

*The History of
Free Christian Church*

The History of Free Christian Church

Originally published to commemorate the 150th Anniversary
of the founding of Free Christian Church

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Preface

The Free Christian Church as we know it today, an active, vital, growing congregational church of nearly one thousand men, women, and children, is the legacy of forty-four men and women of remarkable courage, vision, and Christian conviction.

Born in 1846, a time of tumult and controversy as our country careened toward the Civil War, the Free Christian Church is quite possibly unique in American church history as a church founded exclusively on the issue of the abolition of slavery.

When the church was founded, the issue of slavery was not so clear-cut in our society as we think, as you will see from these pages. The founders stood alone in Andover against the tide of popular opinion that said slavery was a matter of privacy not to be decided by the government (an argument offered today in other contexts). These men and women on whose shoulders we the members of Free Christian Church now stand were not guided by public opinion but by the word of God and obedience to their conscience. They clearly saw slavery as an evil practice and a cancer on the soul of America, made even worse when the church turned a blind eye to it, as did the other churches in Andover.

Free Christian Church is truly fortunate to have been on the right side of this issue and to be still motivated by the unique vision of marrying the evangelical gospel message to a strong social conscience. Over the past thirty-five years of my ministry here, we have sought to be a church concerned to spread the gospel and to meet human needs in the local community and in dozens of places around the world.

It is with the desire to keep alive this unique vision and to make a small contribution to the understanding of American church history that we offer this record of the founding and the history of the Free Christian Church.

Confident in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Jack L. Daniel
May 2012





John Smith, Founder and Benefactor of Free Christian Church. His strong belief that the evil of slavery had to be opposed by the church led him to withdraw from West Parish and, with his family and other like-minded men and women, form the Free Christian Church. A prosperous Scottish-born mill-owner, he was also instrumental in establishing Andover's Memorial Hall Library.

The Founding of the Free Christian Church of Andover

Mary Byers Smith

On the occasion of the Centenary of Free Christian Church in 1946, members of the parish gathered for a Family Banquet, presided over by Rev. Levering Reynolds. The main feature of the evening was a historical paper, written and read by Miss Mary Byers Smith, granddaughter of four founders of the church: John and Agnes Smith and William and Agnes Donald. Her description of the roots of the church is a wonderful combination of keen scholarship, affectionate anecdotes, and thoughtful reflection.

IN THE EARLY FALL OF 1819, a young Scotsman named John Smith decided that, after working in Waltham for two years and eight or nine months, he “then wanted to see the country... wanted to know what there was out here.”

“After looking around Albany and Troy,” he said, “I went to New York and took passage in a ship loaded with hay for Charleston, South Carolina. Off Cape Hatteras we experienced... a severe gale but arrived in the Charleston Harbor safely, and I went on shore. I saw a crowd of people gathered on a vacant lot; I always went where there was a crowd—and what, think you, I saw there? It went to my heart like a shot: it was a sale of slaves. I remained and saw them bid off; one young fellow, named Anthony, about seventeen years of age, brought \$750. After Anthony was sold, a woman was put up, with a child on each side of her, and a babe in her bosom... She wept bitter tears and it made me weep to see her. She was bid off, and my heart recoiled at the sight. If there is anything wicked it is for one man to take another, to make him his beast, to beat him and to get all the work out of him possible, and to allow him to go blindly down into eternity without the knowledge of God.” Unquestionably this experience of my grandfather was the driving force back of the Free Church movement.

We all know vaguely that this church was founded on anti-slavery but just how or why is not easy to understand without some study of the times. John Smith came to Andover in 1824. The first entry in the Free Christian Church record is March 21, 1846. During this twenty-year period occurred almost all the important changes from the Andover of earliest colonial times to the modern era. When I started to write this paper, I thought it would be useful to sketch in a little background of the years 1824 to 1850. I soon found that this was one of the most confused and complicated chapters in American history. I should have been in despair if I had not discovered Dr. Arthur Darling’s *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848*.¹ For what I am obliged to leave out I refer you to his fascinating book.



The Thomas Clark House, Central Street, Andover. Here, on Nov. 29, 1845, a religious group “by the name of the Free Christian Society” was organized. Six months later the Society was constituted as a congregational Church. Thomas Clark served on the Society’s first committee, “to procure a house of worship,” and was a long-time Free Church Deacon.

Until 1836, the only way to get to Andover was by stage-coach. In fact, the Andover and Wilmington Railroad (connecting with the Boston and Lowell) was the first link in what became the Boston and Maine system.² There were no newspapers when my grandfather came here, except what might happen to be brought from Boston by stage two or three times a week. By the forties, half a dozen papers expressing the most divergent points of view were being circulated and eagerly read, including Garrison’s *Liberator*.

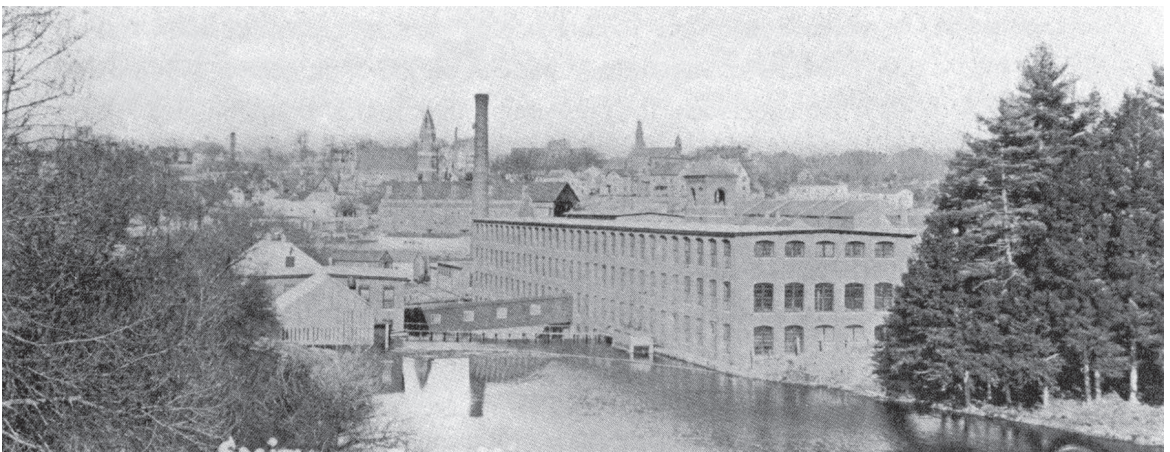
Manufacturing was both cause and effect of the extension of the railroad. When my grandfather bought water-rights on the Shawsheen in the early twenties, there were already tiny cotton and woolen mills operating in North Andover, Marland and Abbot Villages and Ballardvale. As early as 1825 there was “a petition for the establishment of a bank.”³ Lawrence was not set off from Andover and Methuen until 1847 and South Lawrence remained a pine forest until long after the completion of the great dam in 1848. My grandfather came to live in Frye Village (now Shawsheen) and at first made cotton machinery. Later, at the suggestion of John Dove and his brother, Peter Smith, he started there, not the first flax mill in America as is often stated, but the first successful one.⁴ Word of this went back to Scotland and gradually he was joined by fellow-countrymen, friends and relatives. We know that the Donalds, also founders of this church, emigrated to the United States in 1844 because “they knew a family of Smiths who were about to make the venture, led thereto by the success of their cousins, John and Peter in Andover.”⁵

At the opposite end of the town on Andover Hill was the Andover Theological Seminary founded in 1808. By 1840, all its buildings had been completed; and a picture shows the little elm trees of the Elm Arch.⁶ Phillips Academy, a much older school, was for a while

rather overshadowed by the Seminary with its immense preoccupation with turning out ministers of sound orthodox faith. It was founded as a protest against the “dangerous Unitarianism” of Harvard College, and it was managed by extreme conservatives. It had organized its own church though in close association with the South Church, which for nearly two hundred years was the only church in Andover⁷ and where in the twenties Austin Edwards regularly preached to a congregation of two thousand. Meantime, Abbot Academy had come into being. With three flourishing schools and their resident faculty drawing from wider geographical areas all the time, it is fair to describe Andover of the forties as an important intellectual centre. Distinguished foreigners and literary people were sure of a large and enthusiastic audience. It became even something of a political arena. When in 1843 Daniel Webster was asked to speak in Essex County, Andover was the town chosen; and on November 9, he addressed an outdoor meeting of 15,000 down in the hollow back of Mitchell Johnson’s house.⁸

General accounts of the period agree that an undercurrent of agitation and discussion of slavery was going on all over the country. In 1787, the New England Meeting of Quakers started an agitation in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut against the lucrative foreign slavetrade.⁹ Slavery in Massachusetts had only recently been abolished by law (1780) and there were still former slaves and former slaveholders living here in 1824. The Rev. Samuel Phillips owned several slaves and one of them, Cato, wrote a long and grateful letter to the Phillips family.¹⁰ Negroes in Andover may or may not have been forced to sit in the slave gallery and go in by a little outside stairway as they did elsewhere in Massachusetts. But even if their lot was not unpleasant, nobody thought much about them; and it must have shocked my grandfather to hear occasional discussions as to

The Smith and Dove Mills. John and Peter Smith and fellow industrialist John Dove operated the first successful flax mill in America. Their mill buildings on the Shawsheen River now comprise the Dundee Park complex.



whether the Negro was really a human being and, as such, entitled to human rights. Moses Stuart on the Hill justified slavery by reference to the Old Testament.¹¹ In general the attitude of the church was too conservative to suit those who had seen the system of slavery with their own eyes.

The best conservative opinion in the North was opposed to an extension of slavery. Many conservatives would like to have seen it abolished in the South but felt bound by the Constitution to protect the rights of the slave states. Very few Northerners had seen the worst phase of slavery personally; when they did, as Channing did, they felt obliged to speak out. Garrison's *Liberator*, radical, violent, and vituperative, did make converts among the more thoughtful people.

Fiery meetings were held in Andover at one of which George Thomson, famous orator and member of Parliament, was asked, "If you had the power, would you liberate the slaves tomorrow?" He replied, "No, sir, I would do no such thing. I would liberate them tonight."¹² In 1837, the Grimke sisters spoke before the Andover Female Anti-Slavery Society. Some men attended the meeting. A great furor resulted as it was not considered at all proper for women to address a mixed audience. The society replied to criticism in an open letter to the *Liberator*¹³ that the meeting was "designated for ladies and if the gentlemen attended, they must sustain the responsibility for a mixed meeting."

Many anti-slavery meetings had broken up in riots. In 1835, at a Faneuil Hall meeting, Garrison had been mobbed and put in jail for his own protection. In June, 1837, the Association of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts, meeting in Brookfield, issued a pastoral letter forbidding discussion of slavery in the churches. It was not a simple question of those who believed in slavery and those who did not. Big business in the North, manufacturers of cotton and their banking associates were opposed to any violent change in the economic system. They in turn were the supporters of the church which had a dominant place in the life of the people. It is not difficult to understand the pressure brought to bear on highminded young clergymen to stress peace and concord and to refrain from stirring up strife among the brethren.

[John Greenleaf] Whittier's reply to the pastoral letter was an angry poem by that name which probably encouraged local protests. "At a meeting held at the Centre School House in the West Parish of Andover, November 6, 1837, for the purpose of forming an anti-slavery society, the meeting was called to order by Deacon Peter Smith. John Smith was chosen chairman." Minutes of this meeting

were published in the *Liberator*. The *Liberator* also states that Moses Stuart suppressed the theologues who wanted to organize an anti-slavery society. “The neighboring institute of Phillips Academy underwent a similar experience; but 50 students, though nearly all studying for the ministry, were less subservient than those of the Divinity School. Forbidden to organize among themselves, they joined a village Anti-Slavery Society, and disobeying an ex post facto regulation of the faculty were virtually expelled.”¹⁴

The preliminary skirmishes which resulted in the forming of this [Free Christian] church took place in the West Parish Church. It was a struggling rural parish made up of Holts and Lovejoys and Abbots joined by a group of Scottish immigrants including my grandfather.

They were all earnest, God-fearing folk devoted to their church and largely self-educated. The pastor of the West Parish Church was Samuel C. Jackson, an able and finely educated young man who somewhere in his training had tucked in two years study of the law. His father was a minister also and he was in close touch with his associates in the neighboring churches and in the powerful and influential seminary of Andover Hill. So it came about that my grandfather, whose schooling, such as it was, stopped when he was thirteen, was pitted against the whole force of the church in the person of Mr. Jackson whose letters to his father in Dorset, Vermont, tell the story.¹⁵ It is like a scene in a great play. The roar of battle is indicated but the issues are clarified by a dialogue. Imagine the stage: Andover a hundred years ago, with clouds of oppression and winds of freedom for a backdrop; clamor and tumult off stage; and vividly before us the individual leaders sparring for position.

Andover, April 3d. 1840

My dear parents,

...Trouble, trouble yet with abolitionists. There seemed to be a calm for a time after our annual meeting. After a while Mr. John Smith came and talked with me about the vote of the church and we had a calm and friendly talk. He was grieved that there should be a vote on our church records — “a gag law” — prohibiting the discussing of slavery. I assured him that the record should be removed or obliterated and nothing appear on the subject, if he and his brethren would agree not to bring the matter into the church until they had good reason to believe that they were the majority. He gave no assent or refusal to this proposition and so we parted. Soon after, he bore a prominent part in a disgraceful scene which occurred in town, when he and others undertook, by clamor and tumult, to prevent the formation of a new abolition society, in opposition to the one of which he was president and he and his party actually succeeded in driving their brother abolitionists out of the house by the uproar which was occasioned. I was present as a spectator only, but he was probably mortified that I was a witness of the scene, as he was no doubt ashamed of his conduct afterward. The next I heard of him, he declined acting as Treasurer of the Parish any longer. Soon after, he “signed off,” as it is called here, refusing to be taxed here. I understand he intends to worship with us for the

present. He gave me no intimation of any such design of leaving us. The whole reason is that his abolition measures are not favored by the church and minister. No others have gone out as yet. If they can't be peaceable, we choose to have them go. We have shown every indulgence consistent with our consciences. What the end is to be we don't yet know. Mr. Smith and his wife are exceedingly unhappy. I pity them. There is no other church where they can go and be any better off, than in mine. He has laid himself open to discipline, by a violation of pledges (refusing to pay subscriptions on abolitionist grounds solely) and is now in a fair way to violate his covenant. I am soon to have a full and Christian talk with him. And I intend to lay the whole matter before our association for advice, and obtain it from the Professors. Yesterday was our Fast Day and I had made special preparation for it. I made special reference to the sad state of things produced by anti-slaveryism. I took the bull by the horns. My general subject was slavery. My object was to vindicate myself; to vindicate ministers generally, and all good men who are now so shockingly slandered by abolitionists. In the morning I showed that I, all ministers, and abolitionists generally held the same great fundamental principles on this subject—showed what we all believe, and that I had preached in accordance. And at the close of my sermon I called on the assembly to show by rising whether they assented to these principles. They all rose, except two abolitionists! I had now gained a great point: That we were all essentially agreed. In the afternoon I came out with my practical conclusions, and inferences, and they set snug. There was no mincing matters. Things had got into such a state that I felt bound to tell the whole story. My sermon occupied three hours, and the people seemed in no hurry to get home. I have had no report from it as yet. [Post-Script, April 4th] Deacon Smith has been to see me about my fast-sermon, and we have talked the whole forenoon. He thinks I preached good abolitionism in the morning, and in the afternoon upset it all. I think, however, he feels much better after a talk, and will not leave.

[Rev. S. C. Jackson, Pastor, West Parish Church, Andover]

Andover, Sept. 1, 1840

Things in my parish are in a more hopeful state. Providence has interposed wonderfully for us. Strange to tell! Mr. John Smith has come back to us! Of his own accord—unsolicited—without any concessions or explanations or pledges on my part, or on the part of the church. He came unexpectedly three Sabbaths ago with his family and took his accustomed pew. The next evening, he and his wife came to see me, to tell me of their “conversion.” They had been to a “Union” convention the week previous where their abolition leaders advanced infidel doctrines, denying Sabbath, ten commandments, churches, etc. This opened their eyes. They saw that their leaders were leading into infidelity, and felt that they could no longer follow such men but would go back to their minister and church. The interview was a pleasant one. This is a complete reconciliation. Mr. Smith admits that his course had been a wrong one and that I had more to justify me in my course than he had been aware of. He took twenty dollars to give me when he left home; but did not give it, and told his wife the reason was that “they had so good a time, he didn't want any money in the business.” Of course the money will come. It is a long story, and I can't now tell you the whole.

