

Reverend Donald Macomber was the pastor of the Epsom Baptist Church in 1961 when the centennial of the Baptist Church was celebrated. His history is online at Epsom History.com. At the same time, previous pastor, Dr. Emmet Russell, had retired and returned to Epsom and remained a member of the church. His article on the history of the building was part of the centennial celebration. This history has been on the website as well, but its author was unknown. An original type-written manuscript, with 'by Rev. Emmett Russell' added in pen, attributes this history to him.

**HISTORICAL ADDRESS AT THE CENTENNIAL OF THE PRESENT BUILDING  
OF THE EPSOM, NEW HAMPSHIRE, BAPTIST CHURCH, JULY 1961  
Rev. Emmett Russell**

The Freewill Baptist Church in Epsom was organized July 1, 1824, under the leadership of Elder Arthur Caverno, its first pastor. For ten years worship services were held in Deacon Marden's barn at Marden's Corner, now the Traffic Circle. A society to handle business affairs was organized, and the first church building erected in 1834, on the present site.

The church began in revival among a small group of believers, which resulted in their reaching out to others, so that the church was evangelistic from the first. Serious discipline problems soon arose, which were met in a forthright manner, with due deliberation but no beating about the bush. However, every time the reviving power of the Holy Spirit came upon the little flock, the records indicate that discipline problems vanished. The positive power of the Spirit of God in the lives of men and women exercised more effective discipline than the negative restraints imposed by men.

Early records show that the people who formed it desired a "free" church, that is, one not linked with town and state government; and that the type of church life they envisioned was intensely practical. For instance, two aims expressed were that the members would not "grudge" one another in such matters as dress; and that they could care for the poor among their own number.

By 1861 the Society felt the need of a more commodious building. William Goss bought the old building and removed it to Gossville, where, enlarged and altered, it remains as a store and post office. The building was moved by oxen. When they reached the place where Fred Knight now lives, the church stuck fast and could not be soon dislodged. It was Saturday night. The building was so badly tipped that when the worshippers sat in the pews on Sunday morning, some became seasick because of the angle at which they were tilted.

Quoting the church records: "April 1, 1861. The winter past, the Lord has again revived his work. The church as been quickened into a new life and interest, and quite a number of souls have found the Savior. The Society has decided to build

a new house of worship this season, and this with the revival gives a fresh interest in all things. Tho' the beginning of the terrible civil war makes things look dark and paralyzes the industrial pursuits of life. Our hope of success is in the Most High."

There were baptisms twice in August, once in September.

Again quoting the records: "Dec. 25, 1861. A happy Christmas to us, tho' stormy, in the dedication of our new house of worship. For about thirty years the Church worshipped in the old house, where we saw much of the power of God in the conversion of souls, from time to time. All felt that the time had come when we needed a more convenient house to worship in. An effort was made to raise a subscription sufficient to build a new house, and in this we were successful. The old house was disposed of without much difficulty, and the stockholders of the new decided on the same site of the old. The work was commenced in the latter part of May and completed in December. Bro. James B. Stanton of West Lebanon, Me., was master workman, and won out high esteem as a workman and a manager. The pews sold very readily and all were perfectly satisfied with the new house. The house was dedicated to the worship of God, Dec. 25, 1861. Eld. MA. Quimby, the pastor of the church, preached the sermon, founded on Gen. 28:17, 'And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place: this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'"

(Outline) "I. Some of the appropriate opportunities in the house of God."  
"II. The immense value of Christian opportunities in the house of God. The exercises were interesting and quite satisfactory to all. We felt that the Lord had prospered us beyond our expectations. May this church edifice long stand consecrated to the worship of the Most High, and constantly occupied with an intelligent and spiritual ministry of attentive hearers. The Lord make it the birthplace of many souls, who shall shine as the stars forever and ever.  
Thomas Tripp, Clerk, Epsom, Dec. 25, 1861"

Thus our present church building was erected in troubled times. In February 1861 the Confederacy was formed at Montgomery, Ala. Jefferson Davis arrived in Richmond, Va., on June 30 and Richmond was made capital of the new Confederacy. The border state hesitated, but Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri staid in the Union. The upper Mississippi Valley states were loyal; they wanted no custom houses between themselves and New Orleans.

Fort Sumter, S.C., was fired on April 12, and fell April 14. The flag of the United States of America had been fired on: April 15 President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to join with the regular army in putting down the rebellion. The North expected the war to be over in months.

The South also felt that it had reasonable expectation of a speedy victory. The South did not have to conquer the North in order to win: all it had to do was

convince the North that the North could not win. Many regular army officers, including Robert E. Lee, had gone over to the Confederacy. The spirit of Southern men was more martial. England and France were expected to sympathize with the South. The Northwest would want to settle the quarrel quickly in order to keep the Mississippi River open for its commerce. Lincoln agreed that the Federal Government could not interfere with slavery in any state, and wanted a constitutional amendment to settle that question. Lincoln would enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, because it was the law.

