

# Expansion of Choices for Worship in Old Dartmouth (end of the eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth centuries)

Dartmouth Historical and Arts Society

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# William Allen Wall – portrays a calm seacoast life



# Not all was calm in the colonists' spiritual life

- **Begin with a review of the eighteenth century**
- 1723-24 – First Civil Rights Case in the Colonies
- October, 1723, Philip Tabor, a Baptist minister and John Akin, Joseph Anthony and John Sisson—all three members of the Society of Friends—were assessors and refused to collect the taxes imposed by the General Court of Massachusetts for the maintenance of ministers of the state sponsored church (now known as Congregational). For this they were all imprisoned.

# King George I decided in favor of the Quakers and Baptists

- The assessors petitioned King George.
- King George remitted the taxes that had been assessed to pay for the town ministers.
- He ordered that the assessors be immediately released from imprisonment.
- So far , So good. Variety of Choices for Worship
- Source: Leonard Bolles Ellis, The History of New Bedford and Its Vicinity

# In Old Dartmouth

- If you lived in here in Russells Mills, your choices for worship were:
- Apponegansett Meeting House (Quaker) - .8 mi
- Baptist Church, Tiverton – 9.5 mi
- Head of the River Precinct Church (state church – or Congregationalist) – 11 mi

# Isaac Backus

- **Need to know him**
- Very influential in the religion of Old Dartmouth (and indeed entire U.S.)
- Amazing such an important person lived so close to us. Middleboro Library has a collection of his writings in rare book room



# Elizabeth Backus was Isaac's mother

- Elizabeth Backus - woman of wealth and importance
- She and her husband had joined a congregational church
- She had raised her children with constant admonition to follow God's ways.
- Elizabeth's husband died from the measles in 1740, leaving her financially secure but in sole care of 11 children, including one only six weeks old.
- Why had God stricken her with more than she could bear?
- The First Great Awakening (1730s) restored her hope.
- After that occasion, she became one of the most fervent of the revival enthusiasts, and her home became a center for prayer meetings and religious exhorting.
- Due partially to his mother's faith, Isaac Backus also gave his life to Christ, finding new hope.
- Backus became a Baptist in 1751 when he became [pastor](#) of the Middleborough Baptist Church in [Middleborough, Massachusetts](#).
- He became the leading spokesman for the fastest growing religious group in 18th century America.

# Isaac Backus

- 1764, Isaac Backus joined [John Brown](#), [Nicholas Brown](#) (brothers of Quaker Moses Brown), and several others as an original trustee for the chartering of the [College in the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations](#) (the original name for [Brown University](#)), the first Baptist school of higher learning.



# King George I ruling not honored

- 1774 - in Northampton, Massachusetts, eighteen Baptists were jailed. Their crime? Refusing to pay taxes for the support of the town's Congregational minister.
- Discrimination also in Virginia where Anglicanism was established church
- Also in 1774, down South in Virginia, James Madison declared, "That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some. . . . There are at this time in the adjacent county not less than five or six well-meaning men in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which in the main are very orthodox. . . . So I must beg you to . . . pray for liberty of conscience for all."
- James Madison disagreed with jailing those who were not Anglican

# Outline of Baptist Persecution in Colonial America

- **Let's Review**
- **IV. The Baptist Fight for Religious Liberty in Virginia: A Timeline**
  - A. 1770 – Baptists presented petitions for the removal of restrictions placed on them
  - B. 1775 – Baptists presented petitions calling for the abolishment of the established church; one petition garnered 10,000 signatures, including Presbyterians and some Anglicans
- **Baptists gained some freedom**
  - C. 1776 – VA disestablished Church of England; dissenters exempted from attending church and paying taxes to the Church, and allowed to publicly voice their religious sentiments but no separation of church and state; Baptists were still not happy, and were yet persecuted
  - D. 1777 – Jefferson wrote a “Bill for Religious Freedom” declaring that “no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever”; no immediate action was taken (Jefferson departed for Paris, leaving James Madison to champion the bill)

