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"Faith of Our Fathers."

In November of 1830, the young Minister of Concord's First Church preached a sermon in commemoration of the church's one hundredth anniversary. He emphasized the fact that this church conceived in orthodoxy, had, in spite of liberal and destructive trends throughout New England, remained strictly orthodox in doctrine and in practice during its century of existence. The Minister, Rev. Nathaniel Bouton, knew personally the second and third generations descendent from the pioneers of Concord: moreover he had, as he later demonstrated, the qualities of a true historian—accuracy as to facts and a capacity for logical deduction. His conclusions can hardly be challenged when we read in this anniversary sermon—"The character of the town, its prosperity and all that constitutes its glory, are derived from the religious principles and moral habits of the original settlers." Therefore, it behooves later generations to consider the Faith which produced results so favorable to our inheritance.

In this day of human self-sufficiency and moral laxity, scant respect is paid the Puritan who taught and practiced a life of self-discipline; and yet it becomes increasingly evident that as self-discipline wanes, our heritage of self-government slowly disintegrates. Years ago the English historian, Macaulay declared that the Puritan had developed "a noble race of men superior to the ancestors of any other nation", a statement that may well give us pause in this day of religious, moral and political confusion.

With the Reformation as his spiritual background, the Puritan in New England sought to establish simplicity and sincerity in his church in ~~contrast~~ distinction to the corruption, as he deemed it, of the Church of England. He claimed as his inherent right, a direct approach to God without the offices of priest or prelate. The Bible was his guide and he sought to model his daily life according to its exacting precepts.

The Puritan's God was a mighty, just and merciful Being in whom was strength and comfort for the human needs, implying that worship and obedience to Him must be first principles. The modern concept of the Deity as an easy-going, indulgent Father could never have commanded the respect, much less inspired the worship, of a Puritan community. The Puritan knew the fear of God, nevertheless he approached the Throne of Grace boldly because his New Testament gave authority for such confidence. In common with St. Peter, St. John and St. Paul, he held that the one great essential of Christian faith is the belief in the deity of Jesus Christ which entitles sinful humanity to the mercy and fatherly love of God. The Puritan was prepared to defend his Faith against divers unbeliefs. He knew the warnings that Jesus, Himself, had given concerning false prophets and teachers, and he knew the fulfilment of such warnings in the history of the Christian church. He was alert to the danger of corruption of the Faith.

Coming to New England to build a state in righteousness, he counted no cost too great for the success of his exalted ideal. There could be no toleration of dissent for in singleness of purpose lay his power. In pursuit of his ideal, the Puritan developed a character of spiritual virility and moral strength. He established the Congregational church, so simple in its worship, so child-like in its Faith, so democratic in its polity that it approximated the church of apostolic times and, mighty in the Spirit, his church stood uncorrupted in the Faith until after the Revolutionary War

The Puritan joined his government to his church and in early New England only church members were eligible to vote as "freemen". Such seemingly rigid principles did not prevent great vision, for the public school and the college were second only to his church in all plans for his new state.

The trend of Puritan life produced a strong mentality, a restlessness in times which afforded scant outlet, intellectual vigor and it was inevitable that the clergy should indulge in complicated dogma and speculative philosophy. Thus the Faith became cumbered with ideas which brought into controversy the harsh Calvinist and his gentler, but equally insistent opponent, the Arminian; dissenters developed and the church sometimes stooped to persecution. Through all such stress, however, the Faith held to essential belief.

In 1680 a Synod of the New England Congregational Churches was held in Boston and Articles of Faith were adopted as the standard of orthodox belief, centered around the great central fact of the deity of Jesus Christ. Fifty years later the little church in Pennycook Plantation was organized on "orthodox" principles and chose a Minister who was deemed a "moderate Calvinist". Under primitive conditions and isolated from older churches, the new church escaped dogmatic theology and re-captured the idealistic simplicity of early days in Massachusetts Bay Colony. With similar results in integrity of life and in high moral courage, the members of the little church in Pennycook wove into the fabric of Concord life, ideals of righteousness and honor, of learning and thrift. They proved in this small corner of the world, the everlasting truth that a Christian church true to the Faith, may be a channel for God's creative and redemptive purpose in a needy world.

