

CHAPTER IX.

FORMATION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH – EFFORTS TO OBTAIN A PASTOR – THE CHURCH AND TOWN UNITE IN A CALL TO REV. HUMPHREY MOORE – ORDINATION OF THE CANDIDATE AN IMPORTANT OCCASION – BELL GIVEN TO THE TOWN BY MR. PERKINS NICHOLS OF BOSTON – SUNDAY-SCHOOL ORGANIZED IN 1827 – OTHER DENOMINATIONS CLAIM RIGHTS IN THE TOWN MEETING-HOUSE – RIGHTS FULLY CONCEDED IN 1833.

The Congregational church was organized in the parish six years before the incorporation of the town.¹ The council met November 19, 1788, and consisted of Jonathan Livermore,² Abel Fiske,³ John Bruce,⁴ Moses Putnam, Ebenezer Rockwood, Richard Ward, Daniel Mansfield, and William Bradford.

¹ The churches organized in Hillsborough county, previous to the commencement of the present century, are as follows:

	Organized.
Nashua,	1685
Hudson,	1737
Amherst,	1741
Litchfield,	1741
Hollis,	1743
Pelham,	1751
Lyndeborough,	1757
New Ipswich,	1761
Wilton,	1763
Hillsborough,	1769
Goffstown,	1771
Temple,	1771
Merrimack,	1772
Mason,	1772
Francestown,	1773
Mont Vernon,	1780
Hancock,	1788
Milford,	1788
Weare,	1789
Deering,	1789
Greenfield,	1791
Brookline,	1796
Peterborough,	1799

² Rev. Jonathan Livermore, a native of Northboro, Worcester county, Mass., born in 1739, was graduated at Harvard college in 1760; was the first minister of Wilton, being ordained there in 1763. He sustained the pastoral relation in that place about fifteen years, when he was dismissed, but did not leave town, remaining till his death, which occurred July 20, 1809, aged 79 years.

³ Rev. Abel Fiske was born at Pepperell, Mass., May 28, 1752; was graduated at Harvard college in 1774; taught the grammar school, and studied divinity at Concord, Mass.; was ordained at Wilton in November, 1778, and was pastor of the church till his death, which took place April 21, 1802, at the age of 50 years.

⁴ Rev. John Bruce, the first minister in Mont Vernon, was born at Marlboro, Mass., in 1757; entered Dartmouth college at the age of about twenty years; was graduated in 1781; was settled in 1785, and continued his pastorate till his death, which occurred March 12, 1809.

In the proceedings of the council twelve persons are named as constituting the church, viz.:

Stephen Burnham,
Caleb Jones,
Elisha Hutchinson,
John Wallace,
Nathan Hutchinson,
Thomas Burns,
Jonathan Towne,
Benjamin Conant,
Benjamin Hutchinson,
William Melendy,
Jonathan Jones.

Attached to the covenant are seven additional names, viz.:

James Wallace,
Hannah Bradford
Mary Burnham,
Sarah Hutchinson,
Letitia Wallace,
Mary Wallace,
Betsy Wallace.

The first meeting was held at the house of William Crosby soon after the organization, when Elisha Hutchinson was chosen clerk, which office he held till his death.

At this meeting and examining committee was chosen, and it was decided that "applicants for admission might relate their religious experience verbally or in writing, and that no persons should be admitted who would not come up to the standard of full communion." The next year several meetings were held, but they related solely to the discipline of a member. Then follows a period of nearly six years in which no meeting seems to have been held. After the organization of the town, the church took a new name. For six years it had been known as the third church in Amherst, but then became the First Congregational church of Milford.

In 1795 the town and church voted to give Mr. Bailey a call to become their pastor, but he did not accept. In 1796, the church voted to give Mr. Randall a call. The town voted to concur with the church, and offered Mr. Randall a salary of \$350 per year, and to give him a settlement of \$50. Mr. Randall declined. Then follows a period of nearly two years, in which there is no record of any business meeting of the church.