Jan. 6, 1841

We have at last disposed of our troubles in the church on the subject of slavery, I trust, forever. At our annual meeting, Deacon Smith again brought up the subject for church action. I had anticipated the matter and was prepared for it. I had previously drawn up some resolutions and a preamble such as I and a majority of the church could assent to. As soon as the matter was introduced, I remarked that I had had, and still had, objections to church action on this subject but they were objections, not conscientious scruples, and I could waive them for the sake of my brethren. My great objection had been the evils of debates and contentions among brethren, but I thought the time had now come when resolutions could be passed without these evils. So for then my objection was removed. My own resolutions, of course, would avoid objections as to principles and conscientious scruples. I then read my paper. Deacon Smith immediately moved its adoption by the church. John Smith said it was “all he asked for, at present.” He was “perfectly satisfied.” It passed unanimously—without any debate! This result was exactly what I expected, though I consulted no

one except Deacon Holt. My grounds were the following. Mr. John Smith, coming back as he did, without any concessions to him by the church, and so humbly, had disposed the church to show him all the indulgence they could, consistently with conscience. Hence they were ready to yield all they could for the sake of peace. On the other side, the abolitionists had been so humbled and defeated and cut off, on every side, that they would take anything we would give. One year ago they would have scouted my resolutions. I was confident the matter would work just as it did, and that the crisis had come for settling the whole difficulty. It was voted that the resolutions be published in the Boston Recorder and N. Y. Evangelist. Thus, I think that wisdom and forbearance have carried us through this trouble, with the blessings of God. The next day after the church meeting, which was New Year's Day, I received a letter as follows: "Andover, Jan. 1, 1841, to Rev. S. C. Jackson. Dear Pastor, Please to accept the enclosed \$100.00. May your labours this year in the Lord be abundantly blessed; this is the earnest prayer of your brother. John Smith." This I regard as good evidence that our troubles from abolitionism are over. God be praised.

Your son, S. C. Jackson

We do not know exactly what happened next. It is interesting to find that Garrison took sufficient notice of the affair to write on December 1, 1840, "Our good friend John Smith of Andover has discontinued his *Liberator* and gone back to his pro-slavery minister Jackson, all to show his regard for religion and abhorrence of heretics."¹⁶ It is probable that from this time on the whole group held slightly aloof from the extremists. The last meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society was held February 17, 1845.¹⁷ In August, 1845, James Hendy was excommunicated from the West Parish Church after he had refused to worship with them any longer on anti-slavery grounds. He accused Mr. Jackson of getting Anti-Slavery resolutions passed in the church just to hush up and defeat the true believers in the cause, and ridiculed Mr. Jackson's advocacy of colonization. All this was aired at some length in the *Liberator* together with a splendid letter from David Middleton in which he said, "Considering that Brother Hendy is a working man, his defense was good, and his positions what Abolitionists consider incontrovertible."¹⁸ It is worth mentioning, however, that the founders of this church, coming from the West Parish Church, were certified to be "members in good and regular standing. . . and recommended to the Christian fellowship of those who may unite with them. . . in forming a separate church."¹⁹

The same thing is true of the founders who came from South Church. There are records of unrelated individuals who were excommunicated for their anti-slavery activities, but when the time came for dismissing the Free Church group, their purpose is mentioned without censure. Mr. and Mrs. Donald were listed by name; others were voted certificates to be filled in with their names.²⁰ This would seem to indicate a respect for the character of the group, and perhaps also a gradually changing public opinion on the national issue of slavery. Meantime, "the Methodist, Baptist and Universalist Churches, none of whom had been very prosperous, had just then

The Free Christian Church, 1849-1908, built by the Methodists on the so-called "Handy" lot on the east side of Main Street, near Morton. This church building was purchased and moved to a site on Railroad Street, then improved and presented to the church by Deacon John Smith. It was dedicated as a Congregational Church, March 8, 1850. The next-door parsonage was built a few years later, during the pastorate of Rev. Caleb Fisher.



abandoned holding public services. Besides the convinced Abolitionists and the members of discontinued churches, there were growing factory villages along the Shawsheen River containing working people who had no regular and satisfactory church-home and would hail the organization of a society that would be formed largely to meet their special wants and in the administration of which they could bear an equal responsibility.”²¹ A preliminary meeting was held in November, 1845, at the home of Stephen Dinsmore and a petition for the formation of the Free Christian Church was addressed to Mark Newman, Justice of the Peace.

The important difference between this church and any other church that I have been able to discover is Rule 4 of the Covenant drawn up and adopted on April second. “This church will fellowship all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, who have witnessed a good profession before men, and practically honor Him. All such are most cordially invited to unite with us in commemorating His Death. Believing that...slaveholders and apologists for slavery do not practically honor Christ, they are not included in this invitation.”

I now quote my grandfather [William] Donald, founder, Deacon and clerk of the Church for many years:²²

“On the 7th of May, 1846, a council was called for the purpose of forming a Christian Church. The churches invited were not our immediate neighbors, they not being in sympathy with our design. Instead, we found friends in Fitchburg, Haverhill and Boston. Small as the Council was, it numbered all whom we could conveniently then find to sympathize with us in our cause. The place of meeting was in

what is known as the Richardson House situated on the corner of Main and Chestnut Streets. There this church was constituted, its forty-four original members having been connected with the older churches as follows: with the West Church 17, with the South Church 14, with the Methodist Church 10, and with the Baptist Church 3. Our friends among the wise and learned of the town were few, causing us to remember with gratitude, and to make special mention of one distinguished divine who wished us well: the Reverend Justin Edwards, D.D., who occasionally cheered us by his presence and by addresses on temperance and the observance of the Sabbath... But if we had little to cheer us, we thanked God and took courage at every remembrance of our righteous cause, and of the honor conferred upon us in being allowed to stand forth as friends of the poor and the friendless.”

Incidentally, five days after the church was formed, the United States went to war with Mexico over land claims connected with Texas. Slavery complicated the dispute. We do not know the politics of our founders but we do know that they must have disapproved of this war and read with absorption the newspaper comments upon it.

“The pastor of this infant church,” Dr. Brown writes, “was a man of ardent piety, of fine ability, of intense enthusiasm and in full accord with the principles of the new enterprise. By some favoring Providence with which I am not familiar, attention was directed to the Reverend Elijah C. Winchester of western New York who... began his labors on the first of February, 1846, three months before the church was formally organized. . . . I remember to have heard some of the leading brethren remark as to what their emotions were on the first Sabbath of their public worship. They thought their numbers would be so small as to produce discouragement; but were delighted and made hopeful by finding an unexpectedly large gathering. On each succeeding Sabbath the congregation increased until the place was filled.”

The early meetings were held in private houses, then in the “Universalist Church which stood on the corner of Punchard Avenue. We hired it all furnished. A student joked with Mrs. Smith about going to a Universalist Church, and said, ‘The Devil is in it.’ But she said, ‘Then we must go in and turn the Devil out.’ Afterward we bought the Methodist Church and moved it in two sections to the place where it now stands, and built on the portico and put up the spire.” This refers, of course, to the white wooden church described so delightfully by Mira Wilson in her Anniversary paper of last November.²³

To Mark Newman Esq. one of the
Justices of the Peace for the County of Essex
Sir,

You are hereby requested to issue your
warrant to one of the persons hereinafter named
directing him to call a meeting of the following
persons, on Saturday the 29th instant at the dwelling
House of Thomas Clark at 7 o'clock P.M. viz.,
John Smith 2d Thomas Clark Jonas Holt Ephraim Everson
Stephen Dinsmore John Dove James Henry Jonathan Poor
Joshua Blanchard James B. Lovejoy Asa H. Brown Jacob
Brown for the purpose of organizing a Society by the
name of the Free Christian Society of Andover
Andover Nov. 24th 1845

Jonas Holt
John Smith 2d
Thomas Clark
Stephen Dinsmore
Joshua Blanchard

Original Petition to Organize

To Mark Newman Esq., one of the Justices of the Peace for the County of Essex.

Sir, You are hereby requested to issue your warrant to one of the persons hereinafter named directing him to call a meeting of the following persons, on Saturday the 29th instant at the dwelling house of Thomas Clark at 7 o'clock P.M. viz. John Smith 2d, Thomas Clark, Jonas Holt, Ephraim Everson, Stephen Dinsmore, John Dove, James Henry, Jonathan Poor, Joshua Blanchard, James B. Lovejoy, Asa H. Brown, & Jacob Brown, for the purpose of organizing a religious society by the name of The Free Christian Society of Andover.

Andover Nov. 24th, 1845

Jonas Holt
John Smith 2d
Thomas Clark
Stephen Dinsmore
Joshua Blanchard

To Thomas Clark one of the petitioners for calling a meeting of several persons, legal voters, to the number of ten or more on Saturday the 29th of Nov. instant at the Dwelling-house of said Clark for the purpose of organizing said petitioners and others into a religious society by the name of the Free Christian Society of Andover

In compliance with the petition above named, you are hereby required to warn John Smith 2^d Thomas Clark Jonas Holt and others to the number at least of ten legal voters to meet at the Dwelling house of Thomas Clark for the purpose of organizing the persons above named & others into a religious society by the name of the Free Christian Society of Andover

And^o Nov 26th 1845

Mark Newman Just Peace

To choose a Clerk of

Andover Nov 26th 1845 In obedience to the above warrant I have warned the above named persons and others to meet at the time & place and for the purposes above named - Thomas Clark

Original Warrant to Organize

To Thomas Clark one of the petitioners for calling a meeting of several persons, legal voters, to the number of ten or more on Saturday the 29th of Nov. instant at the dwelling-house of said Clark for the purpose of organizing said petitioners and others into a religious society by the name of The Free Christian Society of Andover.

In compliance with the petition above named, you are hereby required to warn John Smith 2d, Thomas Clark, Jonas Holt, and others to the number at least of ten legal voters to meet at the dwelling house of Thomas Clark for the purpose of organizing the persons above named and others into a religious society by the name of the Free Christian Society of Andover.

Andover Nov. 26th, 1845

Mark Newman, Justice of the Peace

The Smith Family Home. The Smiths lived at 57 Central Street, a prominent address for a prominent family. Smith also had all of the homes of Brechin Terrace built for his flax mill workers and named the street after his hometown in Scotland.



This church building was dedicated on March 8, 1850. On the 25th of February, Smith wrote to his daughter, Helen, a student in Bradford Academy, “We are just now going up to the new church to help about the carpet. We are expecting to have the dedication next week. If you would like to come to it, let me know and I will write you what day it will take place, Providence permitting, on Friday this week, the service to commence at two o’clock P.M. Your mother wishes me to say that it will be very gratifying to her to have you here on that occasion. Joseph will be here and we hope to see you. Let Miss Hasseltine know how we feel about it and there is no doubt but she will be willing to have you come. You can make your own arrangements so as to (have) as little time lost in your studies as possible. If you will write what train you will come with, we will endeavor to meet you at the Depot. [March 6]. I wrote you before about the time the dedication of the church takes place. You would come over with the Portland train that is here about a half hour before 1 o’clock and go back the same afternoon to Bradford. Be so good as to give my respects to Miss Hasseltine and tell her I shall be very happy if she will come over. I want she should be here and hear the sermon and see the house.”²⁴

Mr. Wilson has preserved in his wonderful scrapbook an order of exercises of the Dedication. In it we learn that Mr. John L. Taylor (pastor of the South Church) read the Scriptures. His presence and the fact that Miss Hasseltine, principal of Bradford, was invited seems to show that the church was already on good terms with its neighbors. Dr. Brown bears this out when he says:

“It should not be inferred that when the Free Church was organized, there existed any demonstrative opposition; or that it was born of dissension and strife. Difference of opinion there certainly was, but there was no quarrel. The men and women who organized

the church and made it what it was, did so from the deepest conviction of duty. They could not have done less, with their views of truth and obligation, and been loyal to Christ.”²⁵



I looked for some mention of the Dedication in the *Liberator*; but Daniel Webster’s 7th of March speech filled all that week’s issue and crowded out everything else for weeks to come. I feel sure that other historians may find much more than I have but I have read enough to realize how fascinating this sort of quarrying can be. One small item for a later day: At the close of a Sabbath School Concert in 1859, “Mr. Alexander Scrimgeour, in behalf of 220 contributors, presented to Mr. John Smith an elegant Bible in token that his munificent gift of the church edifice, grounds, and endowment of \$3000 is greatly appreciated.”²⁶ It is a family tradition that the choice of gift met with strong disapproval on the part of my grandfather’s housekeeper, who remarked, “They’ve a Bible in ilka room i’ house; they’d mair need of a cow.”

And now from the wealth of material available in scattered letters and printed form, I am choosing this one comment from Mr. George Frederick Wright [pastor from 1872 to 1881].²⁷

“The early history of the Free Church is such as to give great satisfaction to everyone who has shared in its work. Its early interest in moral reforms was truly Christian in its character and in striking contrast to much of the activity of its time. This reflects great credit on its founders.... On account of its soundly Christian character, the Free Church did not find itself without a mission when slavery was abolished, but all the more prepared for the new phases of Christian work.... In these times (1886) when so much is said about the antagonism of labor and capital, it is refreshing to think of the cordial relationships that have ever prevailed in the Free Church between men and men, as such, without regard to their temporal condition.”

The Stephen Dinsmore House, Main and Chestnut Streets, Andover (also known as the Captain Richardson House). On May 7, 1846, by an ecclesiastical council held in this home, the Free Christian Church was organized, with forty-four members. Representatives attended from Haverhill, Boston and Fitchburg congregations; none came from Andover’s unsympathetic churches.

We may need to remind ourselves sometimes that it was consideration of the slave as a human being and not his legal status that concerned the founders of this church. And if so, what we read in the papers today about discrimination against the Negro should sound to us like unfinished business.

Endnotes



Mary Byers Smith. Granddaughter of four founding members of Free Christian Church—John and Agnes Ferguson Smith and William and Agnes Bain Donald—Miss Smith prepared and presented this paper on the history of the church for the 100th anniversary. She was a longtime active and generous member of the church, serving as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for many years. She was extremely helpful during the restoration after the 1941 sanctuary fire. Mary Byers Smith died in Boston in 1980.

1. Subtitle, *A Study of Liberal Movements in Politics*. Yale University Press, 1925.
2. George Pierce Baker, *New England Railway System*. Harvard University Press, 1925.
3. Sarah Loring Bailey, *Historical Sketches of Andover*. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880. p. 601.
4. John Smith, unpublished letters and journals in possession of the writer.
5. Donald Gordon, *The Donald Family*. Boston, 1906. p. 57.
6. Claude M. Fuess, *An Old New England School*. Houghton, Mifflin and Company.
7. That is, in what is now Andover. North Andover was not set off until 1855 and had, of course, an even older church. During the period under consideration, ten new churches were organized. See Newman Matthews, *The Churches of Andover and North Andover, 1640-1840*. Ms. at Andover Historical Society.
8. For date and numbers of audience, Claude Moore Fuess, *Daniel Webster*. Little, Brown and Company, 1930. II 138. For the place, hearsay.
9. Bancroft, *History of the United States*, Vol. 6, p. 311.
10. Bailey, p. 42.
11. Fuess, *Daniel Webster*, footnote II 230.
12. John Smith, papers.
13. *Liberator*, Aug. 18, 1837.
14. *Liberator*, V 122, 130. See also Fuess, *Old New England School*, p. 225.
15. Three longhand letters at Memorial Hall Library, Andover.
16. William Lloyd Garrison, by his children, II 427.

17. This did not prevent their taking an active part in the Underground Railway. Straight up the 'pike' two miles north of Andover was the thriving manufacturing centre of Frye Village, now Shawsheen. There William Poor and his sons had a flourishing wagon factory, Elijah Hussey a sawmill, and William C. Donald an ink factory. Being pronounced abolitionists, these men had separated from the South Church and organized the Free Church in 1846. The Donalds, Poors, Fryes, John Dove, and John (and Peter) Smith—all members of the new church—contributed generously to the fund for fugitive slaves. William C. Donald, Elijah Hussey, Joseph W. Poor and perhaps others could be counted on to speed the black wayfarers on their journey. When Mr. Poor heard a gentle rap on his door, or other subdued sound in the night, he dressed quickly, went out, harnessed his mare, Nellie, to a covered wagon and started with his dusky passengers, probably for North Salem, New Hampshire. In spite of a few inaccuracies, this graphic picture is a true one, borne out by similar recollections of Donalds and Smiths. See Wilbur H. Sievert, *Underground Rail Road in Massachusetts*, Worcester, 1936. Reprint from the *Journal of the American Antiquarian Society*, April, 1935.

18. *Liberator*, November 21, 1845.

19. West Parish church records. April 9, 1846. "Certain members of the church having applied for a dismission that they may be organized into a new church, the following certificate was voted: 'This certifies that the following persons; viz. John Smith, Agnes Smith, James Smith, Margaret Smith, John Smith, Mary Smith, George Smith, Jean Smith, John Dove, Helen Dove, Robert Ross, Mary Ross, Elizabeth Ross, Catherine G, Hendry, Catherine Petrie, James B. Lovejoy are members of the West Church in Andover in good and regular standing. Having requested a dismission from us, that with others they may be regularly formed into a church of Christ in another Parish of this town, they are, by vote of the church, hereby dismissed for this purpose and recommended to the Christian fellowship of those who may unite with them and when constituted members of a separate church, their particular connection with us will cease.'" John Smith's brother Peter did not join the Free Church group.

20. South Church records.

21. Reverend Dr. William B. Brown, third Pastor of the Free Christian Church, address at the 25th Anniversary of the Church on file at the Andover Historical Society.

