

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SOUTHWEST PARISH – NAMES OF SOME OF THE PROMINENT RESIDENTS IN THE MILE SLIP AND UPON DUXBURY FARM – BUILDING OF THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE – WILLIAM CROSBY'S GIFTS TO THE PARISH – DESCRIPTION OF THE OLD HOUSE – APPEARANCE OF THE VILLAGE IN 1794.

Before the close of the Revolutionary war, in the year 1782, the following persons, viz., Darius Abbot, Isaac Abbot, Ebenezer Averill, Elijah Averill, Moses Averill, Andrew Bradford, John Bradford, Augustus Bradford, David Burnham, Israel Burnham, Joshua Burnham, Stephen Burnham, George Burns, John Burns, Thomas Burns, Henry Codman, Benjamin Conant, Josiah Crosby, Josiah Crosby, Jr., Sampson Dodge, James Gilman, Arthur Graham, Samuel Graham, John Grimes, Jonathan Grimes, Thaddeus Grimes, William Grimes, Benjamin Hopkins, Jr., Benjamin Hopkins, 3d, Ebenezer Hopkins, Samuel How, Abner Hutchinson, Bartholomew Hutchinson, Benjamin Hutchinson, Elisha Hutchinson, Jonathan Hutchinson, Nathan Hutchinson, Nathan Hutchinson, Jr., William Melendy, William Peabody, Bartholomew Towne, Jonathan Towne, John Wallace, and William Wallace, were constituted the Third or Southwest parish in Amherst. Parishes were at that time organized with power to impose taxes and raise money for the purpose of building meeting-houses and supporting the public worship of God. For all other purposes the members of the parish continued to hold the same relations to the town in which they resided which they had before the incorporation of the parish. No territorial boundaries in our parish were at first established, the individuals, instead of a certain portion of land, making the parish; but ten years later the parish was set off by metes and bounds, and this action of the people and the legislature was the initial step in the formation of the town of Milford.

Neither the Mile Slip nor the Duxbury school farm had town or parish organizations, but together had certain quasi corporate privileges conferred by the state, by which these places were permitted to raise money for the support of schools and the care of highways.

Among the prominent men in the Mile Slip and the Duxbury school farm at the time of the formation of the parish, were the following:

James Badger,  
Simon Blanchard,  
Stephen Blanchard,  
Stephen Blanchard, Jr.,  
Richard Boynton,  
Daniel Chandler,  
Samuel Gutterson,  
Caleb Jones,  
Benjamin Lewis,  
Benjamin Lewis, Jr.,  
Timothy McIntire,  
Joshua Mooar,  
Aaron Peabody,  
Samuel Person,  
William Person,  
Joseph Wallace,  
Stephen Williams,  
Benjamin Wright.

While none of the inhabitants of the Mile Slip or Duxbury school farm were members of the Southwest parish, the inhabitants of these precincts attended meeting, when they chose, at the parish meeting-house, and in several instances became members of the church, worshipping there.

The first meeting of the southwest parish was held at the house of Thaddeus Grimes, who kept a tavern upon the estate on Elm street, which in 1804 became the property of the late Humphrey Moore. At this meeting Captain Nathan Hutchinson was chosen moderator; Augustus Blanchard, clerk and treasurer; Augustus Blanchard, Lieutenant Thomas Burns, and Captain John Bradford, assessors; and Benjamin Hutchinson, collector; -- and it was voted to "build a meeting-house of the same size and bigness the Northwest parish (Mont Vernon) hath built, except the porches," and that Lieutenant Darius Abbott, Captain Josiah Crosby, and Captain Andrew Bradford be a committee to provide timber, boards, and shingles, and let the same out at public venue to the lowest bidder. At the annual meeting of the parish, on the fourth day of March, 1783, it was voted to raise £32, 4s. To discharge the expense of the parish being set off, £95 to be laid out in purchasing timber, boards, shingles, and other materials for building the meeting-house, £15 to pay for preaching the current year, and that Captain Nathan Hutchinson, Lieutenant Thomas Burns, and Captain John Bradford be a committee to hire preaching. The same year another meeting was called to select a place for the erection of a meeting-house, and make provision for clearing the same, and it was voted that the house should stand about twenty rods south of Shepherd's bridge, on a rise of ground. This vote would have located the meeting-house on ground now covered by the Wadleigh block. At a meeting held later the same year, Captain Nathan Hutchinson, John Wallace, and John Burns were chosen a committee to procure stone for underpinning the meeting-house, and Joshua Burnham was authorized to purchase a "parish book."