# Baptist Timeline Continued

- E. 1778-1786 – Baptists continued to insist on full religious liberty and separation of church and state; **John Leland, a Massachusetts transplant**, was a popular minister who supported Jefferson's religious freedom bill and led the Baptist agitation for separation of church and state; during this time, a number of denominations were willing to compromise by decreeing a general religious tax; the Baptists refused
- F. 1786 – VA established Religious Freedom; Baptists complained that the proposed new federal constitution did not make sufficient provision for religious liberty

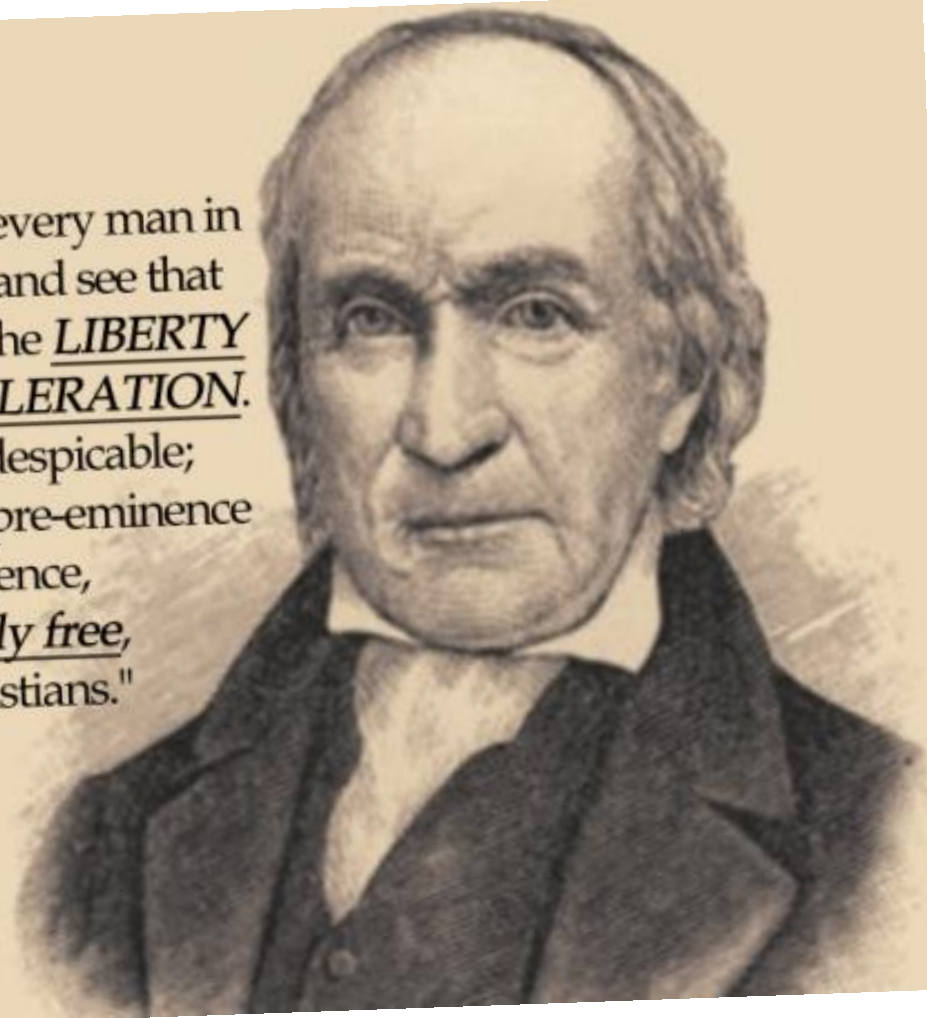
# John Leland

- Raised in New England, Leland traveled to Virginia in 1775 to spread the Baptist message just as tensions between the established Anglican Church and the Baptists were mounting. Leland believed that church and state must be separate for individuals to be free to follow their conscience in matters of religion. Leland became a key player in the so-called [Virginia experience](#), where he found strong allies in [James Madison](#) and [Thomas Jefferson](#). It was an unlikely alliance.
- Leland was a fervent evangelical intent on spreading the "Good News" of the Gospel. Leland was convinced that the church must be protected from interference and incursions of the state;
- Madison and Jefferson shared a passionate belief in religious liberty. Jefferson believed that it was the state that needed protection from overzealous clergymen and organized religious groups.

"Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The LIBERTY I contend for is more than TOLERATION. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence, whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians."

~John Leland

"A Chronicle of His Time in Virginia,"  
The Writings of the Later Elder John Leland,  
published in 1845



# Constitution of the United States and Needed to be Ratified

- The **Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom** is a statement about both **freedom** of conscience and the principle of separation of church and state. Written by Thomas Jefferson and passed by the **Virginia** General Assembly on January 16, 1786, it is the forerunner of the first amendment protections for **religious freedom**.
- U.S. Constitution completed on September 17, 1787 – No Bill of Rights
- February, 1988, Massachusetts ratified Constitution. Its example ensured that the Constitution would be speedily adopted by most of the states that had not already done so. **HOW DID IT HAPPEN? BECAUSE OF DARTMOUTH PASTOR OF THE PRECINCT CHURCH, SAMUEL WEST**

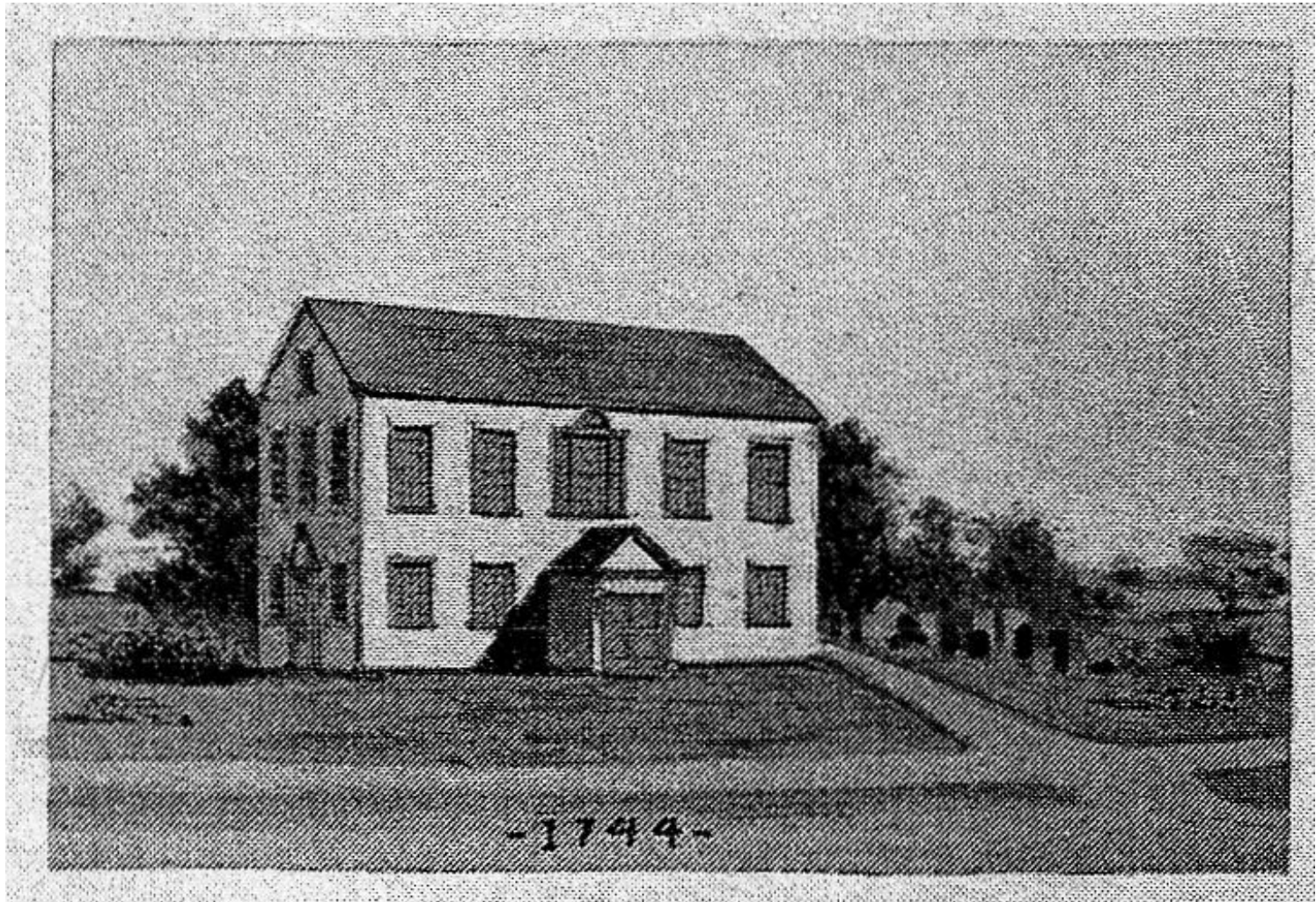


Meanwhile, back in Old Dartmouth



# Third Meetinghouse of Precinct Church

at head of the Acushnet River – Samuel West Pastor











Grave of Lt. Metcalf, killed in the Battle of New Bedford, September 1778

# Samuel West

West's greatest service to the nation came as the delegate to the 1788 Massachusetts convention to ratify the new federal Constitution.

Governor John Hancock was in the chair. Much of the debate revolved around the draft Constitution's failure to provide sufficient protection for the rights of the states, deal adequately with questions of congressional representation and taxation, and make explicit provision for individual liberties. West spoke out. Backus was the delegate from Middleboro. Vigorous debate continued, as the convention was nearly evenly divided.

<http://uudb.org/articles/samuelwest.html>