The anniversary sermon which Rev. Mr. Bouton preached in 1830 at the end of a century, cites certain results of the orthodox standard maintained by the Pennycook church. At the end of the first half of that century, there were no paupers in the town: at the end of eighty years there were but three, and at the end of the century, idleness was still counted a vice and whoever was found guilty of that offence was placed under proper guardianship. During the entire period reviewed there had been no capital crime in Concord, "no outrages or gross violation of order"; one descend

ent only, of our original settlers had been an inmate of prison, and only one other native born son shared similar disgrace. Through long years of hardship, privation and injustice, the principles of free education had been maintained so that at the end of its first century, only four illiterate children of school age could be found in the entire town.

In view of such results, it is reasonable to hold that the Covenant of First Church is the most influential document in the early history of Concord. It is herewith presented as it was established in November, 1730, just prior to the ordination of the first Minister.

"You professing a firm belief of the Christian Religion, and humble repentance of all your sins, do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, solemnly devote and dedicate yourself and yours to the Lord Jehovah, who is Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in everlasting Covenant; freely choosing God for your portion and happiness; heartily embracing the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, as He is freely offered to you in the Gospel, and the Holy Ghost as your Sanctifier; and promise by Divine Grace that for the future you will endeavor to observe all things whatsoever God in His Word has commanded you.

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Moreover you promise, that so long as God shall continue you with us, you will submit yourself to the Rules and Discipline of this Church of Christ in this place.

We then receive you as a Disciple of Christ and member of the same body in full Communion with ourselves, promising as God shall enable us, to watch over you with patience, meekness and brotherly love, praying that the God of peace may dwell among us and be glorified in us.

Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before His Throne with exceeding joy-To the only wise God Our Saviour be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, world without end.

Amen."

A "Half-way Covenant" was used in the church for many years, in accordance with general custom, for the benefit of those believers who as yet were not church members, but who wished baptism for their children. The "Half-way Covenant" was identical with the regular Covenant so far as ##### after which the following was substituted:

"And in particular you promise to seek after some further evidence of our Christian qualifications as that you may find yourself disposed to come forward and shew forth the Lord's death at this table."

First Church organized with a small group of members but the number grew steadily as the town grew and Dr. Bouton found evidence that ultimately nearly all the settlers who were not members, had taken the "Half-way Covenant." During Dr. McFarland's pastorate (1798-1825) this "Half-way Covenant" was abolished but the regular Covenant was in use for nearly eighty years until Unitarian unbelief current in the Congregational denomination of New England, made necessary the re-writing of the Covenant in more explicit terms.

Church membership two centuries ago was not to be entered into ignorantly or lightly. The vow was "an everlasting covenant" a pledge of solemn self-dedication to a code of living. It was preceded by long and careful preparation under the guidance of Minister and deacons. Its discipline, applicable only to church members, appears to have been administered with justice, charity, dignity and patience. If misdemeanor were charged and proven, every effort was made to bring the offender to repentance and when repentance was confessed, the erring one was, in due season, restored to the communion. This might be a process of two months or more of probation, and sometimes the patient endeavor of years.

In the exercise of this discipline, the church took upon itself responsibility for enforcement of the moral law; it sat as a board of arbitration for the settlement of neighborhood disputes, or as a court of family relations—as the case demanded. During Parson Walker's long pastorate

only fragmentary church records were kept, but we know that two cases of discipline occurred prior to 1736, recorded as "several sins of the tongue" and "speaking falsely with dishonest intent." These offenders were suspended from communion, but after humble confession, they were reinstated.

On a September day in 1730 a messenger arrived in Pennycook with an order from the committee of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, calling upon the Proprietors to assemble in their log meeting-house on October 14, for the purpose of choosing and calling a minister. On the appointed day the Proprietors—as many as could make the trip to the Plantation—met and voted: "That Rev. Timothy Walker shall be the Minister of the Town." From that day on for nearly a century, the one church in Concord was, according to Puritan custom, maintained as a town institution at town expense and each land owner was taxed for its support.

Timothy Walker, native of Woburn, Mass. and a graduate of Harvard college was a young man of twenty-five when he accepted the call to this frontier church at a salary approximating one hundred and thirty dollars a year. He was not a stranger in the town for he had been supplying more or less at the log meeting-house during the summer. The ordination of Mr. Walker must be an occasion of all the dignity and solemnity possible in such primitive surroundings and the committee of arrangements was chosen with care: Dea. John Osgood of Andover, John Pecker of Haverhill, Benjamin Nicolls, probably of Andover, and Capt. Ebenezer Eastman of Pennycook. The committee invited three ministers to be ordaining council and, naturally, they were the ministers of the two Andover churches and of the Haverhill church. The great majority of the Proprietors were members of those churches.