At the annual meeting held on March 2, 1784, it was voted to proceed with the meeting-house, and to begin to frame it the first Monday in June, and raise it as soon as possible. Captain Nathan Hutchinson, Captain Josiah Crosby, and Captain Andrew Bradford were chosen a committee to see that the meeting-house was framed, underpinned, and raised. It was also voted to raise £30 towards the expense of the meeting-house, and £20 to pay for preaching; that three shillings per day be allowed each man for work on the meeting-house, -- the laborer to board himself; and that "any person who shall hereafter join the parish, shall be exempt from any tax raised to raise, board, and shingle the meeting-house." For some reason, the location that had been fixed for the house was not satisfactory, and at a special meeting held on the 15th day of June, it was voted that it should be located about ten rods northwest from the former place, between two pitch-pine stumps; that "Augustus Blanchard, Lieutenant Thomas Burns, Joshua Burnham, Captain John Bradford, and Lieutenant Benjamin Hutchinson be a committee to carry on the work," and that "said committee provide one barrel of rum, two barrels of cider, and one quarter of sugar for the raising." The meeting-house was raised in the summer of 1784, and on the second day of September of that year, a special meeting was called, and the second article in the warrant was to see if the parishioners would board, shingle, or furnish any part of the meeting-house frame. It was voted to board and shingle it; that "it be boarded with square-edged boards", and that the "boarding and shingling be let to the lowest bidder at vendue." At the same meeting it was voted to raise £40 to defray the expense of further finishing the meeting-house.

Lieutenant Thomas Burns and Lieutenant Darius Abbott were made a committee to wait on Governor Hopkins and get the "donation he hath offered to procure the nails." This Governor Hopkins was none other than Benjamin Hopkins, the original settle upon the Charlestown school farm, who at this time, at the age of eighty-four years, was making a substantial gift towards the building of the meeting-house. To prevent misapprehension upon the part of any, it may be remarked that he never held the office of chief magistrate of the state, but was so prominent in town affairs as to have acquired this title among his neighbors.

In the month of November, 1784, the parish met and raised money enough to buy the clapboards, steps, glass, and window-frames for the house. At the annual meeting in March, 1785, it was voted "to raise thirty pounds to hire preaching, and fifty pounds to be laid out upon the meeting-house." At another meeting held in the same month, it was voted to build porches to the house. The building of the porches was let out to Josiah Crosby, Benjamin Conant, Benjamin Hutchinson, and Elisha Hutchinson. It was voted that "they have, as a consideration, the ground said porches will save in the house, and fifteen pounds to be paid by the parish when the whole is finished."

On the seventh day of April, 1785, a warrant was posted for the first parish meeting in the new house, to be held on the twenty-fifth day of April, 1785. The house was then boarded, shingled, and possibly clapboarded, but there were no window-frames nor window-glass in the house, and no permanent floor was laid. At this meeting a committee, previously chosen, made a report of a plan for the pew ground. This determined the size of the pews, the dimensions and direction of the aisles, or alleys as they were then called. It was also voted "to sell the pew ground to the highest bidder, give good conveyances, and take the money for the finishing of the house."