22. At the 40th Anniversary, John Smith, papers.

23. Mira Bigelow Wilson, Principal of Northfield Seminary. Daughter of Dr. Frederick A. Wilson, Pastor of the Free Christian Church 1889-1919 and Pastor Emeritus until his death.

24. John Smith, papers.

25. John Smith, papers.

26. Newspaper clipping, no date, on file at the Andover Historical Society.

27. Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Oberlin Theological Seminary. Former Pastor of the Free Christian Church. While in Andover, he was greatly interested in the evidence of glacial action in the Indian Ridge and Pomp's Pond region. *The Ice Age in North America*, which was published in five editions was among his writings on science and religion. The quotation is from a letter of May 27, 1886, on file at the Andover Historical Society.



Free Church and Parsonage on Railroad Street. The Railroad Street site suited the earlier congregants, many of whom worked in the mill villages of Frye, Abbot, and Marland. At the turn of the century, the church began to look for a more central location.

Manual of the Free Christian Church of Andover, 1856

Periodically, the church published a manual for the congregation describing the history and including such information as the principles of belief, rules of order, declaration of faith (for baptism), covenant (for membership), and the names and status of all members. The following are excerpts from the 1856 edition. Ten years after its start, the church counted 124 members. Six of the founding members had already died, including John Smith's wife Agnes and Stephen Dinsmore, in whose home the church was constituted.

History

THE FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF ANDOVER, consisting of forty-four members, was organized by an Ecclesiastical Council, on the seventh day of May, A.D. 1846.

The basis of organization was *Congregational in Polity, Evangelical in Faith*; inviting the co-operation of all Christians in efforts to elevate the standard of vital godliness and practical religion, to win the souls to Christ and to present the Gospel as the remedy for all the evils of society, as well as for all the sins and woes of the heart; giving fellowship to "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, who witness a good profession before men, and practically honor Him." The evils of *slavery, intemperance and kindred vices* were especially regarded as requiring from Christian churches a clear and earnest opposing testimony. In accordance with this conviction, the church took *free and independent ground*, and excluded from its fellowship "persons who manufacture, sell or use intoxicating drinks as a beverage, slaveholders and apologists for slavery, as not practically honoring Christ."

Upon this basis the church has continued to the present time, seeking by the divine blessing to accomplish its mission. They have gladly recognized the providential changes wrought in public sentiment, through the wonderful course of events culminating in the abolition of slavery, whose odious wickedness ripened in treason, rebellion, and bloody war; and, welcoming to fellowship all who have come to substantial unity with themselves, they have been pleased to enter into closer relations with other churches, uniting with them in conference and in council, and receiving from them Christian recognition and sympathy.

"Hitherto the Lord Hath Helped Us."

Principles

- I. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Supreme Law Giver of the Church.
- II. That the Bible is the only binding code of laws which Christ has given for the government of his church.
- III. That each Congregation of Christians, meeting in one place, and united by solemn covenant, is a complete church, having no superior but the Lord Jesus Christ, and subject to no authority but His.
- IV. That to every such church, the Lord Jesus Christ has given the inestimable right to choose its own Pastor and other church officers, and to discipline its own members.
- V. That between churches thus constituted under the laws of Christ, as also between all ministers, there is perfect equality of power; and no man or body of men, civil or ecclesiastical, has any authority from Christ to control, hinder, or reverse the will of a church in regard to the choice or dismissal of its officers or the discipline of its members. That all true Christians are required by Christ to regard and treat each other as members of the same body of which He is the head; and as such, to live in the unity of the Spirit, to maintain Christian fellowship, to unite in the worship and ordinances which he has appointed.
- VII. That the choice of Pastor and other officers should be made by a vote of the whole church.
- VIII. That the admission and exclusion of members should be by a vote of the church at large.

Rules

In accordance with the foregoing principles, we adopt the following Rules, for the government and discipline of this church:

- I. Persons offering themselves for admission to this church shall give satisfactory evidence of regeneration. If coming from another Church of Christ, a certificate of good standing in said church may be required.
- II. This church, in all its transactions, shall make no distinction whatever on account of nation or color but shall regard all persons according to their moral and religious worth.

- III. The members of this church shall not knowingly assist in setting up “workers of iniquity” to places of power, believing that he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.
[II Samuel 23:3, Exodus 18:21]
- IV. This church will fellowship all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, who have witnessed a good profession before men, and practically honor Him. All such are most cordially invited with us in commemorating His death. Believing . . . slaveholders, and apologists for slavery, do not practically honor Christ, they are not included in this invitation.
- V. Any member in regular standing wishing to leave this church and unite with some other church shall, on application, receive a letter of dismissal and recommendation, by vote of the church, certified by either the Clerk or Pastor.
- VI. A correct record of the transactions of this church shall be made by a clerk appointed for that purpose.
- VII. When persons unite with this church, the fact of their intention to do so shall be announced from the pulpit on the previous Sabbath; and if they join on profession of their faith, they will be expected to give their assent to our summary of belief, and to take upon themselves our covenant obligations.
- VIII. Candidates for admission to this church may choose that mode of baptism which shall answer their consciences in the sight of God. Parents shall have the privilege of consecrating their children to God in the same ordinance.
- IX. The stated seasons of communion with this church shall be six annually.
- X. In cases of discipline, this church shall follow the rule laid down by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17, and enjoined by the apostles in 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Summary of Faith

- I. We believe in one and only living and true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
- II. We believe that the Bible is the word of God; that it was given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; and is the sufficient and only infallible rule of faith and practice.
- III. We believe that all men are under obligation to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves; but that previous to regeneration, they are both destitute of and positively opposed to the exercise of this love; and their moral character, therefore, is entirely sinful, and exposes them to eternal death.
- IV. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, by his sufferings and death, has made a full atonement for the sins of the whole world, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- V. We believe that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only ordinances [sacraments], and that these should be observed to the end of time.
- VI. We believe in a general resurrection of all the dead, a final judgment, and that the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked, will be alike eternal.

Covenant

Professing unfeigned sorrow for our past sins, and denying all ungodliness and every worldly lust, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and men, solemnly avouch the Lord Jehovah to be our God and portion; the object of our Supreme love and delight. We receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and from hell, and the Holy Spirit as our comforter, sanctifier, and guide.

We receive all true Christians as our equal brethren in Christ, and his friends as our friends, irrespective of nation, color, or condition in life; and promise to watch over them in all Christian tenderness and fidelity. We submit ourselves to the government of Christ in His Church, and by daily prayer to God in the name of Christ our Saviour, will seek for grace to keep our covenant vows.

Do You Thus Covenant and Engage?

Twenty-fifth Anniversary Address, 1871

Rev. William B. Brown

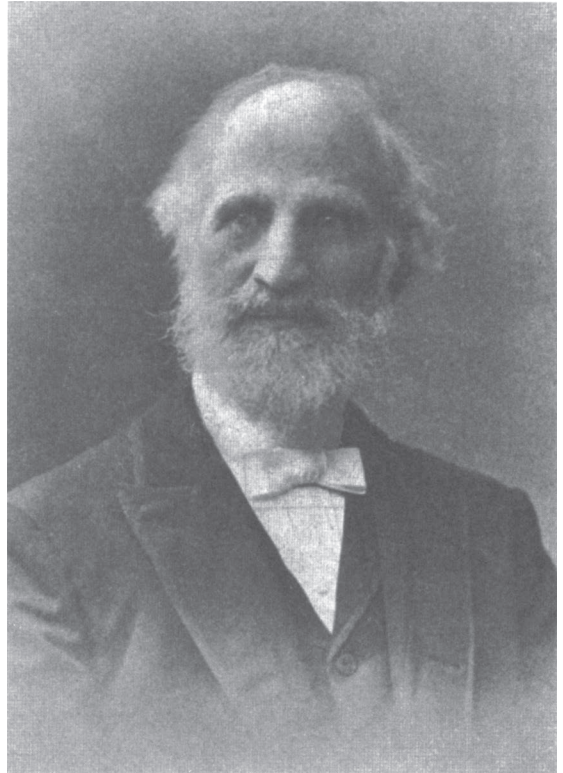
On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the church in 1871, the Rev. William Brown, pastor from 1851-1855, delivered the sermon. These excerpts show him to be a spellbinding orator.

NO ORGANIZATION, WHETHER CIVIL OR RELIGIOUS, has any good reason for existing that has not a work to do peculiarly its own and which could not be done as well by any other. A church that is thrust in upon a community when and where there is no need of it, no work for it to do that other churches might not do as well, has no excuse for existing at all. Its presence is an impertinence.

When the Free Christian Church of Andover was organized 25 years ago, there was some doubt at least in the minds of many of the most excellent and influential people of the town as to the fitness and wisdom of the undertaking. It should not be inferred from this that when the Free Church of Andover was organized that there existed any demonstrative opposition; or that it was born of dissension & strife. Difference of opinion there certainly was but there was no quarrel.

Among those who founded the church were men of wealth and standing and piety who counted the cost and were ready in all respects to do what was necessary to make the enterprise a success. But of them all, no one was more consulted, more relied upon than was the lamented Mrs. Agnes Smith. She was a woman of such sincere piety, of such excellent judgment, of such warm sympathies and so unpretending in her manners and so approachable to all, that her counsel was sought and followed in the conviction that she knew and expressed the divine will.

Let us note the reasons of a more public and far-reaching nature that pointed, nay, as the brethren thought, commanded [to the forming of a new church]. I now have special reference to the complicated question of slavery as it then existed. I have no wish to call up the past and painful reminiscences, but to outline the history of this church and not speak of slavery and its monstrous pretensions



Rev. William Bryant Brown, third pastor of the Free Christian Church. He served from 1850-1855, overseeing the move from rented worship quarters into the Railroad Street meeting house. Brown returned in 1871 to speak eloquently at the 25th Anniversary of the founding.

and humiliating successes as having a large share in making that history would be like reciting the play of "Hamlet" with Hamlet omitted. And most happily for all, the days of sensitiveness on this question have passed, I trust forever; and now every church and minister vies with every other in pronouncing their execrations upon that "sum of all villainies." While I welcome the anathemas [formal ecclesiastical bans], and the changes in the status of the slave and of the public sentiment that make this possible, I can not help congratulating this church that you stood firmly for freedom when the cause of freedom sadly needed friends, and when it cost something to be an abolitionist. If you ever made a somersault upon this subject, it was 30 years ago, when the battle was the fiercest and the odds were against you, and not at the close of our late rebellion when the hydra monster lay dead at the feet of our victorious army, and there were none to mourn its death, or to give it sepulcher.

It seems to me a happy coincidence that this 25th anniversary of the Free Church should stand connected with two other events, both of special interest in this community at the present time; one general and the other local.

It was fitting that your church anniversary should occur in such close connection with what is fast becoming a national holiday for the decoration of the graves of our fallen soldiers [Memorial Day]. They do not need flowers to keep their names fresh and fragrant in the hearts and memories of a grateful people, and yet when we recall the vastness of the struggle, the rebellion that was crushed and that grandest of American events, the destruction of African slavery accomplished and also how many thousands of noble lives went out, what can be more suitable than that once a year all the people should meet to recount their deeds and strew their resting place with flowers? Had all the churches of the land, or even of the North, held always to the sentiments which this church has proclaimed and advocated, there would either have been no war or else the rebellion, and the slavery that instigated it, would have been easily crushed together. And it is a fitting and noble deed that now, when victory is gained and our principles are in the ascendant that the foremost founder & supporter of this church should also be foremost in the erection of a monument in honor of our fallen heroes. [The reference is to John Smith, one of the founders of Free Christian Church, who made a large donation to the town of Andover for a library which became Memorial Hall Library.]

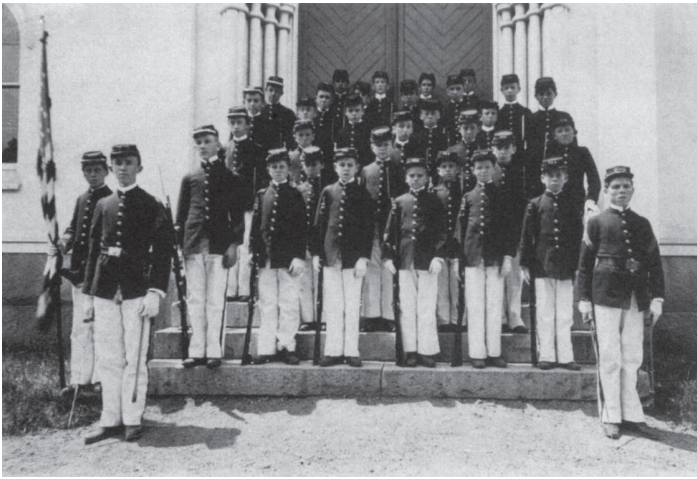
Fiftieth Anniversary Observance, 1896

Rev. William G. Poor

The Andover Townsman reported on May 8, 1896, "It was very appropriate that the occasion of the arrival of [Free Church's] fiftieth birthday should be honored by some special observance. A beautiful day combined with many other pleasant associations to make it an event long-remembered by all who took part in it and all who were present. It was like the reuniting of one large, happy family, and old and young enjoyed it alike." At 3:00 in the afternoon, Rev. William G. Poor of Keene, N.H., delivered the historical address, "A remarkably strong, able, and interesting production, an outline of the history of the church from its inception down to the present time." The following are excerpts from that address.

...YEOMEN HAD FOUNDED ANDOVER in 1646. Her people had steadily grown well-to-do. The rapid waters of the Shawsheen turned here and there a millstone, drove here and there a saw. Farms became productive, other activities rewarded honest toil, and by the time of the struggle for liberty, Andover was thriving sturdily through times that tried men's souls. Rev. Dr. Samuel Phillips, pastor of the Old South Church for sixty years (1711-1771), did not the least good in giving to the State such sons. Was the revolutionary army short of ammunition, powder came from the Andover powder mill, and even before the close of the struggle, the historic Academy was incorporated, and provision begun for the education of young men for the ministry of the Gospel. The Nineteenth Century dawned. The town was busy, in the defense of the faith, in the defense of the flag. The haystack prayer meeting at Williamstown was now carried on with increasing interest on Andover Hill... And the town which had begun with sturdy yeomen had completed two centuries, proved its patriotism, incarnated the New England idea of education, strengthened the commonwealth, and sent eager men of God throughout New England, across the sea, and was beginning to send them into the unknown, rapidly colonizing West. Fifty years ago, look at her, noble old Andover... patriotic, industrious, classic, Christian! The slave-earned wealth of the South paid tribute to her culture, and so her very Christian eagerness overlooked the oppression of the black man, or passed it lightly by.

But the tap of the auctioneers hammer, the breaking of hearts, the rending of homes, the moans of women and the cries of children, the swing and blow of the overseer's whip—these sounds connected with the multiplying of a race by enforced prostitution, mingled with the cry of blood from the ground, were the mutterings of the coming



The Boy's Brigade of the Free Christian Church, lined up on the front steps of the Railroad Street meeting house in 1897.

judgment. There were some who heard, but they were few. And the powerful wealth of the South and their threat of dissolving the Union awed many who would otherwise have spoken out their convictions; while others who at heart detested slavery opposed those who urged its immediate abolition. Such was our town when she had rounded out her two centuries. But could God permit the upright town to remain thus?

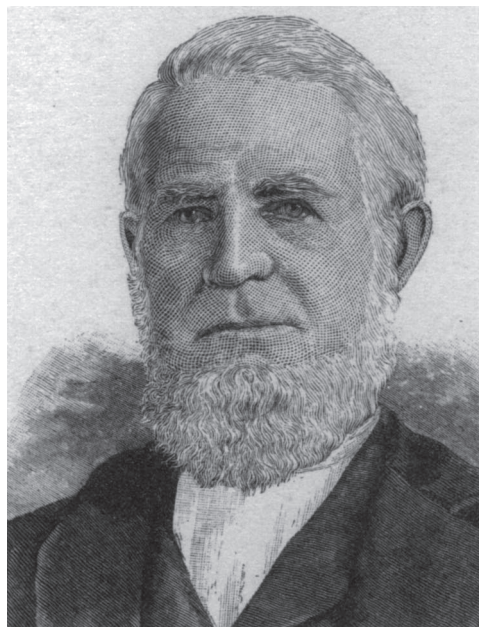
Many in this assembly can hardly realize how feeble was the sentiment of the North in those days. The president of Brown University published a book urging the question of slavery not be agitated; a bishop in the Methodist church of New England defended the right to hold slaves by what we call the Golden Rule! And Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Unitarians, Universalists, and Quakers, usually as wide apart as the poles, were cordially at one in the contemplation of the southern "form of economic subordination." Throughout the North, most pastors in influential pulpits so preached Christ as not to offend the devil in the South. Fifty years ago, little had occurred to help the sentiment against slavery. The infamous Fugitive Slave Law had not yet aroused the North; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was yet to fire the hearts of the people; and the Dred Scott case and the arguments of Abraham Lincoln were a long decade distant.

But God had trained in Scotland the men for helping Andover. And as in those scenes in Judea first testifying of the Christ, here were two Johns, and one of them had a brother James. And men with Christian wives were there, having the freedom of the hills in their lungs and the freedom of the Son in their souls.

