

**MANUAL OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, PLYMOUTH,
N.H.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649437085

Manual of the Congregational Church, Plymouth, N.H. by Anonymous

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PRINTED BY
REPUBLICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION
CONCORD, N. H.



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Historical Sketch.

The Congregational Church in Plymouth is as old as the town. The first settlers were mostly from Hollis, and the church was organized in that town April 16, 1764, before they came to Plymouth. This was the first church organized in New Hampshire north and west of Boscawen, and only Bennington, in Vermont, is older. The church in Newbury and Haverhill was gathered in the autumn of 1764. But it was afterwards limited to Newbury, leaving the church in Plymouth the oldest in Grafton county. It built the first meeting-house, gave the first call to a pastor, and enjoyed the first revival in the county.

Plymouth was first visited, with a view to settlement, by a party from Hollis, in Nov., 1762. The next spring men came on, and worked through the summer, clearing and building cabins, and some of them spent the winter. In the spring of 1764 the first families arrived, the wife of Col. David Webster having probably been the first woman in town. She came on horseback, bringing in her arms her infant, David, afterward so widely known. Among the first settlers we find the names of James Blodgett, Lieut. Josiah Brown, Capt. Jotham Cummings, Samuel Dearborn, Capt. James and David Hobart, Lieut. Zachariah Parker, Col. David, Amos, and Stephen Webster, Ephraim Weston, John Willoughby, and Francis Worcester.

Rev. Nathan Ward came by invitation to Plymouth early in the same year. He was born in Newton, Mass., April 11,

1721, son of Joseph Ward. He did not receive a liberal education, but, being converted under Whitefield's preaching, and possessing superior natural endowments, he was led in middle life to enter the ministry. His first settlement was in Newton, Mass., where he preached about seven years. In 1760 he was preaching in Newcastle, Me., and in Jan., 1761, received a call to settle there, which he accepted. But some difficulty arose, and the relation never was consummated, the invitation being withdrawn at his request in Oct., 1763.

He preached his first sermon at Plymouth, May 19, 1764, at Col. Webster's cabin, on the present grounds of the Pemigewasset House, from the text, Isa. 1: 19, 20. After spending four Sabbaths, he received a formal call to become pastor July 9, 1764. His acceptance, however, was delayed, and in February further overtures were made by the proprietors. These were successful, and he was installed at Newburyport, Mass., July 10, 1765.

A meeting-house was erected in 1767. It was of logs, 40 feet by 50, and stood facing south, a few rods south of the present road, at the foot of Meeting-house hill, having the stocks and whipping-post in the rear.

This house was burnt by an incendiary in Nov., 1787, for the purpose, no doubt, of hastening the work on the new house, the frame of which had just been raised. In this second house, on the top of the hill, the fathers worshipped God for fifty years, and very hallowed associations cluster around it. It continued to be used as a town-house till 1865, when it was sold at auction. A bell was provided Nov. 12, 1827.

The present house of worship was dedicated Dec., 1836, and first occupied on the Sabbath, Jan. 1, 1837. The chapel was built in 1851.

Mr. Ward's pastorate continued until Jan. 4, 1798, and he resided in town until his death, June 15, 1804. After Mr. Ward's dismissal, Mr. Daniel Hardy, a graduate and recent

tutor in Dartmouth college, preached "off and on" for six months, and was invited to become pastor. But he declined the call, and spent most of his life in teaching.

The next year Mr. Drury Fairbank accepted the call of the church, and was ordained Jan. 8, 1800. He was a native of Holliston, Mass., born Oct. 13, 1772; graduated at Brown University in 1797, and studied theology with Dr. Emmons. His pastorate continued until March 18, 1818. He removed the next year to Littleton, where, after a pastorate of sixteen years, he continued to reside, and died Jan. 11, 1853.

Rev. Jonathan Ward succeeded Mr. Fairbank, and, without installation, served the church as acting pastor eleven years. He was a son of the first pastor, born Aug. 24, 1767; graduated at Dartmouth college, in 1792, and also studied theology with Dr. Emmons.

His previous and only pastorate was in Alna, Me., of twenty years. After leaving Plymouth, he preached in Brentwood three and a half years, and in various places for shorter periods. He died in Brentwood, Feb. 24, 1860.

Rev. James Hobart, another son of this church, and the first male child born in town, Aug. 2, 1766, labored here for six months after Mr. Ward left. He had just been dismissed from a successful ministry of thirty years in Berlin, Vt., which continued to be his home during many subsequent years of labor among the churches of Vermont and New Hampshire. He died July 16, 1862, aged ninety-six years.

Mr. George Punchard was born in Salem, Mass., June 7, 1806. He was graduated from Dartmouth college in 1826, and studied theology at Andover. He was ordained pastor of this church, March 11, 1830, and dismissed March 6, 1844. In the spring of 1842 his health and voice failed, and he was absent six months. Returning, he was still unable to perform pastoral service, and in March, 1843, the church, declining to accept his resignation, gave him leave of absence