At a meeting of the parish held in September, 1785, it was decided to lay the floor of the house and to let the laying at vendue. The record quaintly runs, "*Voted* Augustus Blanchard vendue it; accordingly it was instantly vended and struck off to Thomas Boynton at thirty-nine shillings."

December 25, 1785 – when it must have been too cold for long speeches in a house without permanent floors, doors, or windows – it was voted, after some consideration, to have the sashes, window-frames, doors, and stuff for the body seats put up at vendue to be completed by June, 1786. The sashes were bid off by Thomas Boynton at fifteen and one half pounds old tenor; the window-frames by David Chandler at £3, 10s.; the front door by Benjamin Conant at twenty shillings; the body seats by Nathan Hutchinson at a sum not named.

In September, 1786, the parish having heard the report of a committee sent out to examine the porches of several neighboring meeting-houses, it was voted "to accept the plan of the porches of the Temple meeting-house to have the porches of this meeting-house built by." In September, 1787, it was voted "to collect the notes for the pew ground sold, and get the glass set and put in." Notwithstanding more than twenty meetings had been held, and money raised at most of them, the enterprise languished, and in June, 1788, there was an article in the warrant "to see if the parish will do anything towards finishing the meeting-house." Upon this article it was voted "to ceil round the house as high up as the windows." In September, 1788, it was voted "to finish the whole of the meeting-house and get a plan of the galleries." The meeting was adjourned to September 19, when the parish voted to accept a plan of the galleries and sell all the pew ground therein, and apply the proceeds to finishing the house. This year the parish received from William Crosby, who seems to have had a deep and practical interest in all its affairs, a deed of the following described pieces of land, viz.:

"Beginning at the southwest corner of Shepard's bridge, thence running southerly on the west side of the road leading from said bridge to my house until it comes to the main road that leads from my house to Wilton, to a stake and stones; from thence westerly on the north side of said road about eight rods, to a white oak stump; thence northerly to a black oak tree marked, standing on the bank of the Souhegan river; from thence by said river to the place of beginning, being the land the meeting-house stands on. Also, one other piece, to be appropriated for a burying-ground, on the west part of my farm, bounded as follows, viz.: Beginning at a large white pine tree standing on the bank of the river a few rods north of the ditch bridge (so called); from thence north twelve rods, to a stake and stones; from thence west until it comes to the river; and from thence by the river to the bound first mentioned, -- containing about one acre."

From this it appears that the original meeting-house plat, or what is now called the public square of the village, as well as the old cemetery on the Wilton road, was the gift of William Crosby, who is remembered by many now living. He was only thirty years old, and yet he was acting the part of the "father of the parish," as he was named by his pastor, Rev. H. Moore, at the time of his decease in 1831.

In the warrant for the meeting in March, 1789, there was an article as follows: "To see if the parish will agree to appropriate any part of the front gallery in the meeting-house for a pew or pews for the singers to sit in." The parish voted the singers the pew, and also raised £10 for levelling round the meeting-house.

In the warrant for the meeting held October 12, 1789, was this important article, "To see if the parish will make any addition to the pew in the gallery where the singers sit." After a long debate in which the capacity of the pew and the capacity of the singers was discussed, and the extravagant demands of the musical portion of the parish commented upon, it was solemnly voted "to enlarge the singing pew to seventeen feet and no larger."

The parish met the last time as a parish October 29, 1792, and voted to paint the meeting-house. January 11, 1794, the legislature chartered the town of Milford, and the organization was perfected in March following, when all the parish property passed into the custody of the town.

At the annual meeting in March, 1798, the house having been glazed, painted, and in most respects finished, the town voted to build four additional pews upon ground not before sold. It was further voted "to let the building of these pews at vendue to the person who would build the same for occupying the same the shortest term of time." They were bid off to Abial Holt "to improve them in six months and two weeks."