... When young Abraham Lincoln saw the slave pen and auction block in New Orleans, he uttered a great vow against slavery. So a visit to the South fired the heart of an Andover manufacturer. But he was situated so that he could do more than vow. He went to his pastor for sympathy and advice, but found it not. The Scotch character could not be idle before so great an evil, and soon with James and the other John, their families and some others began to hold Sunday meetings at their homes. They were in the church and loved its fellowship, but their convictions commanded them to leave it, yet without a quarrel.

Throughout the autumn and winter of 1845-1846 these meetings were held weekly. Should they form a new church? It was a grave question, involving great sacrifice and heavy responsibility... As they waited, the vision came, and with the divine assurance they went forth to build according to the pattern shown upon the mount. The meetings grew in attendance, people of like principles, mostly of the artisan class, gathering with them... A society was formed, and they rented the Universalist Church at the corner of Main Street and Punchard Avenue which many of us remember as the old Grammar School. Their search for a minister was divinely guided. They found Rev. Elijah C. Winchester, fresh from Oberlin, a consecrated man, an indefatigable worker who came at the close of 1845. Presently, Free Christian Society was formed and convened in the house of Stephen Dinsmore, April 2nd, 1846 to hear and adopt the Rules, Principles, Summary of Belief, and Covenant there presented by a committee previously appointed. May 7 was selected for the consummation of their plans, and James Lovejoy, John Smith, and Thomas Clark were appointed a committee to call the Ecclesiastical Council and make all the arrangements. The make-up of the council suggests the unpopularity of the movement. A church in Fitchburg was represented by its pastor, Rev. Sherlock Bristol [who would soon be called as Free Church's second pastor] and by a deacon whose name was not preserved; Rev. N. D. Merritt and Deacon Butters of Haverhill and Rev. William P. Russell of Boston were also present. The church was organized with forty-four members.

...I would epitomize the history of the church thus: always by its pulpits and its various activities it has enabled men to hear the Great Voice saying, "Whom do men say that I am?" Some have given some answer, others another, and this church has always approved honest search, has never feared thorough investigation. Yet those who wait, those who wander, friends and foes of Jesus Christ, she urges to answer, "Whom say ye that I am?" Dear old church, stay free in that liberty by which Christ hath made us free, and let your testimony of hand and eye, of toil and rest, in fact, in life and lip, count more and more for the Son of God. May the indifferent become attentive, the listener a disciple, the disciple an apostle, because you hush men to hear, "Whom say ye that I am?"



Rev. Sherlock Bristol, second pastor of Free Christian Church (1848-1849). Rev. Bristol became familiar with the Free Church as one of the only "local" congregational ministers who agreed to attend the original 1846 founding. He served a church in Fitchburg at the time.



The Pulpit of the Old Church, Easter Sunday, 1904. This photograph of the interior of the "White Church" was taken three years before the church and land were sold (for \$6,000) to the Boston & Maine Railroad. The worship table and pulpit chairs were preserved in the move and, recently refinished, are still in use in the Free Church today.

Later that same day, the church gathered at 6:00 "around the festive board and partook of a bountiful collation supplied by the ladies of the church. At 7:30, the time for the evening service, every seat in the church was taken." After a series of addresses from eight former pastors and old members, the pastor of the South Church spoke of the connection between the two churches and presented Rev. Wilson with four handsome silver communion mugs, as a token of continued fellowship. Then eighty-year-old Deacon William C. Donald, one of the two living founders of the church, was called upon to relate his remembrances.

Address of Rev. William Brown

... This church took a stand fifty years ago. It had a mission to perform; slavery, which was rightly called a curse, rode the nation, church and state alike. This church was organized as one to stand always and everywhere for God and humanity, for right against law, for justice and truth, for the carrying out of the great law of the love to God and love to man. When I first came here, the home of John Smith was one of the depots of the underground railway, and I have known the friendly shelter of many a fugitive for a night there till he could be hurried off on his course northward in a carriage. Here we stood when I came here and had little intercourse with the other churches. I think after being here a month I went to see the pastor of

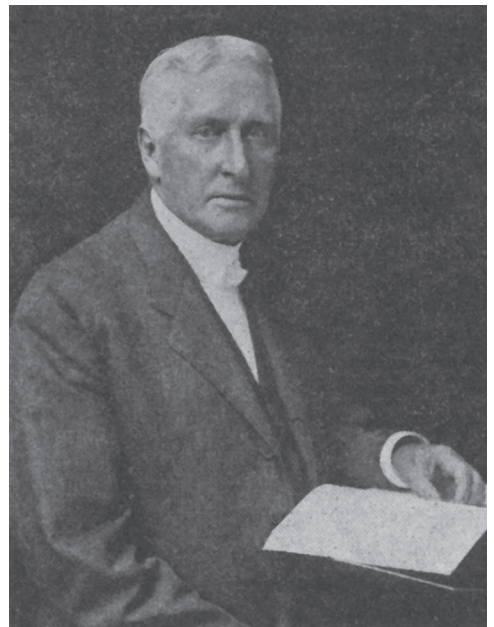
the Old South church—we were all brothers yet we differed in some things—yet before a year was ended we exchanged pulpits and did so frequently thereafter.

Dear parish friends, I wonder, I wonder if it would be a right thing for me and all men standing on the verge of death—would it be right for me to speak for them and myself? I have often thought in looking over my Christian ministry of more than fifty years, I might have achieved more for Christ and have been more influential than I have been. It was just a little more than a year ago that my dear wife left me in the midst of life. I honestly resolved to give up the world. I did nothing alone. By God's help I kept up. Since then I hardly know which world I live in. There have been days in the past year when I hardly knew whether I have been here or there and more than that, I do not think there is much difference between here and there. I think we can make heaven on earth and that the blessed ones are always around us. Try and see some of Christ here and you will know what the fellowship of love is. Knowledge and sympathy are much, love and strength are a good deal, natural and mental force, and social standing—all these have their place but, after all, it is our greatest longing to be happy in the spirit. Love to do good. Break away from the rule of sin. From all worldly passions to the possession of love for the good of man... Let us all turn in that direction, that we shall know God. Then will the whole community feel our power, the world over. That is the greatest work, the power of the conquest of the heart. God grant it to all. AMEN.

Rev. George Frederick Wright, eighth Free Church pastor (1872-1881). After leaving Andover, Wright joined the faculty of Oberlin College and became a worldwide explorer and expert in glacial phenomena, an interest that began with Andover's Indian Ridge. Author of sixteen volumes, including Scientific Confirmations of Old Testament History, he was honored by Oberlin with an endowed professorship of "the harmony of science and revelation."

Address of Rev. G. Frederick Wright

... This church has succeeded because it has believed in something; because it has felt it has had a divine calling, a message to hungry and thirsty souls. How the distinctions of person have faded away when we pass here. Here are the rich and the poor always met together. Each heart has known its own bitterness but all have come here for love and consolation. The church has done its work. It has been a stream of water fed from a mountain spring... Different individuals, different faces fill these pews—this pulpit—each a different address. I bid you Godspeed in your work. To keep this stream full is the most important work of your life.



Address of Deacon William C. Donald

I appear before you as one of the two surviving charter members of the Free Christian Church, organized fifty years ago today. Forty-four of us commenced the race; all have fallen except one who has not

identified himself with us for many years, and myself.

We banded ourselves together and took counsel of one another and of God as to how we could honor Him and do something for the liberation of three million of our brethren held in slavery in the South. After much prayer and conference, we came to the conclusion that we must come out from the other churches that apologized for slavery and received slaveholders into their communion.

The prime movers of the enterprise were Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, whose strong faith and love for the cause, and their very liberal pecuniary aid, made the undertaking possible; so that with the cooperation of the other forty-two members, we started on our course, feeling that we had the approval of God and our

consciences. We held monthly anti-slavery prayer meetings in those days, as well as weekly meetings, and though we believed in prayer, we sometimes cried out, "O Lord, how long?"

Fifty years ago today, we assembled at the house of Stephen Dinsmore, corner of Main and Chestnut Streets (the old Captain Joseph Richardson House), and laid the foundation of the Free Christian Church. Public worship and Sunday School had commenced three months before. A council of three ministers was called, one from Boston, one from Haverhill, and one from the West. Ministers in those days who sympathized with us were scarce. There



Founder William C. Donald. Mr. Donald, owner of an ink factory in the Frye Village section of town, withdrew from South Church to help constitute Free Christian Church. At his death in April 1906, he was the last of the original members. As a memorial his children donated the organ for the new 1907 sanctuary. When fire destroyed that organ in 1941, Donald's descendants donated our present organ.

was not one minister in the town of Andover to wish us Godspeed. We were looked upon as the Salvation Army were when they first came here, and like them we were long ago recognized as workers for God and humanity.

So we were organized with the Rev. Elijah Carpenter Winchester as our leader and pastor. We have been fortunate in having a succession of good faithful ministers of marked ability, and not the least among them is the present incumbent.

Although the church was made up of different shades of belief as well as from different nations, we have lived in harmony for fifty years. God grant that the cordial relations now existing between the Free Church and the other churches in town may grow stronger and stronger as time goes on!

Boston Jan'y 13, 1906
Dear Pastor &c
I have just received
notice of the Annual
meeting on Jan'y 17—
Very sorry I cannot be
with you—but the infirmities
of age forbid. I shall
think of you and your
flock—and of the many
times I have had the
privilege of uniting with
you in labour and service
to these many years.
In the Sabbath School
half a century ago

the sick and dying
beds—^{of many} which I expect to
see e'er long in that
happy land—and you
who are here in health
& strength double your
diligence to make your
calling and election
sure so we may all
meet in our heavenly
home and join in
the heavenly song
of redeeming love

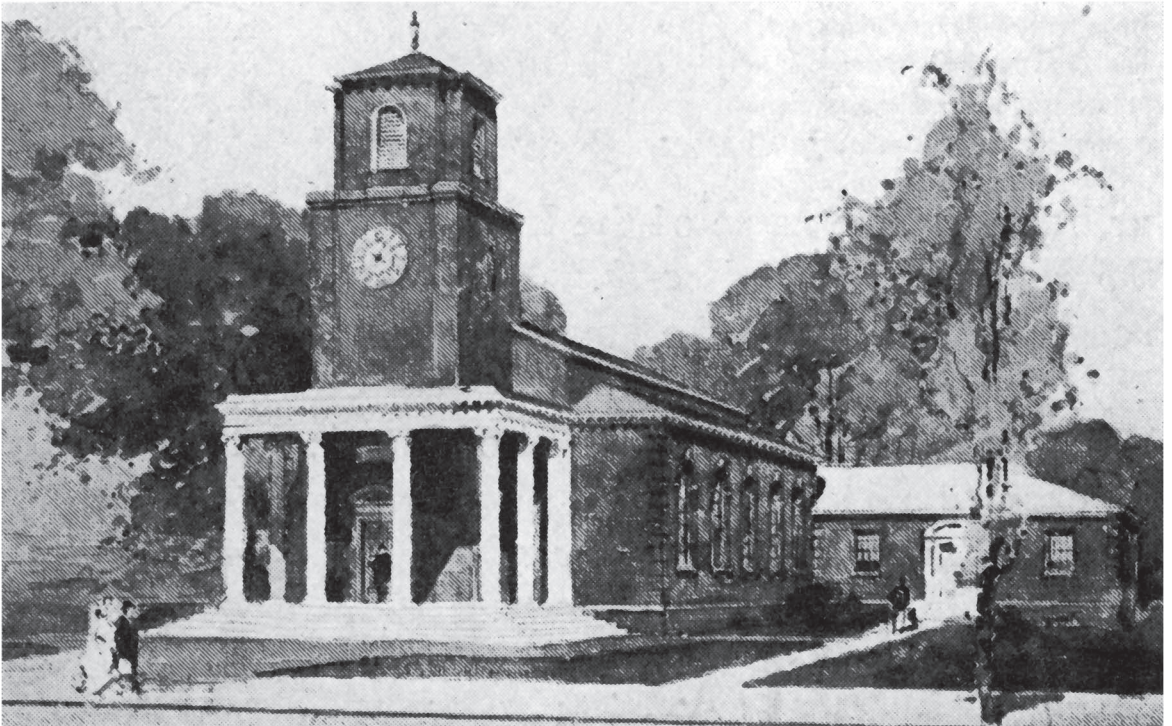
Boston, Jan'y 13, 1906

Dear Pastor

I have just received your notice of the annual meeting on January 17—very sorry I cannot be with you but infirmities of age forbid. I shall think of you and your flock and of the many times I have had the privilege of uniting with you in labor and service, to these many years, in the Sabbath School half a century, and at the sick and dying beds of many of which I expect to see e'er long in that happy land—and you who are here in health and strength, double your diligence to make your calling and election sure so that we may all meet in our heavenly home and join in the song of redeeming love. [William Donald died at age 90 four months later, April 1906. Remarkably, his daughter Agnes Donald Gordon, who with her husband was a pioneer missionary in Japan, would be the oldest member of Free Church at her death a generation later.]

The Laying of the Corner Stone, 1907

The exercises that accompanied the laying of the corner stone of the present Free Christian Church building, September 21, 1907, opened with the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" and liturgy that spoke of Jesus Christ as the chief corner stone and the people as living stones built up into a spiritual house. A box of pertinent documents and photographs was troweled into the stone as it was placed, and two speeches addressed the events of the day. The Andover Townsman reported the occasion with the article reprinted here.



Architect's Sketch of Proposed Free Christian Church. In 1901, there were strong feelings among Free Church members that "a change in the location of its House of Worship would best serve its permanent interests." A 5-year Building Fund was established in 1902 toward the purchase of a lot and erection of a new building. Land was purchased in 1903, and the church hired the most prestigious firm of the day, New York's McKim, Meade, & White, represented locally by Thomas Fox, of Fox & Hale, 3 Park Street, Boston. Contractors were Hardy & Cole, of Andover.

A LARGE ASSEMBLAGE OF PEOPLE witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of the new Free Church on Saturday last, the quiet but dignified proceedings making a lasting impression on all who attended. Settees were placed about the open space and these were quickly filled, many people having to stand, but the crowd that gathered represented all the denominations in town and showed the interest taken in the new church by all the townspeople. The program as printed in last week's *Townsman* was carried out, the congregation, assisted by the choir, singing the good old hymns in a spirit well becoming the occasion.

Prayer was offered by the Rev. William G. Poor of Topsfield, and the choir, under the leadership of Edwin G. Booth, rendered very sweetly the anthem "The Lord Is My Shepherd," by Macfarren. Then followed an address by the pastor, the Rev. Frederick A. Wilson. Mr. Wilson spoke as follows:

Address of the Rev. Frederick A. Wilson

We meet this afternoon for a service of special significance.

The laying of a corner stone of any public building, whether in the interest of education, government, patriotism, philanthropy or religion is worthy of special observance.

But its significance varies with the purpose of the structure. Some are memorials of past events, or achievements, or of individuals worthy of marked honor. Some are new agencies for promoting human welfare, and the hopes which center upon them give importance to their foundation.

The building whose corner stone we lay today is both a memorial of the past and a prophecy of future achievements.

The Free Christian Church of Andover has had a history which well deserves commemoration in the new walls to be erected here, and we believe it has opportunities for future usefulness which warrant enlarged means and strong hopes of future service.

Those forty men and women who sixty-one years ago united to form this church were a far-sighted, brave-hearted company. They builded better than they knew and the results which have followed their union must cheer their hearts in the bliss of the Church triumphant. They organized this church that they might act the more freely, unitedly and efficiently against slavery, intemperance and kindred evils of the time.

They were human. They had their faults and made mistakes; but we honor them for the devotion, self-sacrifice and wisdom they showed in standing by their convictions, and for the cheering fruits of their labors.

This building which we rear is a memorial to what they were and what they did for human freedom and righteousness. Many of them lived to see the downfall of slavery and a widespread interest against intemperance. The special evils against which they fought have come under universal ban and no longer make the work of this church distinctive from that of others. But the principles which inspired their action still need application to the changed life of our day and still demand faithful, earnest self-sacrificing effort.

In this need lies the purpose and hope of the building whose corner stone we lay this afternoon. The aim of the Free Church founders, as its pastor ten years after its origin expressed it, was "to elevate the standard of vital godliness and practical religion to win souls to God and to present the Gospel as the remedy for all the evils of society as well as for all the sins and woes of the heart."

In prosecuting this aim they emphasised four principles.



The Laying of the Corner Stone. Groundbreaking for the new Free Church occurred on June 26, 1907. Three months later the corner stone was laid in a ceremony pictured here; Agnes Low who passed away during the 150th anniversary year, attended as an infant. Less than one year later, on September 19, 1908, a service of dedication was held in the new sanctuary. The first baby baptised that fall was Ada Buchan, friend to many in our congregation.

Simplicity in their basis of Union;
 Supreme loyalty to conscience;
 The power of Christian truth to meet human needs; and
 The brotherhood of man.

1. Their creed was remarkably short for the time. They endeavored to make it so simple, yet so comprehensive that it might secure the confidence and cooperation of all Christians of like faith and sympathies.

As a result, the church has had on its roll members from Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Free Baptist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. It was evangelical but undenominational in its origin—a brotherhood of Christian believers—as its name “The Free Christian Church” (chosen after careful deliberation) suggests. Its doctrinal belief and freedom of government naturally drew it into alliance with the Congregational churches, and after ten years of independent life it came into recognized connection with them.