Now, 18 (O.S.) was the date set for the ceremony and the members of the ordaining council probably took two days for the trip on horseback to Pennycook Plantation. Approaching the new town, they turned from the original road northward across the Plains, and followed the branch road to the new ferry at the South End. We can fancy that ferryman John Merrill met them in person for he would hardly yield to another the honor of meeting the reve-

rend guests, nor would he miss the opportunity to greet his home pastor, Rev. John Brown of the Haverhill church. John Merrill's wife, Lydia, and their small children had moved to Pennycook during the preceding June and were snugly housed in the log cabin standing on the little hill above the ferry. From her doorway Mrs. Merrill could watch the ferry boat as it crossed the river.

As the party proceeded to the west bank, John Merrill could point with pride to the well-built fence stretching up the intervalle in the rear of the Range I houselots and he would tell of the abundant crops raised and recently harvested within its protection. As they neared the landing he would point with even greater pride to his own log house at the very end of the village street. On landing we can be sure that the honored guests were welcomed with all ceremony and led up to the main street by the short and steep ferry road. This ancient road was in use until 1936 when Water St. was filled in as approach to a new bridge over the railroad tracks. A house then stood on either side of the old road.

We can picture the guests and the welcoming committee as they rode up the broad highway so recently cut out of primeval forest. The roadway clung uncertainly on the sloping shelf of upland and it was cut through again and again by rushing brooks which sought the river. More than one of these brooks had worn a deep ravine into which the new road dipped precipitately. The deepest ravine was near the foot of present Montgomery St. and from its depth the road climbed a steep hill to the level of our present Court House. None of these brooks were bridged except, possibly, for foot passengers.

On either side of the road were log houses, many of them still unfinished for the settlers still had another season in which to fulfil their contracts. Between the houses there were frequent alder thickets and dense forest closed in the hills to the west. It was a wild and primitive scene but the little cabins looked snug and from more than a score of

them the smoke rose cheerfully above the stone chimneys on that November day. According to a deposition of Jacob Shute in later years, there were at this time fifteen families resident in the town beside several single men. Shute had brought his family here during the year of 1730.

The little cavalcade approached the block house, henceforth to be known as the meeting-house where, for generations to come, the religious and political activities of the town were to be centered. The building stood on the west side of the highway and north of Meeting-house brook which flowed across the road at the foot of present Chapel St. The structure was forty by twenty-five feet in dimension, with log walls so thick as to be bullet proof, since this was to be the town's refuge from Indian attack. The only windows were large holes under the eaves—too high for attack, and near the floor were port holes for defence. Then or later, the visitors must have been led north to the end of the highway on the little hill overlooking Horseshoe pond, there to see the new log house on Range I, Lot I which was to be the home of the new Minister. It is certain that there or at some hospitable cabin on the way, the customary liquid refreshment was brought forth for the comfort of these honored guests.

The list of original members of First Church has been preserved. Four of the group were recommended by letter from First Church, Andover, by the pastor, Rev. John Barnard, who was a member of this ordaining council, and two of these were the Barker brothers, William, Jr. and David, sons of Proprietor William Barker of Andover. David evidently developed his father's grant in Pennycook and probably lived near the present corner of N. State and Walker Sts. After his father's decease thirteen years later, David sold this homestead and we hear no more of him in Concord. But in this year 1730 David was elected field driver (for stray cattle) with Jacob Shute.

William Barker, Jr. was married and his wife, Martha, was the only woman in this original group of church members. She was one of the five wives of settlers whom we can identify as living in Pennycook at this time. The Barker home (at least a few years later) was on the site of our Court

House and it seems likely that William, Jr. came to the Plantation as substitute for an absentee Proprietor. Ultimately he acquired this home-
stead in his own right. The Barkers were near neighbors to Edward Abbot
who lived at the corner of present Montgomery St. His wife, Dorcas, and
Martha Barker had much in common that winter of 1730-31: on Dec. 27 after
the ordination, the first male, white child born in Concord, was welcomed
in the Abbot home, while a month and a day later, Martha Barker bore a son,
William 3rd. In later years the Abbots became church members.