This substantially completed the house, excepting the belfry which was afterwards erected. Up to this time more than thirty meetings had been held in the parish and the town, in aid of the location and construction of the meeting-house. Nearly twenty years had passed since the organization of the parish. The cost of the house can never be ascertained on account of imperfect records and a disturbed currency. So far as we can learn, its builders worked in harmony, bearing themselves like men even under the trying circumstances of the enlargement of the singing pew.

The old meeting-house was moved from its original location about four rods to the northeast in 1847. The building was raised, and two stores were finished underneath the audience-room, one of which continued to be used for the post-office until 1870, when the new town-house having been erected, the old house was moved across the street in an easterly direction, and is now used for business purposes.

#### LOCATION AND PLAN OF THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE.

The house was raised in 1784, the tower or belfry end of the house facing the west, and the underpinning of the south side being laid parallel with the street passing along the south side of the common, and some one hundred and fifty feet from the buildings on the south side of the street. This location did not interfere with the street on the east and west of the house, and there was a small triangular piece of vacant land on the north side of the building. There was a door on the front side in the middle of the house, opening to the south; a porch and door at each end. The pulpit was considerably elevated at the north side of the house. Its front was a section of an octagon projecting from the general panelled front of the structure. The access to the pulpit was by a flight of stairs on the west side, turning at a right angle from the floor to the pulpit door. Below and in front of the pulpit was the deacons' seat and a swinging table. Above the pulpit was a "sounding board" which corresponded in shape with the front of the pulpit. The belfry was built in 1803, and one porch removed. In the front gallery was a space arranged to accommodate the choir, with two pews at each end. The pews were all square, with narrow seats all around, except at the entrance or door; consequently a considerable proportion of the audience presented only a profile view to the preacher while addressing them. The pews were finished with panelled sides, above which was a wide rail supported by turned balusters about eight inches long. The most noticeable arrangement in respect to the pews, -- universal in meeting-houses of that date -- was that all the seats were hung upon hinges, and were so arranged as to be easily raised when the worshippers stood, as was always done in prayer time. Each pew had six or eight separate seats, to be raised or let fall without regard to the noise they made, and as it was done pretty nearly in unison, the effect can easily be imagined upon one unused to such a fusillade. Two free seats on each side of the broad aisle in front of the pulpit, were generally occupied by aged people -- the men on the west side, and the women on the east side. There was a row of pews all around the walls of the house, with an alley between them and the "body pews;" a broad aisle from the front door to the pulpit and a narrow, short alley from that each way to the pews which could not otherwise be reached.

There was a wide gallery on the south side and each end of the house, supported in front by small pillars. In the galleries was a row of pews around the walls of the house, with a narrow walk for access. Between it and the front of the galleries, on the east and west sides, were three long and three short free seats, which were entered by descending one, two, and three steps from the doors to the front of the galleries. Those on the west were for males, and those on the east for females.

The house was occupied for public worship before it was finished, and while much remained to be done upon the inside. Before the house was used for public worship, services on Sunday were held at the house of Jotham Shepherd, which stood upon the ground now occupied by the buildings on the Rossiter farm, near the Methodist church upon the north side of the river. The writer in his boyhood conversed with an aged man who, when a child, attended meeting at the Shepherd house, and was informed by him that at the time the meeting-house was ready for occupancy, there were only three dwelling-houses in the village on the south side of the river -- one where the hotel now stands, one on the ground now occupied by the town-house, and a third upon the Livermore estate at the junction of Elm and Union streets; on the Nashua road there was a house upon the Conant farm, afterwards known as the Benjamin Goodwin estate; on South street, the first and only house for some distance was that of Isaac Marshall. On the Wilton road the first house to the west of the Livermore estate was the Grimes homestead on the Humphrey Moore estate. On the north side of the river was the Jotham Shepherd house and the residence of Colonel John Shepherd. According to the memory of our informant, these dwellings, with Shepherd's mills, a blacksmith-shop, and a small building used as a store, made up the village at the time the meeting-house was built. But at the

time of the incorporation of the town in 1794, several other buildings had been erected within the limits of the village.