Time has proved the wisdom of their simplicity of creed.

The majority of Protestant churches are now laying emphasis on the few essentials for religious fellowship rather than on extended doctrinal statements. Many theological barriers to Christian union are giving way; the spirit of sympathy and cooperation in Christian work is in the atmosphere of our time and rapidly making headway.

2. Supreme loyalty to Conscience led the founders to sever the strong ties which bound many of them to other churches and to meet the hardships and self-denial demanded by the new church movement. The blood of the Pilgrims and of the Covenanters was in their veins and they were true to it. The same spirit is needed no less today.

At no time in our nation's history has there been a greater call for men who have convictions of right and will stand by them.

*“Men whom the lust of office does not kill,
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy,
Men who possess opinions and a will.”*

Men who in politics, business, society and private life will be ruled by the voice of God within them.

The Christian Church has no more important work today than to develop in the people a strong, intelligent conscience—the sense of personal responsibility to God—the rule of right rather than of material profit and of expediency.

It is well for us to recall the loyalty to conscience of our Free Church Founders “lest we forget, lest we forget.”

3. Their Christian devotion was fired by still another motive of present value, [namely] their appreciation of the power of the Bible to meet human needs. They had their doubts and their difficulties in the interpretation and application of its teachings, as thoughtful men of every age have had. But they did not allow their difficulties to make them unmindful of what was plain and helpful to them in its pages. They found in it truth so assuring of God's love and help, so inspiring to noble living, so strengthening in temptation and burden bearing, so comforting in sorrow, so sustaining in death, that they were glad to live by it and to help others to realize its blessings. They had little time for theorizing, but they tried to apply the Divine message they found in the Bible to the varying experiences of their lives. They made much of what they called “vital godliness” and “practical religion.” This gave them high ideals of Christian living. It made them prayerful: it made them hopeful: it made them courageous: it made them faithful: it made them earnest in helping their fellowmen.

With all the changes in religious thought and in the interpretation of the Bible which these sixty-one years have brought, the old book of the fathers is still the most needed, the most valuable book for the race.

Any organization worthy the name of a church has a mission in making its teachings real in the hearts and lives of men. For this purpose we rear these walls, that the blessings of the Gospel, which our fathers trusted and worked for, may be felt wherever our influence can reach. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

4. No statement of the controlling motives in the lives of our church founders would be just without mention of The Brotherhood of Man, "irrespective of nation, color or condition in life" as they expressed it in their covenant. "A man's a man for a' that" was a part of their heart creed, and they made it evident in their lives.

They gave of their hard earnings to the anti-slavery societies of the day. They did courageous service in assisting runaway slaves to escape to Canada. There are cherished memories in some of the Andover homes of the active part taken by their members in concealing fugitives and in sending them safely on to the next station of "the underground railway." They prayed and labored earnestly to prevent the ruinous spread of intemperance. Such brotherly kindness was the natural result of their belief that God made all men in His image and that Christ died for all.

The human slavery of 1846 has gone forever from our land; but the principle of brotherly love has still abundant opportunity for its application in Andover and in every community.

Intemperance still blights the brightest hopes of many hearts and homes, and debases the image of God in man.

Some of the greatest dangers and most pressing problems of our national life are the race questions of the South and West, the strife between capital and labor and the disregard of other's rights so common in public and private life.

Their chief solution lies in the spirit of brotherly love so prominent in the lives of the fathers and mothers of the early Free Church.

The perpetuation of that spirit should be one of the chief aims of this church in the future. We are proud to lay this corner stone, then, in memory of the founders, and in pledge of loyalty to their principles. We do it in strong hope. But the success of the church to be erected here will depend not upon any past reputation or achievements, but upon the consecrated, Christian thinking and living of those who work and worship here.

To be worthy of the founders we must do better than they, because of our greater advantages. May God make the glory of this new temple greater than that of the old.



It was expected that Rev. Markham W. Stackpole would deliver an address, but sickness in his family prevented it. Professor William H. Ryder of the Seminary spoke for that part of the town and its relation with the Free Church, and his address follows:

Address of William H. Ryder

I esteem it a great privilege and honor to be permitted to represent the people on the Hill, connected with the Seminary and the Seminary Church, on this occasion. I am glad to express to you their hearty congratulations, to assure you that they rejoice with you in the fact that you are soon to possess the new and beautiful place of worship, whose corner stone you are to put in place today. It is a source of pleasure to us also, to know that your church is to be nearer our homes, and that, in our long vacations, we may more frequently worship with you and listen to your pastor, whom we esteem and love as you do yourselves.

I am especially pleased that it falls to me to bring you this greeting. I was brought up and made my first confession of my Christian faith in a church which was in spirit closely affiliated with yours. The old First Church in Oberlin, like your church, stood for a simple creed, and proclaimed the right of all men to liberty, and to equal privileges in the state, the school and the church. I had the pleasure of personal acquaintance with some of your earlier ministers, Rev. Dr. Brown, Rev. Caleb Fisher, Rev. E. S. Williams, and Professor Wright. I remember

The "New" Free Church. Dedicated in September 1908, this brick meeting house is still the home of Free Church. Its architect was William Symmes Richardson, of the firm of McKim, Meade & White. Among Richardson's other designs is New York's Pennsylvania Station.

well a brilliant young man who came from your church in Andover to Oberlin when I was a lad, Mr. William D. Scrimgeour, who graduated from college in 1859, and whose promising career as a teacher or a preacher was cut off by his early death, which occurred within less than a year after his graduation. When I came to the Seminary, forty years ago, it was a source of pleasure to me to become acquainted with his mother in a Bible class in the Free Church, which met from Sunday to Sunday.

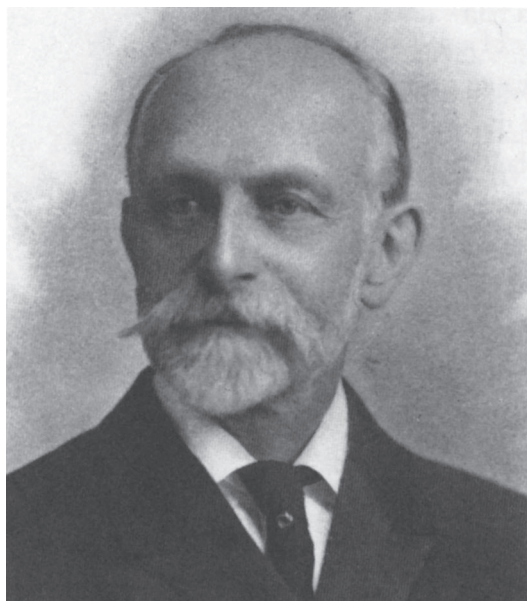
But we are gathered this afternoon not simply to express our congratulations and relate our reminiscences of the years that are gone. We are not here simply to observe your progress in erecting a building which will be a convenience to you and an ornament to our beautiful village. We are to witness the laying of the corner stone of a building which will be, indeed, a worthy memorial of the faith and devotion of those, who in the past have worshipped and labored in this church. But this house which you are building will be more than a convenient place of assembly, and more than a memorial. It will be, it is today, while in progress of construction, a witness and a prophecy, as your pastor has already said. We live in an age when all things which have been held to be true and sacred in the past, must submit to new tests and to rigid and fearless examination. And the creeds, the sacred writings, the conceptions of the religious life and worship, which our fathers and we have held, cannot escape this strenuous and searching investigation. This sometimes gives us pain and anxiety, and we ask the troubled question: Will our religious faith endure this testing? Such a scene as this enacted here today, and such a building as will, we trust, soon stand upon this ground, give a joyful and confident answer to this question. The very process of erecting this house is a witness to an abiding and enduring faith. Those who contribute to it and those who labor upon it bear witness to this faith. Those who look upon this scene, and those who shall observe these rising walls, must be impressed with this conviction.

We hope that for a hundred years, perhaps for two hundred years, this building will stand here, bearing witness to one generation after another that faith in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior shall abide and continue to bear fruit in human lives.

But this house, and this stone which we lay today, are more than witnesses. This stone is an allegory, a symbol. It has a language of its own, and it expresses the truths to which it witnesses. Our Lord gave it that power of expression when he spoke of the stone which should be the head of the corner. The apostle [Paul] more fully interpreted and established this meaning when he wrote of the living stone, elect,

precious, upon which we are to be built, a spiritual house. This very stone commands you so to train your sons and daughters that they shall become corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace. You are laying this stone that it may abide in its place and give its testimony and utter its voice for many a year; you build the walls which shall rest upon it, hoping and expecting that they will stand through the lives of your children and your children's children. But you know full well that all material things are temporary. These walls must crumble to dust; this very stone may be used to build a bridge, or a retaining wall. But the Christian faith to which these bear witness and which they express, shall continue as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.

Historical Sketch, 1932



Rev. Frederick A. Wilson (Pastor 1889-1919 and Pastor Emeritus 1919-1936). Rev. Wilson, much-loved by several generations of Free Church members, was not only a pastor and preacher, but also an educator, orator, poet, patriot, historian and eloquent correspondent. His white "gingerbread" home at 34 Essex Street still stands across from St. Augustine Parish.

Rev. Frederick A. Wilson

This comprehensive review of the first 86 years of Free Church history was prepared by Rev. Wilson, second longest-serving pastor of the church (1889-1919), during his tenure as Pastor Emeritus (1919-1936). His "sketch" includes the names of the forty-four founding members; ten years earlier, a bronze tablet listing these men and women had been dedicated in the church sanctuary to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the founding. When this history was published in 1932, the church had 800 members and had been in its new brick home on Elm Street for almost a quarter-century.

THE FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF ANDOVER was founded under circumstances of great historical interest, especially to those who become

members of it. Aroused at the evil of over two million negroes held in bondage, a small group of consecrated men and women began to meet on Sundays in the different homes. Though most of them were already connected with some church in the town, they nevertheless began to consider the formation of a new Church. They believed it a time for action. They loved the association of old fellowships, they were anxious to avoid quarreling, but their deep convictions led them to the conclusion that they must band themselves together in a new association which would give them opportunity for freer expression and wider application of their principles. Their weekly meetings had been growing in interest and attendance, and after each brother and sister had been urged "to count the cost, and to act not from impulse, or indignation, but in the love and fear of God" they decided to found a new society.

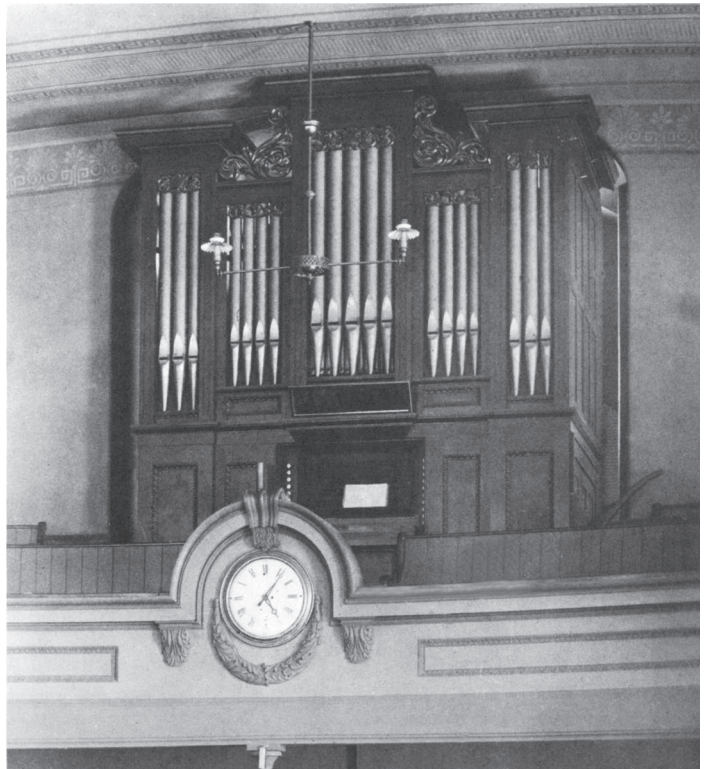
On November 24, 1845, Mark Newman, Esq., a justice of the peace, was petitioned to authorize the calling of a meeting of at least ten legal voters for the purpose of organizing a religious society by the name of "The Free Christian Society of Andover." Accordingly such a meeting was held at the home of Thomas Clark, on the evening of November 29, 1845, and the Free Christian Society was organized. A committee was also appointed to secure a place of worship and another to secure a minister. They were soon able to rent the Universalist Church which once stood on the left-hand corner of Main Street and Punchard Avenue. In February, 1846, they secured Rev. Elijah C. Winchester for their first pastor and teacher. Under his

leadership, plans went on for the organization of a Church. On March 21, 1846, a committee was appointed to prepare a Summary of Belief and a Covenant. On April 2, 1846, they adopted the Rules, Principles, Summary of Belief, and Covenant presented by the committee. The 7th of May was then fixed upon as the date for the consummation of their plans. James Lovejoy, John Smith and Thomas Clark were appointed a committee to invite a Council and provide for the services of organization.

On May 7, 1846, therefore, the forty-four original members came together to found the Free Christian Church. Of this important meeting Deacon William C. Donald, one of the founders, narrates,

“A council was called for the purpose of founding a Christian Church. The churches invited were not our immediate neighbors, they not being in sympathy with our design. Instead we found friends in Fitchburg, Haverhill, and Boston. Small as the council was, it numbered all whom we could conveniently then find to sympathise with us in our cause. The place of meeting was in what was known as the Richardson House, situated on the corner of Main and Chestnut Streets. There this church was constituted.... Our friends among the wise and learned of the town were few.... But if we had little to cheer us, we thanked God and took courage at every remembrance of our

righteous cause, and of the honor conferred upon us in being allowed to stand forth as friends of the poor and friendless. We were on the side of God and we knew that however long we might have to endure we should win. Our hope, we said to one another, was in Him.” So with firm resolution, steadfast faith, these sturdy men and gentle women severed old ties, faced criticisms and consecrated themselves to this new enterprise, covenanting themselves together in words which still form a basis for the Covenant of the Free Christian Church.



Free Church's first organ. Founder John Dove presented this pipe organ to his church, then "The White Church" on Railroad Street.

The organization was Congregational in polity. Fellowship was open to “All who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, who witness a good profession before men, and practically honor Him.” The evils of slavery and intemperance were especially abhorred and, in accordance with this conviction, the church excluded from its fellowship “persons who manufacture, sell, or use intoxicating drinks as a beverage, slaveholders and apologists for slavery.” Founded upon this basis the Church took on vigorous life at once and has continued ever since to be a strong force for righteousness.

The names of the founders are as follows:

Joseph Abbott	Sarah Harding
Caroline Abbott	Catharine Hendry
Alice R. Adams	Jonas Holt
Henry F. Barnard	Pamelia Holt
Mary A. Barnard	Persis Holt
Joshua Blanchard	Bailey Lovejoy
Asa H. Brown	James B. Lovejoy
Jacob Brown	Abia Lovejoy
Bartholomew Carney	Mary Parker
Jane Carney	Robert Ross
Thomas Clark	Mary Smith Ross
Sarah A. Clark	Ammon Russell
Stephen Dinsmore	Ann Smart
William C. Donald	Catharine P. Smart
Agnes Bain Donald	George Smith
John Dove	Jane Smith
Helen Dove	James Smith
Ephraim Everson	Margaret Smith
Rhoda G. Everson	John Smith
Cornelius Gould	Agnes F. Smith
Lydia Gould	John N. Smith
Pamelia Green	Mary Smith

“They live in our hearts and the remembrance of them is dear and blessed.”

Of these forty-four founders, fifteen came from the West Church, twelve from the South Church, three from the Methodist Church, one from the Baptist Church, three from unnamed churches and ten on Profession of Faith.

The last survivor of the original members was Deacon William C.

Donald who died April 22, 1906, at the age of 90, after 60 years of devoted service to the church.

