

HISTORY OF POMFRET, A DISCOURSE

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History of Pomfret, A Discourse by D. Hunt

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D. HUNT

**HISTORY OF
POMFRET, A
DISCOURSE**

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THE DAY OF ANNUAL THANKSGIVING, IN THE FIRST
CHURCH IN POMFRET, NOV. 19TH, 1840.

Daniel

BY D. HUNT,
PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

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AUTHOR'S NOTICE.

[It may be proper to state here, that this work has been performed under great embarrassments, and is, after all, but a meager representation of the history of this town. "The fathers have fallen asleep," and with them is lost a great amount of valuable history. The work should have been undertaken twenty years ago. But such as it is, I yield it, at the request of my people, for publication. Errors will doubtless be found in some of the statements which I have made, especially from tradition; but I have no means of detecting them. I have declared what I have supposed after much examination and inquiry, to be the truth. I have hesitated whether to publish it in the shape of a sermon, as it was originally prepared, or simply as a history; but have concluded, on account of my profession, though there is not much in it that resembles a sermon, to give it in its original form. In what estimation such labors of a Clergyman, to gratify his people and their friends will be held by the public, remains to be seen. The author, during his preparation of this work, has been compelled to regard the council of Moses, in the text—"Remember the days of old" &c.]

DISCOURSE.

DEUT. 32: 7.—*Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father and he will show thee; thy elders and they will tell thee.*"

This is a part of the dying address of Moses to the degenerate people of Israel. God had done great things for them and their fathers, but they seemed not to remember "the hole in the pit whence they were digged," nor "the place in the rock from which they were hewn," nor the mighty and holy hand that had done it. They had grievously departed from the Lord their God, and forgotten his abundant mercies. And Moses, having now assurance that he cannot go into the promised land, nor remain longer with them, to be their instructor and guide; improves the opportunity in his farewell message, to set their sins and their dangers before them; and to urge them by various, and some awful considerations, to cleave unto the Lord their God. This in the text is one of the motives which he is pleased to lay before them—"to remember the days of old, and consider the years of many generations."

Great advantage is often derived from a retrospection of God's dealings with the children of men, particularly with our own ancestors and countrymen. It shows us our origin—it shows us the long-suffering of God towards the wicked and his faithfulness towards those that are obedient—it gives warning to depart from evil and encouragement to trust in the Lord—it is calculated to inspire feelings of gratitude and love towards our great Preserver and Benefactor; and to draw forth expressions of thanksgiving and praise. It was when the Psalmist had been meditating on the history of God's dealings with his fathers

and countrymen, that he said, "O, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, for his wonderful works to the children of men," and exclaims "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting."—"Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee."

With these views of the importance of considering the history of the past, may it not be appropriate, on this anniversary day of "Thanksgiving, Praise and Prayer," to spend a little time in contemplating the history of this town. If we can go over the subject in a proper manner, it may as much as any thing, tend to awaken feelings of gratitude to Almighty God, and lead us to form new resolutions that we will serve and honor the God of our fathers.

The tract of land, originally known as the "Mashamoquet Purchase," and afterwards incorporated as the town of Pomfret, containing fifteen thousand one hundred acres, was deeded by Capt. James Fitch, of Norwich, for the consideration of thirty pounds, lawful money, to Samuel Ruggles, Sen., John Chandler, Benjamin Sabin, Samuel Craft, John Grosvenor, Samuel Ruggles, Jun., of Roxbury, Mass., and six other persons, whom they might choose to be joint proprietors with them. The persons chosen, were John Pierpont, John White, John Ruggles, John Gore, Samuel Gore, and Thomas Morey.

The deed was executed May 5th, 1686. It was signed by James Fitch, and by Owanecho, Sachem of the Mohegan tribe of Indians, and his son Josiah. Whence it appears, that the original proprietors of *this* soil, were careful to obtain the consent of the Indians to their purchase, and to have that consent expressed in writing, upon the instrument by which they held it—a thing not always done by the white people, in obtaining their lands from the Aborigines.

This purchase was confirmed by the General Assembly of Connecticut, with a view to its becoming a town July 8th, 1686. The proprietors employed an agent, John Butcher, to survey their purchase and to divide one half of it into twelve parts of equal value, which were severally assigned to them by lot. The remaining one half they held as joint stock.

Some of these proprietors, it is believed, moved on to their lands as soon as the purchase was made; others at different periods afterwards, and some never came, but sold the divided part, and some the whole, of their shares. The increase of the population here, was not after the manner of some of our Western towns and villages; for as late as 1713, nearly thirty years after the first settlers arrived, there were considerably less than sixty families, probably, not more than forty-five in the whole town.