In 1798, the town voted to give Rev. Mr. Fletcher a call to become their pastor, and offered him a salary of \$500 a year. The record of the church relative to the above is very deficient. It is inferred that the church and the town did not harmonize, for Mr. Fletcher did not accept the offer. At this time the church had been organized nearly ten years, but its existence must have been merely nominal. It could only have lived in name, as no deacons had been chosen, nor members admitted, either by letter or by profession of their faith, and there is no record indicating that a communion season had been observed. In March, 1798, it was voted "to have the sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered twice during the coming season," and two persons were appointed to wait on the table. Two additional persons were also chosen "for the purpose of conversing with those who should apply for admission," and the moderator was instructed "to call a meeting at any time, at the request of any seven members." In August, 1799, a meeting was held to consider the question of giving Mr. Micah Stone a call, but it was regarded as inexpedient. In the year 1800 the church, fifteen of the nineteen members present, voted to invite Mr. Thomas Beede to become their pastor, and the town concurred, proposing \$566 as a settlement, to be paid within one year after the ordination, an annual salary of \$333, and \$110 annually during his residence in town, after he should be unable to supply the desk. He declined, and the next year an unanimous call of the church was extended to Mr. Joshua Lane. It would be interesting at the present time to know what were the hindrances to the settlement of the various candidates, and how the matter in each case was treated by the parties in interest; but the records are silent on the subject.

In March, 1802, the church, nineteen members being present, invited Rev. Humphrey Moore to settle with them in the gospel ministry. The town concurred, in April, and chose a committee of fifteen to determine what settlement and salary was proper to offer Mr. Moore for his services in the ministry. This committee, after consideration of the matter one hour, reported \$600 as a settlement, to be paid or to become due in one year after the ordination, \$400 as an annual salary, and a gratuity of \$100 per annum while he should remain their minister and be unable, through infirmity or old age, to supply the desk. Mr. Moore gave an answer in the affirmative, as follows:

“Milford, Aug. 2, 1802

“Men and Brethren:

Having received your invitation to take the pastoral care of the flock in this place, I feel myself under obligations to make you my grateful acknowledgments for the honor of your general approbation.

“After much deliberation, with diffidence in myself, with hope in your candor, of your tenderness and long forbearance with inexperienced youth, with hope of the continuation of your present peace and unanimity, and with the dependence upon God for wisdom profitable to direct, I give my answer in the affirmative.

“H. Moore.”

And on the 13th day of the following October he was ordained, the exercises on the occasion being, --

Anthem.

Introductory Prayer, by Rev. Ebenezer Hill of Mason.

Sermon, Luke IX, 60, by Rev. Elijah Dunbar, of Peterborough.

Ordaining Prayer, by Rev. Jacob Burnap, of Merrimack.

Charge, by Rev. Jeremiah Barnard, of Amherst.

Concluding Prayer, by Rev. Lemuel Wadsworth, of Brookline.

Benediction by the pastor.

With the settlement of the new pastor, a brighter day dawned upon the church. The month following, a confession of faith was adopted (the one now in use in the church) and stated communion seasons agreed upon – steps indicating faithful, earnest work. At the time of Mr. Moore’s ordination, the church had been in existence about fourteen years, but had no additions except on one occasion, and then by letter. The subsequent year witnessed the membership doubled, thirty-two being added on profession of their faith and seven by letters from other churches, and the election of John Wallace and William Lovejoy as deacons.

Mr. Moore, a graduate of Harvard college and fresh from his theological studies, at once took a prominent place in the affairs of the town, county, and state, which he maintained during his long and useful life.

The ordination of the first minister of the parish was a matter of much interest to all the people. As soon as the day was fixed, the town selected a committee “to regulate the music upon ordination day and upon the Lord’s day.” William Crosby, William Peabody, Josiah Osgood, Augustus Blanchard, and Moses Newell were appointed a committee to provide for the council. Documentary evidence is silent as to the exact nature of the provision which the committee were expected to make for this particular council, but from the fact that the town had no sooner elected these men to this important position than it proceeded to elect Captain Osgood, Major Burnham, Oliver Spalding, Josiah Taylor, Christian Hopkins, Jacob Flynn, and Isaac Abbott a committee to keep order on that day, it may be that the town apprehended that this committee would make the same provision for the ministers that a former committee had made for the raisers of the meeting-house.

After providing for the council and good order on ordination day, the town voted “To raise thirty dollars to be laid out in instructing the singers in Milford, ten dollars of which is to be laid out in tuition and extra expenses.” This expense was incurred by a formal vote of the town that the occupants of the singing pew might make a commendable appearance upon ordination day, which was to be by far the most important occasion the parish or town had seen; and such it proved. Half the population within a radius of twenty miles attended the ordination. A large platform was erected in front of the meeting-house and the services held upon it, the windows communicating with the house having been taken out. A band of music escorted the candidate for ministerial honors from his

boarding-place (the Peabody farm), more than a mile distant. At the conclusion of the service the same band, while the services of the ordination were going on upon the stage, furnished music for a dancing party in a hall on the other side of the common, and a person standing midway could have obtained an intelligent idea of both exercises.