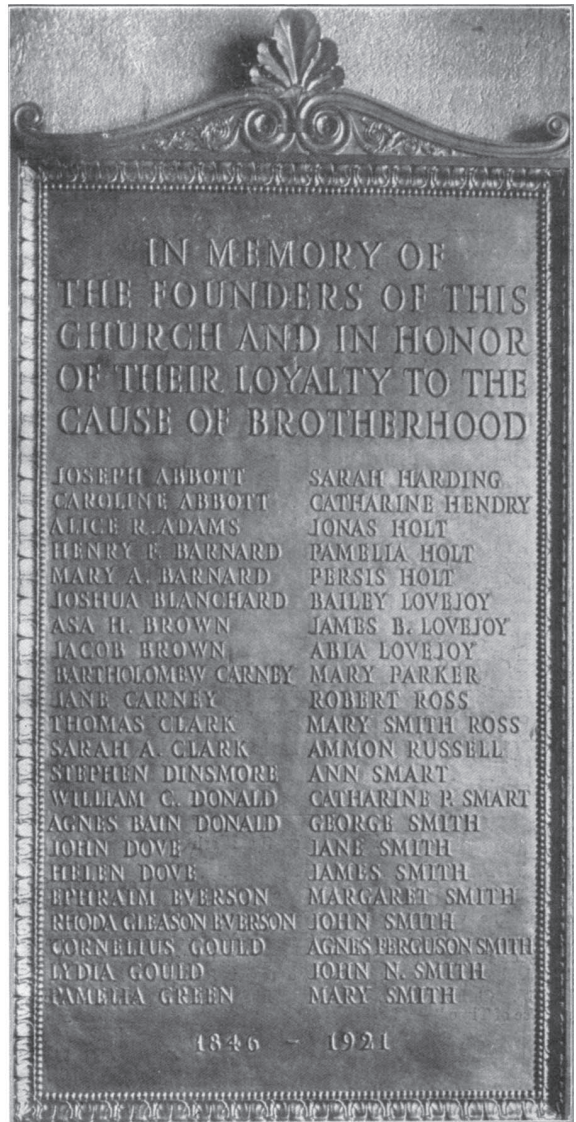
For a few years the Church worshipped in the meeting house of the Universalists on the left hand corner of Main Street and Punchard Avenue. This building was later used for a Grammar School and afterward moved to Bancroft Road where it is now (1932) used as a barn on the estate of Mrs. George F. Cheever.

In 1849 Mr. John Smith purchased the unused Meeting House of the Methodists, located on the left side of Main Street where a dwelling house, number 126, now stands, moved it to Railroad Street, nearly opposite the Boston and Maine Freight House, and presented it much improved to the Free Church with the land it occupied.

It was dedicated March 8, 1850, and was familiarly known as “The White Church.” For 58 years it was the religious home of the Free Church people and was greatly loved by them. This location was chosen for the convenience of the people of the three mill villages, Abbott, Marland and Frye, who then largely constituted the church. Changes in the residence of many of its members, the increasing inconvenience of the location and the need of more modern equipment for church work made a new site advisable.

In 1903 plans were begun for moving to a more suitable part of the town which resulted in the purchase of the lot on which the present House of Worship stands and the erection of the new brick church which was dedicated September 10, 1908.

By conditions of the gift of the former church, the property was to revert to Mr. John Smith’s heirs should it no longer be used for church purposes. Deacon Joseph W. Smith and Mrs. Helen Smith Coburn, his heirs when the change in location was made, generously relinquished their rights to the property in favor of the Free Christian Church and it was sold to the Boston & Maine Railroad who took down the building, disposed of its materials to various parties and used the land for track purposes. The adjoining parsonage was sold



Bronze Memorial Tablet. This tablet on which the names of the forty-four founding members are inscribed was presented by the congregation on the church's 75th anniversary in 1921. The plaque adorns the front of the sanctuary and is a reminder to worshippers of our small but steadfast beginnings.

and moved across the railroad tracks to Buxton Court where it is still (1932) used as a dwelling.

The cost of the new Meeting House and its furnishings was \$67,000 and it was all paid within three years of its completion.

The electric lights of the auditorium were given by Mr. and Mrs. George W. W. Dove. The organ was given by the descendants of Deacon and Mrs. William C. Donald, the pulpit by the Christian Endeavor Society and the pulpit sofa by Mrs. Mary Bailey in memory of her brother, T. Augustus Holt, a liberal supporter of the church. The Communion table was given in memory of Mrs. Isabella Lunan by her three children, and the four pulpit and platform chairs in memory of Deacon Thomas Clark, Mr. and Mrs. James Middleton, and Mrs. Catherine Parker by their families.

The church was organized as an independent church, but in a few years found itself in so close sympathy with the beliefs and polity of the Congregational churches that it allied itself with that denomination.

It observed its twenty-fifth, fortieth, fiftieth, and sixtieth anniversaries with appropriate exercises. Its seventy-fifth was notably celebrated by the dedication of a bronze tablet inscribed with the names of the founders, a gift from their descendants.

The women of the church have been earnest supporters of its work from its origin. In May 1848 they formed the "Social Benevolent Circle," known later as "The Ladies' Benevolent Society" and now as "The Women's Alliance." About 1902 the "Helping Hand Society" was organized to aid in meeting the material wants of the church and to care for its sick and needy.

A volunteer choir has served during all the history of the church and has greatly aided in its worship. A Junior Choir was started in October, 1910, and has ever since been notably helpful in the Sunday morning services.

In 1886 a Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was organized and is still an important aid to the church.

John W. Bell was chairman of its first meeting, Stephen Jackson its president pro tem and J. Newton Cole its first president.

Special organizations for the boys and girls have been of much benefit to the younger generation. Pleasant memories of "The Boys' Brigade," "The Knights of King Arthur," "The X. B. K." fraternity, "The Whatsoever Society," "The Dorcas Club," "The Young Ladies' Club," "The Young Women's Society" and "The Agnes Donald Gordon Club" will long be cherished.

The Free Christian Church had not been long in existence before the women of the parish organized for charitable work. These are selected notes from the minutes of the first years of the ladies' Social Benevolent Circle.

May 14, 1848

Met to frame and accept a constitution.

Mrs. Winchester, Mrs. Marshall, Mrs. Everson, Mrs. S. Abbot, Mrs. Clark

Article 2. The object of this Society shall be benevolent labor & mutual improvement.

Article 5. The tax shall be 25 cents annually for each female and 50 cents for each male member.

voted: That any individual doing their own work shall pay 5 cents at one meeting.

voted: To prepare a box of clothing & other articles for the fugitive slaves of the Canada Mission.

September 19, 1848

Packed our articles and forwarded them for Canada. The barrel contained a bed spread and quilt, two cradle quilts, two milled blankets, shirts, dresses and skirts for women & children & other articles, all of which were priced at over thirty dollars, & three dollars in money to defray the freight of the same.

October 18, 1849

[Voted to spend \$50]...to purchase carpeting for the church building and for use of the Free Church & Society.

November 14, 1850

Held a meeting in the vestry for the purpose of consulting upon the expediency & practicability of getting in readiness a barrel of clothing for the benefit of fugitives from slavery in Canada, who have fled hither from the free states in consequence of the Fugitive Slave Law, recently enacted by Congress. As the season is getting ad-vanced, we voted to make extra effort for the purpose contemplated.

November 21, 1850

Met according to agreement, about 20 members present. Almost everyone came with a bag or a bundle. An empty barrel was in readiness, which was filled to crowding with shoes, stockings, caps, hoods, mittens, quilted skirts, dresses, shirts for men and children, pants, coats, quilts etc. etc. Thus with a little energy, our work was accomplished in a short time & sent on its way. May it prove to be a blessing not only to our souls, by arousing them to renewed effort in behalf of suffering humanity, but also to the poor panting fugitive, who is cruelly driven, in many instances, from quiet, pleasant homes, in this inclement season of the year to a cold and rigorous climate.

March 20, 1851

A communication was read from Hiram Wilson, respecting the condition of the fugitive slaves in Canada who are running by hundreds to the country of a queen, to escape the oppressions of a country professing to be republican and Christian.

January 1, 1852

[N] o meeting of the Society on account of the funeral of Mrs. John Smith, one of our earliest and most efficient members. Our loss is great, but her gain is unspeakable.

September 16, 1852

[F] our members present. We find the responsibility of sustaining our society rests upon a very few, but these have come to the conclusion sometime since that the course in which we are engaged is good and that with the blessing of God it must be sustained.

Social Benevolent Circle minutes (continued)

January 20, 1853

[Suddenly a big meeting—just like old times.] [B]etween 60 & 70...at tea, over 100 in the evening...a very lovely sociable, and interesting meeting.

February 24, 1853

The evening was broken up by the burning of Mr. Morrill's ink factory.

October 10, 1860

Soc. met in vestry. Voted to expend five dollars in the purchase of yarn to be knit into socks for the soldiers.

May 22, 1878

With the return of cold weather and the approach of the winter holidays, our society again begins its meetings for the benevolent labor and mutual improvement.

For thirty years, since 1848, have the people of this parish met, the ladies plying busy fingers for the benefit of the needy and oppressed both at home and abroad, the gentlemen coming later to enjoy the social; cup of tea, and to add to our funds and conversation.

In looking over the Secretaries' reports for these years, we find the Society, for the first two years working for the fugitive slaves of Canada West! To what a period of our country's history does this lead our minds!

The Indian Missions next claimed our sympathy and help and to them our contributions were sent for the next two years; the head-quarters of these missions being at Oberlin, Ohio.

Then came the Mendi Mission in Africa, help to the missionaries in Kansas, work for our own parsonage, church, and for the poor of our parish. This brings us up to 1861.

At the beginning of the Civil War, our ladies came to the front - and worked for the soldiers for one year. The next winter began work for the Freedmen which continued for thirteen years, up to the beginning of last winter.

During these meetings, there have been many fluctuations in their interest and prosperity. We have been called the most sociable as well as the most actively useful of any society in town. While other reports have reached us of the dullness, stiffness and general lack of interest - in this our only meeting for sociability and acquaintance.

It remains to be seen by our efforts this year, what shall be the result of the winter before us. If we strive honestly to do good as we have opportunity, the Lord will surely bless our efforts. The labor of our hands, given with a cheerful heart will find its appointed way; nor will the ready smile, the kind greeting, the effort at acquaintance towards any who, by their presence show their desire to unite with us, be lost if the motive be equally good. During these years there have been many changes in our members. Familiar faces have gone, and new ones have come to take their places. Scarcely a family represented here but has lost dear ones who used to brighten these meetings by their presence. Can we ever forget them?...Thus our numbers have been thinned and we have but to be kinder to those who remain, little knowing who may be next called to go up higher.

Treasurer's Report

Received during the year—From yearly assessments

From evening assessments \$ 9.50

From Proceeds of fair \$13.20

\$74.00

Expended during year—For cloth, stockings etc. \$96.70

*In part payment of \$10.67
singing books*

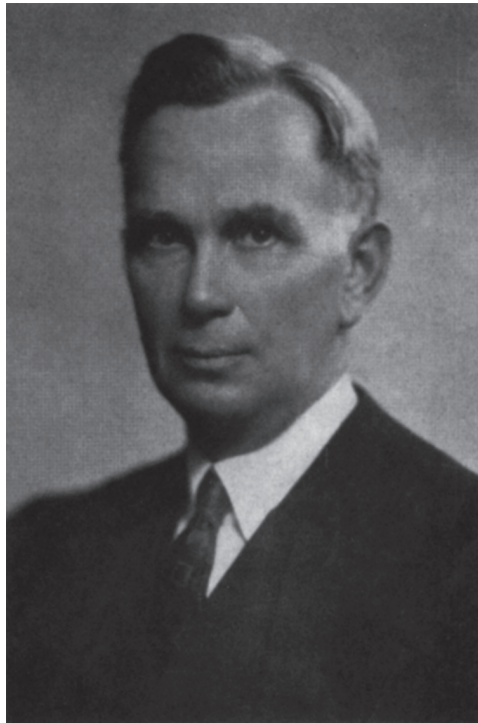
Deposit in savings bank \$35.00

\$50.00

\$95.67

Balance in Treasury November 1878 \$ 1.03

The Free Church was the first in town to form a “Men’s Club” and it was remarkably successful for many years. A “Young Men’s Club” proved very attractive for a time and during one winter held legislative meetings under the guidance of Andover’s Representative to the State Legislature.



Rev. Alfred C. Church, pastor from 1925 to 1937. Under Church’s pastorate, the church grew to its largest numbers previous to today, with 800 members in the 1930s. The Sunday School had five adult officers and six superintendents, the Margaret Slattery Class and Young Men’s Brotherhood encouraged discipleship, and Christian Endeavor groups and the Free Church Players offered fellowship and fun.

For eighty-six years the Free Christian Church of Andover has maintained its helpful ministry. It has had 2,000 members and its present membership is 800 of which 185 are non-resident.

Its modern plant is well adapted to its needs, and its opportunities for service were never greater. It is for its present constituency to carry on the good work of their predecessors, and to make the church of still greater influence in promoting good citizenship, Christian character and the Kingdom of God on earth.

Free Christian Church Since 1932



Rev. Dr. Jack L. Daniel, nineteenth pastor of Free Christian Church. Rev. Daniel, affectionately called Pastor Jack by parishioners of all ages, proved to be the longest-serving senior pastor in the church's history.

Rev. Dr. Jack L. Daniel

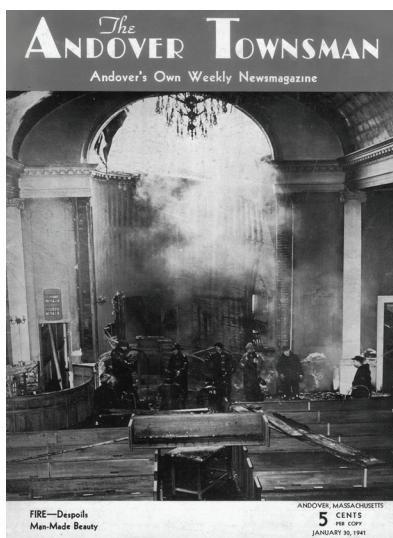
The previous six documents formed the content of the first edition of The History of Free Christian Church, published on the occasion of the church's 150th anniversary in 1996. That volume concluded with a brief history written by Rev. Frederick A. Wilson in 1932. This additional chapter covers the 80 years since then. Because it draws primarily on the recollections and records of Rev. Dr. Jack L. Daniel, it is necessarily brief regarding the events prior to his call to the Free Church pulpit in 1977.

1932-1976

FOLLOWING THE LONG PASTORATE OF Frederick A. Wilson (30 years as pastor, 1889-1919, plus 17 years as pastor emeritus, 1919-1936), Free Christian Church was led by a succession of capable, dedicated shepherds who oversaw the continued growth of the church through the years of the Great Depression, World War II, and the stable postwar forties and fifties. (These men are identified on page 65.)

One of the headline-making incidents in Free Church history during this time was the disastrous January 26, 1941, fire that destroyed much of the sanctuary. That Sunday evening, parishioners had gathered to honor Scotland's bard, Robert Burns. The pastor, Rev. Herman Johnson, gave an inspiring talk on "Robert Burns and Democracy," and prayers were offered for the country, then six weeks into World War II. Late that night a fire of uncertain origin smoldered in a tiny basement room next to the boiler room and slowly spread upward. A woman walking to work at 5:30 the next morning saw flames suddenly rush through the roof and summoned the fire department. Firefighters from Andover and Lawrence heroically subdued the blaze, but not before the sanctuary was left in ruins.

The next evening, Rev. Johnson gathered the leaders at his home to plan how to respond, and the saddened but not discouraged congregation rallied, heartened by the help extended from the community. The school department offered Memorial Auditorium (Doherty Middle School) for Sunday worship and Sunday school classes; the Christian Endeavor (youth) groups would meet in private homes; the ladies' societies and Boy Scouts would use the public library. The Baptist, South, West, and Christ parishes all expressed deep sympathy and made their churches



The Fire of January 1941. A nighttime fire gutted the church interior and destroyed the organ, but the congregation soon rebuilt.



available to accommodate the needs of Free Christian churchgoers. In the meantime, contracts were issued immediately for the complete repair and restoration of the church building and the purchase of a new organ. Unity, loyalty, and generosity abounded. Only three months later, on Palm Sunday, April 6, Free Christian Church was once again worshiping in its own church home. The rededication service later that month reminded the congregation that the fire had been only a physical misfortune, not a spiritual one.

The Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the time of the fire and the restoration project was Miss Mary Byers Smith. Miss Smith was the granddaughter of four of the chief founders of the church, John and Agnes Smith and William and Agnes Donald. It is her retelling of the history of the church, through primary documents and family recollections, that comprises the keynote article in this volume. Miss Smith prepared and presented the paper at the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the church in May 1946. This milestone was reached during the pastorate of Rev. Levering Reynolds, who was a beloved senior pastor throughout the post war years, 1945-1957.

In 1959 the pulpit of Free Church was once again vacant and the church called Rev. J. Allyn Bradford, a Yale Divinity School graduate, as senior pastor. This was Mr. Bradford's first pastorate

One-Hundredth Anniversary "Cake." Free Church observed its centenary with much thanksgiving and its first published history. The birthday banquet featured a model cake decked with 100 candles fashioned by head deacon and skilled pattern-maker Thomas Gorrie, shown here with his wife Daisy. The cake still sits in the church attic, as fresh as ever.

Rev. J. Allyn Bradford, Pastor, 1959-1971. Rev. Bradford, second from the right, was committed to ecumenism, building bridges and promoting unity among Christian churches and denominations. His efforts produced dialogue and shared services such as this one with Catholic parishes. Long-time member and deacon Frederick Fitzgerald looks on (second from the left).



and, at age 31, he showed great promise. He came from a long line of congregational pastors and was a twelfth-generation direct descendant of Pilgrim Governor William Bradford. Allyn, as he preferred to be called, occupied the parsonage on High Street with his wife Margaret Louise and their four children. He was keen to lead Free Church out of quiet complacency and to challenge the congregation to recapture the founding vision of the church to be on the front lines of addressing social injustice.

