

**HISTORY OF THE SECOND
PARISH CHURCH (UNITARIAN),
MARLBOROUGH,
MASSACHUSETTS**

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History of the Second Parish Church (Unitarian), Marlborough, Massachusetts by Edward F. Hayward

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EDWARD F. HAYWARD

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OF THE
SECOND PARISH CHURCH
(UNITARIAN)

MARLBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS

BY

EDWARD F. HAYWARD

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Note

At an adjourned Annual Meeting of the Parish, held on May 4, 1905, it was voted to observe the one hundredth anniversary of the West Church, which afterwards became the Second Parish Church of Marlborough; and the Parish Committee, in connection with the minister, were empowered to act as a committee of arrangements. Inasmuch as the church entered upon its existence, in a house of worship of its own, on the 27th of April, 1806, this date was chosen for celebration rather than that of February 23rd, 1808, when it was legally incorporated as the Second Parish by the General Court. The Parish Committee having the matter in charge were Edward E. Allen, Charles F. Brigham, E. Irving Morse, Walter B. Morse and Stillman R. Stevens. This committee was later enlarged by the addition of the following persons: Mrs. Charles F. Brigham, Mrs. E. Irving Morse, Mrs. Walter B. Morse, Mrs. Stillman R. Stevens, Mr. Herbert M. Hazelton, Mr. and Mrs. J. Henry Gleason, Mrs. Webster Eugley, Mrs. Lorren Arnold and Miss Emily Howe.

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The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the many friends who have helped him in collecting material for his work. The loss of the earlier Parish books and the failure to preserve the Sunday School records has been felt; but he has had valuable assistance from the Public Library officials, from Mr. J. V. Jackman, Mrs. Dennis Witherbee, and many others in the city. He wishes also to thank Mrs. O. Augusta Cheney, of Natick, Mass., daughter of Rev. Horatio Alger, for her contributions concerning her father. There is no likeness of Dr. Asa Packard in existence except a now faded portrait in Philadelphia. A copy made from this portrait is herein presented, through the kind assistance of Mrs. Ruth Q. Powell of Scranton, Pa., a granddaughter, and Miss Anna W. Packard of Hudson, Mass., a great granddaughter, of the first and longest settled minister of Marlborough.

Beginnings

The causes which led to the establishment of the West Church and Second Parish in Marlborough are involved in more or less of obscurity. The immediate cause was the difference of opinion touching the church site. Doubtless the theological disagreement, which was afterward to become more apparent, also entered into the account. But evidences are not wanting that other motives were present to still further complicate the situation. The history of the preceding hundred and fifty years makes clear that the early people of Marlborough made up a highly individualistic, not to say inflammable, community, which never found it easy to act together either politically or socially or religiously. The principle of independency, the right of private judgment, probably never had a fuller carrying out than here. To outsiders they may have seemed quarrelsome, to themselves they doubtless seemed only tenacious of personal rights and perfectly legitimate prejudices. At any rate they had gradually accumulated among themselves an uncomfortable stock of local factions and animosities, which were liable to start up on the slightest provocation, and which were pretty sure to enter into any question which came up for settlement among them.

During these years when there was only one church in the town, and when it is difficult to divorce the religious history from that which

was secular, this state of feeling is markedly shown by the troubles incident to settling a town minister. On one occasion a period of five years elapsed before a pastor could be found, and on another a period of seven years was necessary. Not only did the people find it hard to agree, but in four or five instances, when a call had been extended, there would be a declination. Such had become the reputation of the town for rivalries and divisions, that the candidate, acting also on the advice of neighboring ministers who had been consulted, did not dare to venture on the settlement.

The church schism really began as early as 1738, when "sundry inhabitants of the easterly part," petitioned to be set off from the town and church. In 1756 an attempt was made to have the old meeting-house taken down, and two new ones erected. The only result of this action was a vote "to repair the present meeting-house on the foreside and the two ends, by making new window-frames and casements to slip up and down, and glaze it with sash glass, set in wood, and to new clapboard the foreside and the two ends, and make new doors and steps at the doors; and to accomplish said work, Mr. Thomas Brigham, Dea. Andrew Rice, Capt. Joseph Howe, Capt. Daniel Barnes, and Capt. Ephraim Brigham, were chosen a committee to cause the same to be done." After the close of the King Philip war, in 1680, an unsuccessful attempt had

been made to secure this enlargement. The people were then worshipping in an unfinished church building, the estimated value of which was only fourteen pounds. Its primitive character can be seen from the fact that its roof was made of a tall grass taken from what was then known as "Thatch Meadow." Finally, in 1688 a new church was erected, which continued to serve the needs of the town till the division of 1806.

Preliminary Steps

Ten years before this latter date the agitation for a new meeting-house began again. In 1801 a vote of more than two to one was obtained in favor of building, but the difficulty of agreeing on a site deferred action till June 4, 1804. Then it was decided to locate at Spring Hill. Many at once left the meeting; and it was only after much discussion and delay that in January, 1805, work was actually begun. This involved a removal from what is now the High School Common to the easterly part of the town, and at once the long slumbering demand for a church in the west part made itself heard. Immediately on the action above mentioned, a meeting was called at the house of Capt. George Williams, in which the dwellers in the West Part met and chose William Boyd Moderator, and Benjamin Rice, Jr., Clerk. After considering the difficulties which existed in the town incident to