

**HISTORICAL SKETCHES OF THE
FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD:
A CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE
DELIVERED IN THE FIRTST CHURCH**

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Historical Sketches of the First Church in Hartford: A Centennial Discourse Delivered in the first church by Joel Hawes

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JOEL HAWES

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HISTORICAL SKETCHES
OF THE
FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD.

CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE

DELIVERED
IN THE FIRST CHURCH

JUNE 26, 1836.

BY JOEL HAWES, D. D.

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Hercules Warren Gray,
of Westboro?
(Class of 1862.)

AT A MEETING OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD,

JULY 11, 1836.

Voted, That the thanks of the Church be presented to our Pastor, for his very appropriate discourse lately delivered on its second Centennial Anniversary, and that a copy of the same be requested for publication.

Attest,

WILLIAM W. TURNER, Clerk.

HISTORICAL SKETCHES
OF THE
FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD.



PSALM 78: 1-7. Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born: who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

It is two hundred years, this month,—on what day cannot now be determined,—since the church, accustomed to meet in this house, came to this town and commenced here the worship of God which it has ever since regularly maintained. I have thought the occasion a fit one for reviving some recollections of the history of the church and of its pastors, together with such reflections on the past, as may serve to make us grateful for the present, and afford us useful lessons for the future.

As we look back to the period when our fathers came here and began the great work of laying the foundations of our civil and religious institutions, a thousand interesting associations crowd into the mind, and we scarcely

know where to begin, in the discharge of the duty we have undertaken. We love to dwell on the virtues of the venerated men, to whose self denials, and toils, and prayers, we feel that we are indebted for the chief blessings that distinguish our lot. We are interested and instructed, when we contemplate the principles of civil and religious liberty which, in a dark and iron age, they developed and established in this new world. We are moved with wonder and gratitude, when we think of the wide spread influence of those principles, and of the immensely interesting consequences which have flowed from the humble labors of men, who, driven out, as exiles and criminals from their native land, sought an asylum for religion and freedom on these western shores. But on these topics we cannot now enlarge. Nor is it necessary, as we have often dwelt upon them on former occasions. My present design is more limited, and will be confined to such brief notices of our history as can be comprised within a single discourse.

The original founders of this church were a choice collection of men from Braintree and its vicinity, in Essex County, England. Like the great body of the first settlers of New England, they were Nonconformists or Puritans;* and not being permitted to worship God ac-

* This was a name which first obtained in the reign of queen Elizabeth, in 1564. It was a name of reproach, to distinguish and stigmatize those who did not conform to the liturgy, ceremonies, and discipline, of the church of England. Fuller says, 'it was improved to abuse pious people, who endeavored to follow the minister with a pure heart, and labored for a pure and holy life.' Trumbull, vol. 1, p. 280.

'It was a distinguishing mark of a puritan in these times, to see him going to church twice on the Lord's day with his Bible under his arm; and while others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing &c. on the evening of the Sabbath, these with their families were employed in reading the scriptures, singing psalms, catechising their children, repeating sermons and prayer.' Neal's His. of Puritans p. 560.

ording to their views of duty in their native land, they, in 1632, emigrated to this country and settled at Newtown, now Cambridge, Massachusetts. There they built the first meeting house 'with a bell upon it;' and invited the Rev. Thomas Hooker, whose ministry they had occasionally enjoyed in England, to become their pastor. Accordingly in the summer of 1633, he, with about two hundred other passengers, among whom was the famous John Cotton, and Stone, and Pierce, and Haynes, and 'many other men of good estates,' embarked for this country, where they arrived on the 4th of September. On the 11th of October following, this church was organized at Newtown, and Messrs. Hooker and Stone were ordained its pastor and teacher.* It was the eighth church established in New England, and the first in this State.

* It was a common opinion, in the early history of New England, that in every church, completely organized, there was a pastor, teacher, ruling elder and deacons. Between the offices of pastor and teacher there was thought to be a difference; but in what it consisted, it is not easy now to ascertain.