The fourth member recommended by letter from First Church, Andover,
was a youth of nineteen named Aaron Stevens, probably of the family of
Proprietor Ebenezer Stevens, whose house lot was on the south corner of
Centre road (Centre St.) There Aaron Stevens made his home until his death
many years later. He was prosperous and increased his holdings into a
considerable farm extending up Centre road as far as present Pine St.
Aaron Stevens had the distinction of being the town's first "crowner"
(coroner).

John Russ, fifth of the group of organizing church members, was a
housewright who developed the grant of Proprietor John Grainger. His house
lot Range II, No. I, ^{was} directly opposite the Minister's home. John Russ seems
to have built his cabin on the west side of the lot near the highway to-
day called State St. This was reasonable since there the land lay level
and high. In 1728 Russ had purchased the Grainger grant and thus became
Proprietor in his own right. Not long after the church was organized, his
wife Priscilla Farnum, sister of the pioneer Farnum brothers, joined its
membership. In 1745 John Russ died on his home place at the North End.

Two other young men complete the list of original church members-
Jeremiah Stickney and ^{Samuel} ~~Samuel~~ Burbank. Stickney came from Bradford when
he was about twenty-five years old, to develop the grant of Benjamin
Carlton and he purchased the property later. His wife was Elizabeth Carl-
ton (perhaps the daughter of the Proprietor) and in 1731 she and her small

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son moved to Pennycook. Their home was on the site of present Elks Club and it became the nucleus of a prosperous intervale farm.

There was a Burbank signature to the petition of 1721 for a grant of land at Pennycook but the name is not among the final Proprietors of the Plantation. Doubtless Samuel Burbank came here as a substitute for some Proprietor. His wife's name was Lydia and their son, Jonathan was born in this town in 1732. Mrs. Burbank joined the church after its organization.

The Minister was, of course, a member of the original group and his first deacon was ferryman John Merrill, whose wife, Lydia, joined at a later date. Minister, deacon and members were all young people—not one, probably, more than thirty years old; all signed the Covenant in deep sincerity of purpose and thereby established in Pennycook Plantation, a dwelling place for the Living God.

The ceremony of ordination was one of simple dignity. The rude block house had been furnished with benches of split logs and a crude pulpit which as yet had no door; but the new plank floor made for comfort on a cold November day and it is to be hoped that a bright fire was burning in a fireplace of stone. In such primitive surroundings were gathered the three grave and reverend members of the council, the eight church members, probably some of the absentee Proprietors and as many resident settlers as could find space in the building. In their midst was the young Minister, striving to look more than his twenty-five years. Crude though the service might be, this was an occasion for reverence and deep thanksgiving. These simple and sincere folk had prepared their hearts for the presence of God and they knew Him to be in their midst. Rev. John Barnard preached the sermon, Rev. Samuel Phillips of South Church, Andover, a Proprietor, gave the charge to the new Minister, and, as is the Congregational custom, Rev. John Brown gave the right hand of Fellowship.

When the great day was over, the men and women of Pennycook re-

returned to their homely tasks and the Minister rode joyfully to Woburn to fetch his bride of two weeks, Sarah Burbeen. In due time the young couple arrived in Pennycook to establish their new home. Perhaps the snow lay on the fields as they rode up our main street for the first time together and entered the little log cabin at the far end of the town. Comfort and ease had been left in the old home; hardship, anxiety and sorrow lay before them, but they were strong in love, in a high purpose to serve and in the courage of an abiding faith in God.

Winter closed down on Pennycook Plantation. There was no settlement to the south nearer than Londonderry; none to the east until one reached the sea coast towns; none west to Albany and none north to the Canada line. But the little log houses were snug and warm against the winds howling down our valley; there was ample wood for the hearth and cattle in the rude sheds. There was corn aplenty in the cribs and a miller across the frozen river, and a forest full of game. There were mothers and children to be cherished and men dreamed of days of peace and plenty in this beautiful valley. If the cold seemed unduly bitter, if fear of the savage sometimes made the heart to stand still, if isolation tried the spirit—there was one sure refuge: God was round about them and could they be dismayed?

Thus was the orthodox Faith established in Concord and through generations to come First Church kept the Faith. Under God she bred praying men, saintly women and reverent youth: this was her contribution to the making of Concord. Bitter and frightening years lay ahead of the pioneers in Pennycook. Except for their Christian Faith and the loyalty of their spiritual leader, they might well have given up this enterprise and there would be no Concord today.

Pray God that He may bless Concord now and in future years with a clergy loyal to the "Faith of Our Fathers."