Bradford was a pastor in the same prophetic mold as an earlier leader of Free Church, Rev. Sherlock Bristol, the church's second pastor. Bristol's story is a compelling one as it is recorded in his autobiography *The Pioneer Preacher*. Sherlock Bristol came to Andover in the spring of 1834 as a nineteen-year-old student to enroll in Phillips Academy. His home church, the Congregational Church of Cheshire, Connecticut, helped sponsor him. While taking part in a student debate on abolition, he became convinced of the righteousness of the abolition cause and surrendered his life to Christ to be used to help end slavery. He persuaded more than half the 200-member student body to become abolitionists.

Later that year, famous English abolitionist George Thompson came to speak at Andover's Methodist Church, formerly on Main Street. A local railroad industrialist who supported slavery hired a mob of tough railroad workers to attack Mr. Thompson during the address and run him out of town. Word leaked out, though, and

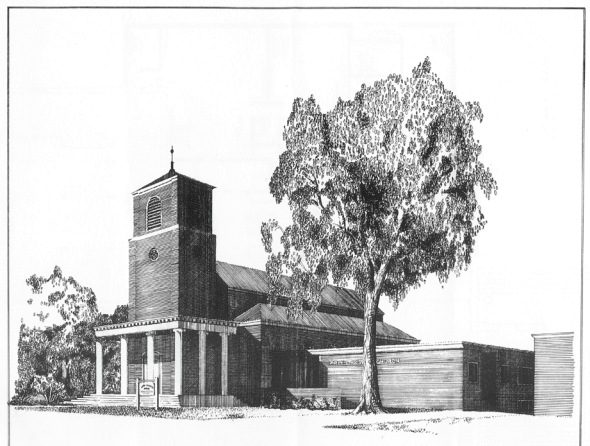
Sherlock Bristol and about 50 other Phillips Academy students armed themselves with hickory clubs, strode into the church, and surrounded the pulpit to protect Thompson. As the speech ended, the mob of roughnecks extinguished the sanctuary lights and approached the platform. Undaunted, the Phillips students boldly formed a phalanx and escorted Thompson out of the building to safety. They later rallied the entire student body to drive the mob away from the home where Thompson was staying. Ringleader Sherlock Bristol was subsequently expelled from Phillips Academy; some 60 of his fellow students, nearly one-third of the student body, quit the school in protest.

Bristol's home church withdrew its support to help educate him, leaving him expelled from school, disowned by his church, and all alone in Andover. Then, a local businessman came to visit young Bristol and asked him to relate the tumultuous events. According to Bristol, the man wept to hear of his mistreatment and offered to pay for his college education. That generous visitor was none other than John Smith, who a dozen years later would help found Free Christian Church. Bristol attended Oberlin College in Ohio, which had been launched by abolitionist congregational ministers. Some 14 years later, he was called to become Free Christian Church's second pastor. Sherlock Bristol recalled it this way:

Soon after I received a call from the Free Church of Andover, Mass., and accepted it. Singular it was to go back to the place where I had been expelled fourteen years before on account of anti-slavery and find myself pastor of a large anti-slavery church and in fair standing with the other ministers of the place. More singular still it was to see occasionally in the congregation Principal Taylor, who was one who had voted me away, now cordial and expressing his pleasure to see me again and to hear me preach!

Like the America of the 1840s and 1850s, America in the 1960s went through tremendous social change with the start of the Vietnam War and the protests against it, as well as the civil rights movement and the racial divide in the country. Add to those the hippie movement, the Jesus movement, and

Proposal for Multi-Purpose Wing. The Bradford years saw a growing demand among younger families for more Sunday School space. However, a proposal to expand by adding a multi-purpose wing was rejected in 1963, and the church began a severe decline.



Rumor Spiked: Free Church Not Closing

ANDOVER — The Free Church — with 125 years momentum behind it — isn't about to fade into a Limbo of non-existence.

Church Moderator Frederick P. Fitzgerald, 95 Central St., yesterday spiked reports the church might close and said an active hunt has begun for a new minister to succeed Rev. J. Allyn Bradford who resigns Sept. 1.

At church planning meetings earlier this year, there was discussion about closing the church, but at a meeting this week such a move was "completely ruled out," said Fitzgerald. "There was no sympathy at all" for the idea of closing the church. "It was dismissed rather abruptly," the church moderator added.

Fitzgerald said the church also is seeking a young person to work with youth, either as a youth director or assistant minister.

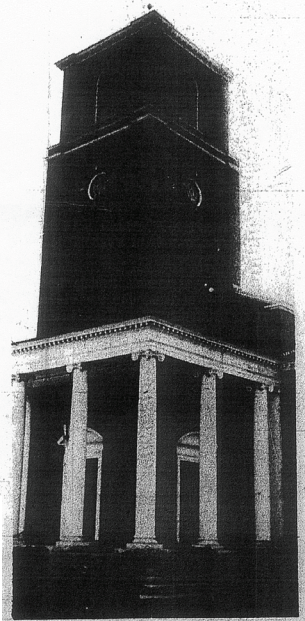
"There's no time limit" on picking a new minister, Fitzgerald said. Sometimes such a search can take a year, he noted. While the church is hunting, ministers will be obtained for Sunday services from a pool maintained by the Mass. Congregational Christian Conference. It will be up to parishioners, themselves, to handle day to day duties normally done by a minister.

Fitzgerald said divinity schools and the Congregational Christian Conference would be contacted in the quest for a minister. One man already has applied for the position.

A yet-to-be-picked pulpit committee will conduct interviews.

The Free Church marks its 125th anniversary this weekend with a family dinner tomorrow at 5 p.m. and a guest speaker, Rev. Egbert W.A. Jenkinson, minister emeritus of First Church, Congregational, Methuen, at Sunday's 10:15 a.m. service.

The church was founded May 7, 1846 as a protest against slavery at a time when anti-slavery was unpopular in New England since many textile mills depended on trade with the South. The anti-slavery stand was one of the reasons for the church's name.



the women's liberation movement, all of which posed a great challenge to the traditional church in America.

Rev. Bradford disagreed with the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and spoke out courageously against it. Unfortunately, America and the church were deeply divided over the legitimacy of the war. And especially for Free Church families whose sons were serving in the military in Vietnam, the message from the pulpit was hard to hear.

Bradford was without doubt a man of great moral courage who spoke with a prophetic voice and led by example. In his desire to identify with the civil rights movement, he rode the Freedom Buses through the South, along with many other clergy and lay people. Many years later in a 2012 interview he recalled the hostility they experienced as they marched in various cities in support of the Reverend

Martin Luther King, Jr. During these turbulent and confusing times, many in the congregation did not understand or appreciate Rev. Bradford's actions. The words of the Lord were true, that "a prophet is not without honor except in his own town."

In the early years of Bradford's ministry, the church grew significantly, especially among young families. Eventually the two morning Sunday School sessions were not enough and plans to build a Sunday School wing on the northwest side of the church were drawn up. This undertaking was enthusiastically supported by young families but just as strongly opposed by older families, many of whom were reacting against Bradford's involvement in the anti-war and civil rights protests. The project failed and numbers of young families left Free Christian to join other churches.

During the latter years of Allyn Bradford's tenure, church attendance declined to the point that Bradford tendered his resignation in 1971. Rev. Bradford's resignation also marked his decision to leave the pastoral ministry and pursue a career in psychological counseling and teaching. Free Christian Church, he declared at the time, was in a "gradual process [of decline] leading to an eventual decision on

Free Church Resolves to Survive. Rev. Bradford suggested upon his departure in 1971 that Free Christian Church would soon close or merge with another church. That option was "completely ruled out," according to Moderator Fred Fitzgerald. There was "no sympathy at all with the idea of closing." Even so, church attendance dwindled even further through the next few years.

merging, closing, or some new type of structure” (*Andover Townsman*, April 22, 1971). Bradford’s resignation and comments triggered rumors about the future of the church, and people wondered whether Free Church might close. But not the people of Free Church itself, who “completely ruled out” that option. Instead, they observed the 125th anniversary of the church’s founding by forming a pulpit committee to find a new pastor.

It was also at this time that the church voted to withdraw from the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, retaining only a local association-level relationship with the UCC. The decision to leave the Mass. Conference came as a result of the theologically liberal drift of the UCC. These two events—Bradford’s resignation and withdrawal from the UCC—marked a major transition in the history of FCC that was reflected more broadly in the mainline Protestant church across America. The social turmoil and disillusion that followed the assassination of President John Kennedy, the divisions over the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the arms race and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the battles over desegregation, the doomed presidency of Richard Nixon following Watergate, all revealed a fundamental flaw in liberal Protestant theology’s belief in the gradual betterment of mankind. Clearly the world was not getting better. As American mainline Protestant denominations continued to move to the left, people began abandoning the church in droves. Mainline churches’ attendance and membership peaked in America in the 1960s and have been declining ever since. In the 50-year period from 1962 to 2012, the church membership of the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC—the church of the Pilgrims and the Puritans—declined by 66 percent.

Following Bradford’s departure, Free Christian Church made a move back to a more theologically conservative position with the call of Rev. Richard Balmforth. “Mr. Balmforth,” as he was known, had been a British Army chaplain in World War II and had since then served in the Salvation Army and as pastor of the Boothbay Harbor Congregational Church in Maine. He and his wife Doris were especially beloved by the older members of the congregation since they also were in their sixties. Mrs. Balmforth was renowned for the elegant and formal English teas that she hosted at the parsonage and at the church as a way to raise funds for the support of the church.

During the five years of Mr. Balmforth’s tenure (1971-1976), the church continued its precipitous decline as young families continued to leave in favor of churches that offered more effective



Rev. Jack L. Daniel, Pastor, 1977-2012. One of the first tasks Pastor Jack undertook was to visit every parishioner in their home. He soon became beloved by the seniors who comprised much of the congregation. This celebration honoring the oldest members (Jim and Margaret Edgar, Tom Gorrie and Isabella Neil) shows the contrast between the young pastor and his flock.

Sunday School and youth programs. This decline no doubt hastened the resignation and retirement to England of Mr. Balmforth.

1977-2004

So once again, in the fall of 1976, the pulpit of Free Christian Church became vacant, and again there was talk of the church closing its doors or merging with one of the other Congregational churches in Andover. It was during this time that the light of Free Christian Church was almost extinguished. How tragic it would have been if Free Church, unique in the history of America in its founding as an abolition church, had died. And no doubt it would have died except for a core of a few dozen committed, faithful, prayerful, godly families who believed that God wanted the church to survive. As they prayed and deliberated, they sensed the need to call a young pastor to reach a younger demographic. Further, they needed to call a more theologically conservative pastor to once again preach the clear word of God, which had been the message of the early pastors.

In January 1977, the pulpit committee received a resume sent simultaneously but separately by the United Church of Christ and by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. They believed this coincidence was a prompting from God. A phone call to the Reverend Jack L. Daniel in Westwood, MA, confirmed

that he was indeed looking for a call. He was serving as a youth pastor at the time, was married, and had been ordained by the Metropolitan Boston Association of the United Church of Christ in 1973. He was also a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and had attended Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. He was at that time enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Andover-Newton Theological School in Newton, MA, preparing for a career in pastoral counseling. He would subsequently receive his doctorate in 1978, but by then God had made it clear that his calling was not counseling, but preaching and pastoring the local church.

Over the previous six years, Rev. Daniel had built one of the largest youth ministries in New England in the town of Westwood. The Free Church pulpit committee especially noted this fact, believing that if the church was to survive, it had to reach younger people. In February Jack and Kathy Daniel met with the pulpit committee. The members—Ernie Kilman, May Reynolds, Robert and Connie Greenwood, Fran Reynolds, Helen Burnham, Herb Skinner, and Chairman Bob Van Der Zee—unanimously recommended that the church call Rev. Daniel as its next pastor. In March of 1977, he preached a candidating sermon and the congregation voted unanimously to call him as the nineteenth pastor of Free Christian Church.

Rev. Daniel's call at the age of 30 marked a significant step for the aging congregation. They fervently believed that God wanted to restore the church to full health under youthful pastoral leadership and biblical preaching. During the early years of Rev. Daniel's ministry, the older members willingly embraced change and younger families gradually began to attend. The nursery, which had been used for storage, was reopened and freshly painted in time to receive its only occupant, Susanna Daniel, born in the first year of her father's ministry.

Average Sunday morning attendance during those early years was around 80, with summer attendance about half that. The annual budget in 1977 was \$39,000; the pastor's salary was \$8,275, and a parsonage was provided. The church was facing a 25 percent deficit, but with prayer and generous giving the congregation ended that first year in the black.

Sometime during those early years, Rev. Daniel, now Dr. Daniel, received what he described as a clear message from God:

“If you honor me, I will pour out such blessing on Free Church that you will not be able to contain it.”

In the first ten years two more daughters, Abbie and Andrea, were born and brought home to the parsonage. The church experienced very slow growth, and many of the older members passed away—the church averaged 18 funerals a year. Through those early years, Rev. Daniel sought to preach a Christ-centered message, start small-group Bible studies, and support the youth and children’s ministries.

In 1987, as many new families began to enter the membership and take up leadership positions, conflict developed between a few long-time families and the newer, younger leaders. The conflict focused on Rev. Daniel’s leadership. One church member who was close to the disgruntled group but who also felt a deep loyalty to the pastor decided to inform the church leadership of a plan by the disaffected members to circulate a petition to remove the pastor. The Board of Deacons and Rev. Daniel were kept informed of developments in this plot. When the group realized that their plan was known and unlikely to succeed, they decided to leave. In all, eight members left and the church was set free to continue in the direction God was leading.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the church grew in numbers and spiritual maturity. Many new young leaders emerged to take the baton as older members retired or passed away. The church staff grew from the original part-time secretary, part-time organist/choir director, and part-time custodian to include a full-time associate pastor and part-time youth minister, children’s minister, music minister, and two secretaries. Attendance averaged over 200 and a second worship service was added largely because of crowding in the Sunday School. The style of worship also gradually changed from more traditional hymns to the formation of a worship band and praise choruses to better reflect the musical tastes of a younger generation.

The solid surge in attendance coincided with a year-long observance of the 150th anniversary of the founding, which featured monthly festivities, the publication of *The History of Free Christian Church*, and an original cantata—“Find Us Faithful”—and banquet on Founders’ Day 1996. To increase the impact of the anniversary milestone, the church raised over \$300,000, about twice the

150th Anniversary. Free Christian Church observed this milestone with a year-long celebration. Each event focused on the legacy of the forty-four founders and their remarkable courage and Christian conviction. There is confidence that the church will thrive as long as it embraces their vision of marrying the evangelical gospel message with a strong social conscience.



annual budget, to undertake a major renovation of the Sunday School and office area. This project was seen as an anniversary gift to the children of Free Christian Church, recognizing that children were the future of this and every church.

It was also in the 1990s that a significant change in church governance took place that enabled the church to function more cohesively and respond more quickly with the gospel message to the changing culture. A number of Congregational churches in the area, such as Byfield Parish Church and First Congregational Church of Hamilton, had moved from the cumbersome church council system to a more biblical and effective Board of Elders. Typically in a council structure of governance, every department in the church has equal representation in decision making regardless of whether or not they are strategic to the mission of the church. A natural tendency toward “turf wars” results as each representative fights for his own group’s special interests. The council system quickly became a bottleneck for the staff and lay leaders.

Inspired by these other churches, Free Christian Church began a year-long time of prayer and study of the Scripture, of Free Church history, and of the history of congregationalism. They found that elders were the New Testament form of government and that they were part of Protestant Reformed theology going back to John Calvin. The early New England congregational churches all had elders who provided general guidance, allowing the pastor to give day-to-day leadership, all under the governance of congregational meetings. Hence the church was “elder guided, pastor led, and congregation governed.” But by the nineteenth century most New England congregational churches had abandoned the elder system, perhaps because of the danger that lifetime elders could over time usurp congregational authority and pastoral leadership. The study also discovered that although Free Christian Church never had a system of elders, it did always have a “de facto” elder board. In the early days following its founding, FCC had a “standing committee” of deacons that included the pastor and senior deacons. This committee had such broad powers as proposing nominations, overseeing mission funds, forming pulpit committees, and setting the agenda for rest of the diaconate. After the year of study and discussion, the congregation voted on October 13, 1991, to revise the by-laws to elect a Board of Elders

who, along with the senior pastor, would oversee all of the fiscal and property matters as well as provide general spiritual oversight for the congregation and set the direction of the church under the visionary leadership of the pastor. The qualifications for eldership would be consistent with those outlined in I Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9, having to do with godly character, healthy relationships, and a knowledgeable faith.

Three important provisions were incorporated into the Board of Elders: First, each elder would be elected by the congregation to serve a three-year term without the possibility of succession except by a congregational vote. This provision guaranteed a “fresh supply” of elders and protected the church from a consolidation of power. Second, the senior pastor could not serve as the board chair, although the pastor would be an *ex officio* member with full voice and vote. Third, and most important, the board must be in full unanimous agreement on all votes. This provision was based on the belief that Jesus Christ, the head of His body, the church, would not lead some of the elders in one direction and others in a different direction. So if the elders disagreed about a particular decision, the belief was that the board had not fully discerned the will of God since Christ would not divide his Body. This unanimity provision prevented major conflict from taking place. The board was also limited to seven members including the pastor, ensuring that reaching unanimity would be fairly easy.