In November following, a meeting of the town was called "To see if the town will erect a belfry in which to hang a bell, which is contemplated being given by Mr. Perkins Nichols, of Boston." The town voted "To build a belfry uniform with the one at Francestown." The belfry was subsequently built, and the bell, the gift of Mr. Nichols, placed in it, where for nearly seventy years it did good service, sounding forth merry peals upon festive and patriotic occasions, and solemn dirges, as one after another of the forefathers passed away; and now it has a new lease of life in the tower of the new town-house, to perform for this generation and its successors the offices it rendered the fathers.

Until the year 1834, the house was regularly occupied for religious services. In 1847 it was turned halfway round and moved about four rods to the northeast, the square pews taken out, and the interior remodeled, to make it more convenient for the general purposes of a town-house. At the same time the house was raised sufficiently to admit of the building of two stores upon the first story. The front of the then remodeled house was toward the south.

The year following the settlement of Mr. Moore witnessed large additions in the church, thirty persons uniting. Prior to the year 1803, no person had become a member on profession of faith, and but few by letter, although the church had been organized fifteen years.

In 1809, a Baptist church was organized, with twenty-nine members. In 1816 and 1817, the Congregational church received large accessions. For a generation, or more than thirty-three years, our fathers and mothers worshipped in a house without a fire, except as the aged women were allowed to carry a few coals in foot-stoves. In the year 1824, the town voted to purchase two stoves for the meeting-house, and after due deliberation and examination, they were placed in the house the following year. For some reason no fire was made in the stoves the first Sunday after their introduction, but it is related that one good lady withdrew from the house during service, declaring that she could not enjoy the preaching in so hot a place.

The Sunday-school was organized in 1827. The year following was marked by large additions to the church. In 1831 a revival of great power prevailed in town, and during that and the following year the church was refreshed in spirit and increased in numbers as never before, and it began to realize that it could stand alone and go on without the aid of the town. Outside the Congregational church, the feeling was increasing that what remained of church and state ought to come to an end, leaving the religious societies to care for themselves.

August 25, 1832, the town and Mr. Moore, at his request, dissolved the legal relation entered upon at the time of his ordination, thirty years before. The members of the Congregational church, and the inhabitants of the town sympathizing with them in polity and doctrine, at once organized themselves under the General Statutes of new Hampshire into a religious society, and took the name of "The First Congregational Society of Milford;" and this society at once assumed and became responsible for Mr. Moore's support, and he became the minister of the First Congregational society.

In January, 1833, the town voted that each denomination should have the use of the meeting-house a portion of the time, according to the tax-rates upon the books of the town, and voted that the portion of time allotted to the Congregational society should be six months in the year. During the time that the Congregational society did not occupy the meeting-house, Mr. Moore preached in Whitney & Bartlett's hall. This hall was in the building now known as Wallace's block, at the corner of Main and South streets.

Before the end of the year the Congregational society offered the town five hundred dollars for the house, to pay individuals for their pews (all that wished to sell), give the town the use of the house for all town business, and keep the building in good repair for all coming time. This offer was rejected by the town by a vote of 116 against to 113 for it. A change of two votes would have given the church and society the house. The proposition being rejected, there was no alternative but to arise and build. At a meeting of the society in November, 1833, it was voted "That it is expedient for this society to build," and at a subsequent meeting it was voted to locate and build upon the potash lot, so called, which is the present location of the Congregational church edifice.

The Congregational church and society took leave of the town meeting-house in 1834. The new house was dedicated October 1, of that year, and, with the exception of an addition to its length of some twenty-five feet, by which twenty-eight pews were added, remains the same building that was erected at the time the town dissolved its relation with the church.

The following honored names make up the list of deacons serving the church in the old town-house: Dea. John Wallace, Dea. Nathan Putnam, Dea. Robert Knights, Dea. Humphrey Peabody, Dea. William Lovejoy, Dea. Isaac Lund, Dea. Freeman Crosby.

The subsequent history of the Congregational church will be given in another chapter.