim Locke. Manson and Cilley go into another room and the members of the church are called in one by one, and asked his or her choice for Deacon. Ephraim Locke and Thomas Bickford are chosen. Amos Prescott was appointed to officiate in the absence

of either. Temperance came up and received favorable consideration by most of the church. Manson preached Nov. 3 and baptized 4 more. He is presumably the pastor of the church. Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> Manson baptized 4. Thus there were 27 baptized in November and December.

In the following May the record says Manson preached in the forenoon and McCutcheon in the afternoon. McCutcheon baptized William Abbott and Manson at the request of McCutcheon gave the hand of fellowship to Abbott and Mercy Bickford. Next record that gives any light is March 12, 1836. A Home Mission Society was formed and Elder Manson was requested to form a constitution. My impression is that Manson preached in Epsom from the fall of 1834 to spring of 1836, a year and a half. Manson came to Epsom at the age of 32. He was ordained 7 years before. At school at Effingham Academy. A revivalist, died in Raymond, mu native town, Dec. 7, 1873. I knew him there. He was liked by people. This church in 1835 had a membership of 80. The Congregational Church must have still about 110.

Manson did move to Epsom, probably January 1836 and lived where Benjamin Bickford now lives, as his name does not appear as pastor of the Candia Church until 1838. His successor was Hiram Holmes. He probably came to Epsom in the fall of 1836 and continued until Nov. 1837. His age was 30. Married while in Epsom.

The first year of its life, 51 members of which 43 joined the first six months. Some "born in Zion" became ministers, Daniel P. Cilley and James McCutcheon. Five of the 8 original members were living when the membership was revised in 1845. Mary Marden was the first to die (1839), Sally Osgood next 1843. The time of Daniel Philbrick's death not known, must have been living in 1843, Lucretia Tarleton expired in April 1849. Elizabeth Currier is in the book in 1845, but not in the second book in 1861. Deacon Locke died 1855. The last two to die was Arthur Caverno in 1876 and Nathan Bickford in 1879. Probably his wife was the last to die of the 43 members of 1824. She died in 1894, a member 70 years.

The most distinguishing thing in McCutcheon's [Manson's ?] pastorate was the building of the new church in 1834. Though he probably had but little to do with it. Remember this was the first meeting house in Epsom not built by the town. {ed. Note, this is not true, as the Congregational Society built one near the town meetinghouse}.

I think I said this last Sunday, there appeared to be none to join the church during McCutcheon's six year pastorate, but he baptized after this 5 or 6 at a single time, perhaps 15-20 in all. I do not know but he was considered pastor in all vacancies, and even when there was a settled preacher here. He was a member of no other church. He is the only member that appears in the register for this church until 1843, and then his

name appears before Ramsey's, 1847 in the time that McCutcheon's name is put down second. He died in 1855.

1834 is a memorable year, 1, for the occupation of the new church, 2, for the coming of Elder Manson and the great revival that followed, 3, the election of the deacons at the house of Ephraim Locke, viz. Ephraim Locke and Thomas Bickford.

1834 and 1838 were the two greatest revival years in Epsom. We know about 60 in 1834 and 66 in 1838 joining the two churches.

Hiram Holmes was not a popular man. Someone said concerning Manson that the church worshipped him more than worshipped God. Holmes was not such a man, but he was a man of strength for he was three times a member of the General Conference. He was married during his pastorate in this town.

#### VACANCIES

This church never had vacancies as the Congregational Church did. With them, a vacancy most of the year from 1826 to 1827; a vacancy frp, 1830 to 1831 and 1833-1835.

When Manson's pastorate closed cannot be exactly told but it must have been between May 1836 and November 1836. Holmes appears to have been here from late 1836 to Nov. 1837. Van Dame from 1837 to we know not, but it appears certain it terminated near January 1838. Van Dame came to this town like Caverno, as a teacher and supplied the vacant pulpit, held 70 meetings and visited nearly every family in town.

But who preached in the year 1835 to June 1840, when Ramsey's second pastorate? Did McCutcheon?

#### GORHAM P. RAMSEY

The new epoch. A stated salary. His wife. His two pastorates separated by 3 years and 8 months. The parsonage at Short Falls. 47 added to the church.

7 added to the church with Davis' less than a years pastorate, 5 in Foss' two years. You need to remember in the Congregational Church, Fifield's 5 ½ years pastorate, the first Congregational Church built in 1845, 43 added to the church.

#### QUIMBY

The most of you knew him. He came a young man, had four pastorates in Epsom, in all over 14 years. The parsonage was built in his first pastorate, the church built in 1861 during his second pastorate, numbers added to the church in his 4 pastorates, 144 + 6 = 150, with a revival in 1858. He stands first of all the pastors in Epsom in the numbers

added to the church. Quimby 1<sup>st</sup>, Curtis 2<sup>nd</sup>. In no other pastorate was there so much material improvement.

His first pastorate was followed by Horace Webber. It was a mistake for Quimby to leave; a mistake for Webber to come. Webber was here for less than two years, followed by Quimby's second pastorate, Webber returned to his church in Sandwich. Following Quimby were Knowles, Brown, Haskell, and Chase. Moses A. Quimby returned for his third pastorate November 1869 to January 1872 and was followed by Joel Baker. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary occurred in the third year of his pastorate.

## CONGREGATION CHURCH NOTES

1852 to the end

Angier and Durgin part of one year each

Putnam again, one year

Willey 3 years 56-59, but not many additions in the grand revival of 57 and 58

Peffers 5 or 6 years

Smith 3 years

Peabody 3 years

From 72 to 76 only occasional preaching by students

Cogswell on Sundays 4 ½ years to 1881, Chase in the summer of 1882

The end.

## CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A third church was organized or transferred from Allenstown. E.T. Philbrick of our church left it and organized the New Rye Church and became its pastor for 7 or 8 years. The church was built in 1861, the same year as this. Several left this church and joined that. 34 were dismissed in 1863, the membership decreased from 185 to 145. The Christian church had a Methodist preacher (Stinchfield) and he was followed by Dickson, Cleverly, Garland and Philips. It dies after a life of less than 25 years.

Epsom NH July 9, 1899