The elder structure of governance served FCC well over the years, allowing decisions to be made quickly and effectively even as the church grew larger and became much more complex. And it provided Rev. Daniel and the church staff the freedom to truly lead the church under the guidance of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

By 2000 the church had outgrown the available Sunday School space once again, leaving no room for youth or adult classes. Also, the style of worship that had evolved used a lot of individual singers and musicians who could no longer be accommodated by the physical structure and layout of the front of the sanctuary. In addition, the sanctuary was unbearably hot in the summer, drafty and chilly in the winter; the sound system was a patchwork of outmoded equipment; and the original colonial-style pews were brutally uncomfortable. It had been some 60 years since the sanctuary had last been remodeled—in



1941 following the fire. Further, the church had virtually no assembly space as all the open spaces except for the well-used basement hall had been converted to staff offices or Sunday School rooms. On Sunday mornings, coffee and fellowship took place in the crowded office area. So in the spring of 2000, Free Christian Church hired architect Dominic Sicari to design an adult education wing with an attractive gathering space where the church could welcome newcomers and have fellowship time. Plans included a major renovation of the sanctuary.

The sanctuary received new windows, pews, carpeting, air-conditioning, and a state of the art sound and projection system. The massive central pulpit was replaced with a platform and portable lectern and was moved closer to the congregation to reflect the more contemporary and informal worship style. A 2,600 sq. ft. cross-shaped assembly space with a 35-foot dome—the Rotunda—was constructed adjacent to the sanctuary in a neo-classical style in harmony with the existing building. Underneath, five large adult education rooms were built. The congregation raised a little over \$2 million to pay for the project. The sanctuary and Rotunda were dedicated in

Share the Light, 2000. As space limitations moved from serious to critical, the church launched Share the Light, a capital campaign to fund a major addition and renovation. As the Rotunda rose next to the sanctuary, the church recreated the 1907 photograph showing the original building under construction (see page 32).

November 2001. The fine oil portraits of the founders that had been given to the church by Andover-Newton Theological School in the 1960s (the Smiths and John Dove had also been benefactors of Andover Theological Seminary) now had a proper place for display in the Rotunda. This project was seen as a symbol of the spiritual growth and renewal that had taken place over the previous 20 years. The grand old church building was brought into the 21st century.

When Jack and Kathy Daniel arrived in 1977, the small group ministry of Free Christian Church consisted of a few active women's groups—the Woman's Union, the Flounders, the Ladies Sewing Circle, the Outgoers, the Women's Auxiliary of the Clan Johnson, and perhaps most impressive, the Margaret Slattery Class, which had begun in the 1920s and was still meeting in 1990. It was named for a well-known Boston social worker, Bible teacher, and author, who was a personal friend of the first teacher of the class.

Most of these “small groups” were composed of senior ladies who organized and led church fairs, rummage sales, bake sales, and bean suppers—and who in fact made up a large part of the congregation. The events they ran raised funds to help support the church, a necessary source of income since many members lived on small fixed incomes. They had little money to give but could convert their time and skills to serve the church in this way. These women were outstanding cooks and bakers and were skilled with sewing and knitting needles. Many still spoke with a Scottish brogue or Northern Irish lilt or strong British accent, having come to this country to work in the textile mills of Andover and Lawrence or to marry the men who did. They were the most pleasant, courageous, and devoted Christian women one could ever hope to know. In many ways it was these faithful, godly, hard-working women, often widowed, who held Free Church together through the lean years when its future was in doubt. They had lived through two world wars, the Great Depression, the loss of husbands and children, and their faith was forged in these furnaces. They fully supported the young pastor and his family and prayed that God would revive His church. Their sewing circles and other small groups were the glue that held FCC together during the early years of Rev. Daniel's leadership.



The Bell House, 1946 and 2012. Longtime Free Christian Church member Elizabeth May Shorten Bell donated her home at 40 Elm Street to the church in 1999 when she had to relocate to an assisted living facility. May Bell was devoted to children and was a tireless volunteer for church childcare. She practiced generous planned giving by allowing the church to use her home to minister to children and youth

As one by one they passed from this life, the nature of the small group ministry at Free Christian Church changed from service-oriented groups to Bible study and fellowship groups. The women of the younger generations who entered the church during the Daniels' ministry were either employed outside the home or busy caring for young children at home. There was little time to host suppers or organize fairs to support the church financially. Instead, pledged giving became the primary means of church support, and small groups became the main environment for studying and understanding the Bible, growing closer to God, and caring for one another. During the three-plus decades of their ministry, the Daniels formed and/or led dozens of small groups—for all different ages and demographics—including Alpha groups, HomeBuilders groups, inductive Bible study groups, leadership “turbo” groups, groups associated with all-church campaigns, Christian travel groups, and prayer groups. Small groups became the essential means by which people came into a personal relationship with Christ, grew in Christian discipleship, and bonded to one another and the church.

In the mid-1990s as the church was experiencing crowding, especially in the Sunday School and youth ministries but before the Rotunda project was conceived, Rev. Daniel approached a member of the congregation who owned a home diagonally opposite the church at 40 Elm Street about selling her home to the church. Mrs. Elizabeth May Bell had been born in that house and had lived there her entire life. Then in her eighties and still vigorous, she had hinted to “Dr. Daniel” that she would in the not-too-distant future put her home on the market and move into an assisted living facility. Rev. Daniel asked her to prayerfully consider giving the church the opportunity to buy it, and she agreed to consider it. Nothing more was said. Then two years later, in 1997, May unexpectedly informed the pastor that she

had decided to bequeath her house to the church upon her passing. May welcomed the idea of the church using her home for children and youth classes and ministry. She had long ago been married for only about three years when her husband, well-known Lawrence dentist Dr. James Bell, died. Though she never had children of her own, she loved children and often volunteered in the nursery and babysat for Bible study groups. Every Christmas Eve she served in the nursery so that parents could attend the worship services. She felt it was fitting for the church that her home be used for the benefit of the children of the church.

In November 1999 May Bell's health declined, forcing her to leave her home and enter Marland Place Assisted Living. She notified Rev. Daniel that she wanted the church to take immediate possession of the home, which it did. May passed away in April 2001 and the youth building at 40 Elm Street has been known as the Bell House ever since.

2004-Present

In the fall of 2004, two significant events in the history of Free Christian Church took place. The first was the purchase of the 19th-century Federalist-style house at 28 Elm Street, located directly across from the church. The owner, local attorney Joseph Wadland, was asking \$1.5 million for the property. The Board of Elders offered \$1 million, and a selling price of \$1.25 was agreed upon. This property was designated "general business zone," which along with its downtown Andover location and ample parking made it a valuable commercial asset for the church to own. Its close proximity to the church and ten good-sized rooms

The Parish House, 1946 and 2012. The office building at 28 Elm Street was purchased in 2004 partly so the congregation might serve the needs of people outside the church. Renovated in 2011, the Parish House has become not only office space for a growing staff and Sunday morning classroom space, but also the center for counseling, support groups, and other community-based ministries.



made it a valuable ministry asset. The vision of the congregation to make the purchase and give the building a dual purpose—for church programs on one hand and for community-based ministries on the other—reflected a confidence in God’s future for FCC.

The other event was the decision of the church in October 2004 to leave the Andover Association of the United Church of Christ after a 43-year relationship with the denomination. The decision came as a result of the United Church of Christ’s aggressive promotion of such issues as abortion on demand, same-sex marriage, radical feminist theology (goddess worship), and the quest for sources of authority other than the Bible (the UCC’s so-called “God is still speaking” campaign).

After a six-month period of study, the congregation voted unanimously in April 2005 to join the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, or “4 C’s.” This small (300 member churches) Protestant denomination was formed in 1948 as a reaction against the theological drift of the Congregational Christian Conference, or “3 C’s,” which was the antecedent to the UCC. Some in the congregation felt that the church should simply remain an independent church, but the strong sense of the elders was that Free Christian was part of the church universal, not a church unto itself, and that this should be reflected through an affiliation with a Christian denomination. At about the same time that Free Church left the UCC, several other prominent UCC churches north of Boston also left the denomination and joined the 4 C’s, including the First Congregational Church of Hamilton, the First Church of Essex, and the First Church of Wakefield. Since joining, Free Church’s pastors and staff have been active in the life of this new and growing denomination.

In the fall of 2004, some 900 people participated in an all-church small group campaign entitled “The Purpose Driven Life,” based on the book by Rick Warren. This campaign produced incremental growth in the number of small groups and leaders. In addition, the Alpha program became a regular ministry offering of the church, resulting in hundreds of people—including many previously unchurched individuals—coming to faith in Christ over the years. Sunday morning attendance around this time sometimes reached 1,000, including children.

The church's community involvement through partnering with dozens of local compassion ministries gave the church a reputation for being the "go to" church in the Merrimack Valley when there was a community need. By caring for the homeless, the widowed, the elderly, and the poor, Free Church once again became a "church for the sake of others." This was much in keeping with its founding vision, the social justice legacy of Rev. Allyn Bradford, and the words of our Lord in Matthew 25:40: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Vital worship, small group ministries, community service, effective evangelism, and solid lay and staff leadership—all under a prayerful, spirit-led sense of mission—enabled the church to reach the local community and also to reach the capacity of the facility on Elm Street. In 2005 the church began offering a third Sunday morning worship service as well as a video overflow service to accommodate the continued growth in membership and burgeoning attendance.

Tenebrae Service, Holy Week 2012. Rev. Daniel reintroduced the church to the richness of the Christian church year in worship. The church more fully observed Lent with Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday Tenebrae services and celebrated the four Sundays of Advent. Such liturgical worship had been minimized over the preceding decades. (Rev. Daniel is in the center and Rev. Paul at the far left.)



In the fall of 2005, the elders approached the owners of 35 Elm Street about the 17,000 sq. ft. vacant lot adjacent to the church building. The hope was to purchase and use the space both for additional parking and to expand the existing sanctuary. The church's offer of \$1 million (three times the appraised value) was rejected, and a firm counteroffer of \$2.5 million was put forward. Disappointed, the elders sensed that God had at that time closed the door to further expansion of the Elm Street facility. In the past the church had missed opportunities to

acquire this and other nearby real estate. In the 1950s, Free Church had a chance to purchase another property adjacent to the church (occupied at the time of this writing in 2012 by the telephone exchange building), but chose not to. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the church passed up offers to buy the 35 Elm Street property. Despite these missed opportunities, the church leadership continues to envision Free Church one day acquiring this property and other adjacent parcels as they become available in order to allow future growth at its strategic downtown Andover location.

With expansion onto nearby property not a viable option, the following year the church began a “Year of Discernment” to discover how God wanted Free Church to respond to the growth in numbers and commitment it was experiencing. Through the discernment process of prayer, scripture study, preaching, and listening to the members, the local community, and the Holy Spirit, the congregation was led to launch a second site of Free Christian Church in North Andover. North Andover was selected because about one-third of the congregation lived in either North Andover or Haverhill at the time, and North Andover was seen to lack a theologically conservative but socially active Protestant church.

Plans were made and a worship service and Sunday School were started in September 2009 at Osgood Landing, the site of the former Western Electric/Lucent plant on Route 125 in North Andover. The Reverend Jonathan Paul, who had been on staff since 2002, was named the first campus pastor of Free Christian Church, North Andover. The slogan “One Church, Two Locations” was chosen to signify the true multi-site nature of the new ministry, with one senior pastor, one staff, one Board of Elders, and one congregation, but two fully functioning facilities meeting the needs of families drawn from a large geographic area. The intention was to maintain the history and identity of Free Christian Church while projecting that history and identity into new areas where vital Christian ministry and presence were needed. To date, the North Andover site has prospered under the leadership of Rev. Jon Paul and the multi-site vision continues to unfold.

In the fall of 2010, Rev. Daniel, then in his 33rd year as senior pastor, approached the elders about putting in place a succession plan, anticipating that day when God would bring to a



The Free Church Parsonage. The house at 14 High Street was built in 1928 by Henry W. Barnard as a wedding gift for his son Foster and daughter-in-law. At the time, the senior Barnards lived in the first house on High Street, now Enterprise Bank, and their other son and daughter lived at 12 and 16 High. Foster Barnard eventually moved and #14 was sold around 1950 to the Free Church for use as a parsonage. Occupants have been the Revs. Levering Reynolds, Horace Seldon, J. Allyn Bradford, Richaard Balmforth, Jack Daniel, and Jon Paul.

close his long ministry. A plan was developed but little did anyone realize that it would be needed sooner rather than later. Rev. Daniel had been approached by a small church in Maine—near the Daniels’ vacation home—about becoming its part-time pastor whenever he stepped down from full-time ministry. The timing didn’t seem right and the overture was turned down. A year

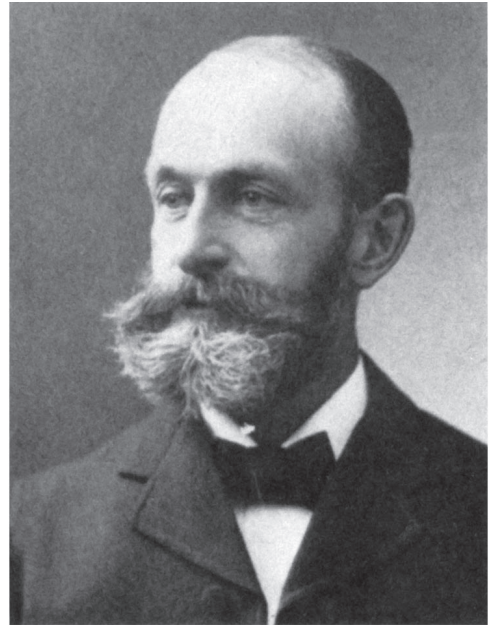
later, in late spring 2011, that church again approached the Daniels and again the invitation was declined. However, a few days later, Rev. Daniel sensed God instructing him that this time he should say Yes, that after 35 years God was bringing to a close his tenure at Free Christian Church. In the fall of 2011 Jack Daniel informed the elders that he would step down as pastor in mid-2012 and relocate to Richmond, Maine.

The elders’ succession plan was built around a commitment to seek first an internal candidate to replace Rev. Daniel as senior pastor. This decision was based on a belief that a qualified internal candidate was a more natural and Biblical approach and would provide the seamless continuity the church needed during transition. Rev. Jon Paul was that candidate. The elders agreed unanimously to approach Pastor Jon about becoming senior pastor of Free Christian Church, a choice endorsed wholeheartedly by Rev. Daniel. Following a period of prayer and discussion with his wife Clancey as well as with trusted colleagues and advisors, Jon Paul enthusiastically agreed to have his name put forward. On April 29, 2012, at the 165th Annual Meeting, one of the largest in Free Church history, the church was presented with a rare opportunity to call a candidate from within, who had come up “through the ranks.” The congregation unanimously called the Reverend Jonathan Paul as the twentieth pastor of Free Christian Church.

During Rev. Dr. Jack Daniel’s long ministry, Free Christian Church gradually returned to its founding vision of being a church firmly rooted in biblical theology but reaching out to a needy world with the life-transforming love of Christ. This dual mission of biblical orthodoxy and compassionate ministry is the true vision upon which Jesus Christ continues to build his church.

Pastors of Free Christian Church, 1846-2012

The original pulpit committee of Free Christian Church consisted of John Smith, Ephraim Everson, and Joseph Abbott. On November 29, 1845, they were chosen by ballot "for the purpose of procuring a minister." "They found Rev. Elijah C. Winchester, fresh from Oberlin, a consecrated man, an indefatigable worker who soon wore himself out and was never able to preach again"!



Rev. Elijah C. Winchester, first pastor of Free Christian Church (1846-1848). "An unrelenting foe to evil, a Christian of stalwart convictions, he was so devoted a follower of Jesus that he resembled more the winsome, gentle Elisha than the stern and fiery Elijah whose name he bore. His ministry was a fruitful one, though so overburdened that he dropped it exhausted."

Elijah C. Winchester	1846-1848	(2 yrs.)
Sherlock Bristol	1848-1849	(1 yr.)
William B. Brown	1850-1855	(5 yrs.)
Caleb E. Fisher	1855-1859	(4 yrs.)
Stephen C. Leonard	1859-1865	(6 yrs.)
James P. Lane	1866-1870	(4 yrs.)
Edwin S. Williams	1870-1872	(2 yrs.)
G. Frederick Wright	1872-1881	(9 yrs.)
F. Barrows Makepiece	1881-1889	(8 yrs.)
Frederick A. Wilson	1889-1919	(30 yrs.)
Pastor Emeritus	1919-1936	(17 yrs.)
Arthur S. Wheelock	1920-1924	(4 yrs.)
Alfred C. Church	1925-1937	(12 yrs.)
Herman C. Johnson	1937-1943	(6 yrs.)
Frank Dunn	1943-1945	(2 yrs.)
Levering Reynolds	1945-1957	(12 yrs.)
Horace Seldon	1957-1959	(2 yrs.)
J. Allyn Bradford	1959-1971	(12 yrs.)
Richard B. Balmforth	1971-1976	(5 yrs.)
Jack L. Daniel	1977-2012	(35 yrs.)
Jonathan Paul	2012-	

