

**AN HISTORICAL DISCOURSE DELIVERED  
ON THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORGANIZATION,  
OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH IN PROVIDENCE, R. I.**

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An Historical Discourse Delivered on the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the organization, of the Hirst Congregational Church in providence, R. I. by Carlton A. Staples

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**CARLTON A. STAPLES**

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AN

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THE

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
ORGANIZATION

OF THE

First Congregational Church

IN PROVIDENCE, R. I.,

AND THE ORDINATION OF JOSIAH COTTON, THE FIRST MINISTER;

*Sunday Evening, November 1st, 1878,*

BY  
*Robert*  
CAULTON A. STAPLES.

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PROVIDENCE  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.

~~8457 Paovid.~~  
~~10th 1878~~

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following account of the observance of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary is copied from the records of the Society, and printed here as introductory to the historical discourse.

In accordance with arrangements made by a Committee of the Society of which William B. Weeden was Chairman, and Charles H. Sheldon, Secretary, the following services of Commemoration were held.

On Sunday morning, November, 3, 1878, Rev. William Newell, D. D. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, preached from the same text, Isaiah vi. : 8, from which Dr. Appleton, pastor of the Church in Cambridge, one hundred and fifty years ago, preached at the ordination of the first minister. Rev. Dr. Farley of Brooklyn, New York, Rev. Crawford Nightingale of Dorchester, Mass., and the pastor joined in the service. The congregation was large and the services were interesting and impressive.

At the conclusion, the pastor invited all to remain and unite in the observance of the Lord's Supper whose convictions and feelings were in sympathy with this simple memorial rite, stating that nearly a hundred years ago it was voted by the church that the invitation to the communion should include all denominations of Christians. The communion service was conducted by Revs. Dr. Farley of Brooklyn, N. Y., and Dr. T. T. Stone of Bolton, Massachusetts.

In the evening the pastor gave an historical discourse, narrating some of the most striking facts in connection with the planting of the church and with its progress and work during the century and a half of its existence, including brief sketches of the ministers down to the death of Rev. Dr. Hall, and stating its theological position in relation to some of the doctrines which divide the Christian world. Revs. Augustus Woodbury and Alfred Manchester, of the Westminster and Olney Street churches joined in the services. A large congregation was present.

The floral decorations were appropriate and tasteful, and included a band of white flowers across the front of the pulpit, upon which were inscribed in crimson flowers, the dates 1728-1878.

On Monday evening, November 4th, a service was held in the church which consisted of prayer by Rev. Dr. Farley; music, singing and addresses by Rev. Fielder Israel of the First Church in Salem, Rev. Rufus Ellis, D. D. of the First Church in Boston, Rev. C. A. Bartol, D. D. of the West

Church in Boston, Revs. Crawford Nightingale of Dorchester, Mass., Richard Metcalf of Winchester, E. H. Hall of Worcester, J. F. W. Ware of Arlington Street Church, Boston, and E. E. Hale of the South Congregational Church, Boston.

These addresses were full of hearty congratulations to the Society and pleasant reminiscences of its ministers and people.

Besides those who took part in the services, the following clergymen were present by invitation, viz. : Rev. George W. Briggs, D. D. of Cambridge, Rev. Granville Pierce of Medfield, Rev. George F. Clark of Mendon, and Rev. Henry Edes of Dorchester, the son of a former minister. Many of the clergymen present represented churches whose pastors of a hundred and fifty years ago joined in the ordination of Rev. Mr. Cotton.

Letters were received from Rev. Preserved Smith of Greenfield, who was a member of the congregation sixty-five years ago, from F. H. Hedge, D. D. of Cambridge, R. P. Stebbins, D. D. of Newton, Orville Dewey, D. D. of Sheffield, H. W. Bellows, D. D. of New York, S. W. Lothrop, D. D. of Boston, Rev. S. W. Flagg of Bernardston, and Rev. E. M. Stone of this city, with words of good cheer and regrets that they were unable to be present.

At the conclusion of the services in the church, the congregation was invited to repair to the chapel



where refreshments were provided and a season of social intercourse enjoyed.

Thus ended the celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the first Congregational Church in Providence, and the ordination of its first minister. The services were of an interesting character and gave much satisfaction to the people.

## HISTORICAL ADDRESS.

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"They that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lordarkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."—MALACHI, III. : 16.

"Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."—JOB, XXXII. : 7.

It is an embarrassing task to pass in review the history of a hundred and fifty years of church life in a single discourse; to gather up and try to make real some of the chief events and personages of this long period, giving a connected idea of what this life has been, presenting the objects and the spirit which have animated it, the influence which it has exerted upon the community, and the fruits of character which it has nurtured and ripened for the garners of heaven.

Let me entreat your patience therefore, if the way seem long, and give me your forbearance, if I seem to wander too freely in the outlying fields of common life. It will be a panorama rather than a finished picture, and if figures are painted which do not strictly belong there, it may relieve a little the tedium of dry detail and cause the unrolling

scene to pass more swiftly, and I hope not less profitably, before you. Surely a century and a half of the life of a church affords much that is worthy of serious consideration. If "multitude of years teach wisdom," we shall find not only events and characters here that excite our interest, but something to quicken our faith in God and man, and make our life more worthy of the divine blessing.

The planting of a church of the Congregational order in the town of Providence, a hundred and fifty years ago, was an object of great interest to the churches of that faith in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Before the year 1720, they had been exploring the land with a view to the commencement of missionary work within this Plantation. Rev. John Greenwood of Rehoboth had visited the place, held services here, and consulted with the authorities in reference to their course should an attempt be made to establish that form of worship. What their answer was, we do not know, but no active opposition was manifested towards the movement, and steps were taken as early as 1720 to gather the few Congregational people of Providence in stated services of worship. That some general organization for religious purposes was formed at that time, seems probable, (although there is no record of it,) since from about this date religious services were held by clergymen of Massachusetts and Connecticut with some degree of regularity, and the ordinance of baptism was administered in the Congregational form to a