News from the front was bad. July brought the monstrous defeat for the North at Bull Run. Men's hearts were failing them from fear. Yet this was the year in which Epsom people built the house in which we worship today.

What kind of men were they who built this house? The same sort of men whose loyalty, courage and devotion saved the Union and preserved for us this "one nation under God, indivisible." Your grandfathers and great-grandfathers were the men. It is dangerous to single out a few for mention, but there are three whose position and prominence must let them stand for many worthy of mention but unnamed.

Of William Goss, the Merrimack County History says: "In the building of the new church in Gossville too much credit cannot be given Mr. Goss for the energy, perseverance and persistence with which he advocated and assisted the enterprise. When others were discouraged and ready to abandon the matter altogether, he took the leadership and bore, for the time being, the burdens himself, and carried it forward to completion."

William Goss was born July 13, 1820, received June 10, 1848 to become a member of the church after baptism, which took place June 25, 1848. He was a member of the Society also an ardent Democrat. He built many of the houses in Gossville, and died May 2, 1887.

Thomas Tripp kept clear and informative records of this period, sensitive to the human and the spiritual aspects of the life of the church. He was clerk from 1845 to 1871 and deacon from 1855 to 1871.

Many names which appear in the church records are still represented in town. Doubtless family tradition preserves the memory of the worthy service and staunch character of men and women who labored as they lived, for God and country during the stern times of the War Between the States.

Pastoral leadership when this house was built was in the hands of the Reverend Moses A. Quimby, whose four pastorates of this church included some of the most fruitful seasons in the work of Christ in this community.

Elder Quimby was pastor from September 1850 to April 1858; from April 1860 to April 1863; from November 1869 to January 1872; and from April 1885 to April 1887; a total of fourteen years and two-thirds. For a pastor to serve the same church twice is rare; four pastorates with intervals between probably constitute a unique record, and a more eloquent testimony to the worth of the man than an even longer continuous pastorate would be. Each of his pastorates was marked by revival from beginning to end. Revival among the brethren stimulated interest among the unconverted, resulting in conversions, and the Suncook River often witnessed the baptismal confessions of new-born souls.

Such were the men who built this church. You whose family traditions include them may profitably indulge imagination in picturing the sturdy men and women, boys and girls who filled this house in its earliest days. May the memories and associations stimulate us all to like devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, that the sacrifices and the successes of 1861 may be renewed in 1961.

This building cost about \$2,200, besides donated labor and material. Pews sold for \$50, and some families needed two. There was no vestibule; instead of the present central door, two doors led immediately from outdoors. Between them was a raised platform for the choir, high enough to house the Sabbath School library underneath. Among benefactors of this library is the Reverend Bartholomew Van Dame, who, though pastor for only year, 1837-38, when he was a young man, many years later left by his will \$100., the income to buy books for this church.

The congregation turned around to face the choir when singing the hymns. At one time a melodeon was used, then a reed organ, until the present pipe organ was installed. The windows were plain, and smaller than the present windows. The pews were white, with brown tops, and painfully straight-backed. But one could bring his own cushion and a cricket for the feet, if desired. At the front on either side were facing seats for deacons, who were active in assisting the pastor with the administration of church affairs. Heat was furnished by large wood stoves at the rear, with funnels the length of the room. Perhaps the habit of sitting as near the rear as possible was thereby promoted. Belfry and bell were later additions, with the vestibule.

The vestry was added in 1888, through the efforts of the women. Memorial windows were installed during the pastorate of the Reverend J. Woodbury Scribner in the 1890's. With the installation of a furnace, first for wood, and now converted to oil, and the addition of electric lights, the story of major changes brings us up to date. Last winter the church interior was painted.

As we sit in this house today, the pews are more comfortable, the lighting better, the instrumental music more abundant. Stained glass windows turn our thoughts inward rather than drawing them outward. Our clothing is different, and our

thoughts are far different, for the world has changed in a hundred years, changed more and more rapidly than in any previous century of human history. Yet the same human needs remain; the same heart-cry for compassion, forgiveness, love and understanding. And the same divine power to meet these needs is available today in Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

For me, there is no place of worship quite like the Epsom Baptist Church. It is a "place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God" rich with my memories of more than a third of its long century. I think that many of you feel the same way about this house. Let us cherish it, keep it clean and beautiful, filled with the sincere praises and fervent prayers of earnest men and women, and the glad songs of our boys and girls, resounding always with the compassionate voice of faithful preaching of "the full-orbed beauty of the Word of God" until Jesus comes again.

.