The terms themselves, though at first distinct, soon became convertible, and the distinction, whatever it was in the beginning, was ere long lost sight of. Trumbull says that the pastor's work consisted principally in exhortation, working upon the will and affections. To this his studies and visits were chiefly directed; that by his judicious, and affectionate addresses, he might win the people to the love and the practice of the truth. But the teacher was *doctor in ecclesia*, whose business it was to teach, explain and defend the doctrines of christianity.

The business of the ruling elder was to assist the Pastor in the government of the church. He was particularly set apart to watch over its members; to prepare and bring forward cases of discipline; to visit and pray with the sick; and in the absence of the pastor and teacher, to lead the devotions of the congregation and expound the scriptures. It was an office very similar to that of deacon, and was not kept up, except in a very few churches, more than fifty years. The authority for these distinct offices was supposed to be found in Romans 12: 7. 1. Cor. 12: 28. 1. Tim. 5: 17. and Eph. 4: 17.

See Winthrop's Journal, by Savage—vol. 1, 31. Trumbull 1, 290, Hooker's Survey part 11. p. 4, 20.

In June 1636, a settlement having been effected here the preceding autumn, nearly the entire church and congregation, with its pastor and teacher, consisting in all of about one hundred souls, commenced a removal to this place. Now that the same distance is daily passed over in ten or twelve hours, we can scarcely conceive of the difficulties which our pious ancestors had to encounter, ere they could reach the banks of the 'beautiful Connecticut,' the place of their future home. They had to make their way through a 'hideous trackless wilderness; over mountains, through swamps and thickets and rivers, with no guide but the compass, with no covering but the heavens, and no lodgings but such as simple nature afforded them.' They drove with them one hundred and sixty cattle, and subsisted on the milk of the kine during the journey. After a fortnight's travel through the wilderness, tenanted only by wild beasts and savage men, they reached this place of their destination. Here they set up the worship of God in the regular administration of his word and ordinances. Here they lived and labored and prayed together. Here they enjoyed the special smiles of their covenant God and Saviour. Here they died; beneath and around us is the place of their sepulchres; and here, having ceased from their labors on earth, they ascended to their reward in heaven.

One of their first cares, after their arrival, was to provide a place of worship. Its location was a little North of where the Universalist meeting house now stands. It was of course a rude, inconvenient building, constructed of logs and covered with thatch. It was occupied only a short period as a place of worship, and, in 1649, was, by vote of the town, given to Mr. Hooker.*

* Town Records, vol 1, p. 67.

The second house for public worship was built in 1638. It was located a little distance eastward, from where the State house now stands, and served as the place of our father's worship 99 years.

It was a circumstance of great importance to the subsequent prosperity of the churches of New England, that they were founded by men eminently qualified for the work; distinguished alike for their talents, their learning and their piety. This may especially be said of those who established the first churches of Connecticut. They were among the most pious, discreet and intelligent of the Puritans; raised up in providence to impress a high character on the age to which they belonged, and to give a new and permanent direction to human affairs.

Thomas Hooker, the first pastor of this church, has justly been styled '*the light of the western churches and oracle of the colony of Connecticut.*' No sage of antiquity was superior to him in wisdom, moderation and firmness; none equal to him in the grandeur of his moral character and the elevation of his devotion. If we except the Rev. John Cotton of Boston, perhaps no man in New England exerted a greater influence in the civil and religious affairs of the country than did this distinguished scholar and eminent servant of Christ. He was born at Marfield, England, in 1586, and was educated at Emanuel College, Cambridge, where he was afterwards promoted to a fellowship, in which office he 'acquitted himself with such ability and faithfulness as commanded universal approbation and applause.' After leaving the University, he preached for some time in London and afterwards at Chelmsford with great success. Among the multiplied fruits of his ministry in that place was Eliot, the famed apostle of the Indians.* So well was he

* One of the principal instruments which the God of heaven used in unging and filling the mind of this chosen vessel (Eliot) with good principles