In 1714, the town was enlarged by the addition of two farms, owned by Jonathan Belcher, Esq., of Roxbury, Mass., containing two thousand three hundred acres lying south of the "Mashamoquet Purchase," in the town of Mortlake,—or what is now a part of Brooklyn—on his petition to have them incorporated with the town of Pomfret; making the whole number of acres then in the town, to be seventeen thousand four hundred.

This "Purchase," it is believed, was once a favorite residence of the Indians. Some families were residing here when the first settlers came; and the remains of their habitations continued many years. Axes and arrows and pestles and gouges and fragments of cooking utensils—all of stone—are often found in the fields in these days. There is also upon one of the hills in this parish, called Chandler hill, the site of an Indian fort.

The soil of this "Purchase" is uncommonly productive for this part of Connecticut; and within its limits, there is but little land which is not arable. Tradition, however, informs us, that when the division into farms was first made, the few bog-meadows, now so little valued, were more highly prized than the uplands on account of the hay which they produced. The surface of the town is uneven, possessing a peculiar arrangement of hill and dale, which in the summer season, when vegetation is fresh, gives to the scenery a charming aspect.

There are three streams of water winding through this town, which retain their original Indian names. The largest is the Mashamoquet, from which the "Purchase" took its original title. The other two empty into this, viz: the Wappoquians, which runs by the burying ground in this parish; and the Nee-

wichewanna, which comes from the hills in the south part of the town.

The early inhabitants of this town were, evidently, persons who feared God and loved the institutions and ordinances of the gospel. This, however, is what we might reasonably expect, when we remember that most of them came from that place where the "apostle" Elliot lived and preached, and diffused his spirit of piety and benevolence, and probably received the seal of the covenant from his hand. Tradition informs us, that before they were able to sustain the means of grace among themselves, they were accustomed to go to Woodstock to worship; and that females walked from the south part of the town—the distance of seven or eight miles, and sometimes in a snow path—carrying their infants in their arms.

As soon as their number and circumstances would admit, they commenced exertions to have the stated ministry of the gospel amongst themselves; and pursued them in the most serious and resolute manner, until the object was accomplished. Perhaps no method will so well illustrate the character of the first settlers of this town, and bring before you their religious history, as to present the records of their doings from the commencement of their efforts until the settlement of their first minister.

At a meeting of the inhabitants and proprietors of the "Mashamoquet Purchase," May 3d, 1713, the following agreement was made and signed by twenty-three persons:

"It being an indispensable duty, as we would aim at the glory of the Lord our God, and regard not only our temporal and civil good, but also, and especially the spiritual and eternal good of our own souls, and the souls of our dear wives and children—therefore, to lay such a foundation, and make such suitable provisions, as that we may have a gospel ministry settled amongst us, and enjoy God in all his holy ordinances—the which that we may do—it is unanimously voted and agreed to, that for three ensuing years, all our public charge in building a meeting house, and minister's house, and settling a minister, and his maintenance, shall be raised after this way, viz: one half on all lands within the township as granted by the General Assembly, and

now belonging to each inhabitant and proprietor of the township so granted, and the other one half of public charge, as aforesaid, on heads, stocks, and other ratable estate. And we also agree that three judicious persons be appointed to give us timely and seasonable advice in any matters of difficulty, either respecting placing the meeting house, or whatever else may concern or conduce to our public peace, and the orderly settlement of our place. We also agree that the Honorable Assembly be petitioned unto, to grant us a freedom from ordinary country charge, or rates, for three years, as has been their custom and favor, to all new towns; and that the General Court or Assembly, order that all those inhabitants and proprietors of land, lying in our township, that shall neglect or refuse to pay their just proportion of public charge, for the next three years ensuing—their dues being suitably demanded—that so much of their land be seized and disposed of, according to law, as may answer his or their just due and proportion of public charge within our township, as aforesaid. Lastly, we desire and empower, our loving neighbors, Lieut. John Sabin, and Sergt. Leicester Grosvenor, humbly to present our petition and pray the General Assembly to put their sanction hereunto.—Witness our hands.”*

This petition was granted by the General Assembly May 14th, 1713, and all the privileges of corporate towns conferred. It was also ordered that Mashamoquet should be called Pomfret.

October 28th of this year, “the town voted to give an orthodox minister—such an one as shall be acceptable to the people—one hundred and fifty pounds in money for and towards buying his land and building his house—also, to break up four acres of land and plant two with an orchard—and for his salary fifty-five pounds in money for the first year, until such time as there shall be sixty families settled in the town; and then seventy pounds a year ever after, so long as he shall continue his ministerial relation to us. And Ebenezer Sabin and Samuel Warner are chosen to go and bring a minister to preach and settle here. And it is voted, in the first place, that they shall make their appli-

* See Note, A.