# West was a Harvard classmate of Governor John Hancock

At the height of discussion, Governor Hancock withdrew, claiming to be suffering from an attack of gout. Without Hancock's support there would be no ratification. West was selected to visit the governor in order to persuade him to return and to present the amendments. "Heaven, West said, had given Hancock another glorious opportunity by saving his country to win imperishable honor to him self. The whole people would follow his footsteps with blessings."

Having listened to his friend West, Hancock had himself carried by servants, "wrapped in his flannels," to the chair of the convention. In his speech he did recommend the conciliatory amendments (some of which later became the basis for the Bill of Rights) and declared, "I give my assent to the Constitution, in full confidence that the amendments proposed will soon become a part of the system." A week later the Constitution was narrowly ratified.



# Massachusetts Compromise

- Through a compromise, better known as the “Massachusetts Compromise” (and supposedly with back door promises to Hancock about his potential future as a Vice-President or President of the U.S.), Hancock was miraculously cured of his gout. With the help of Samuel Adams, Hancock convinced the Massachusetts delegates that a “bill of rights” would be added following the ratification of the new Constitution.
- While this “compromise” was a victory for the Anti-Federalists, it also allowed the Federalists to gain the necessary number of states needed for the ratification of the Constitution. In July of 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth State to ratify the Constitution.

# Baptist Timeline (cont.)

- **V. The Baptist Fight for Religious Liberty on the National Level**
- A. 1787 – John Leland rallied Baptist support behind James Madison's candidacy for the Virginia Convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution in turn for Madison's promise to pursue a federal religious liberty amendment

In keeping with its promise of compromise, the first Constitutional Congress submitted twelve amendments for ratification by the states. (1789 – 1791)

## First amendment

- Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof
- Leland became a pivotal supporter of James Madison and helped win Baptist support for Madison's election to the First Congress, where Madison drafted what would become the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.
-

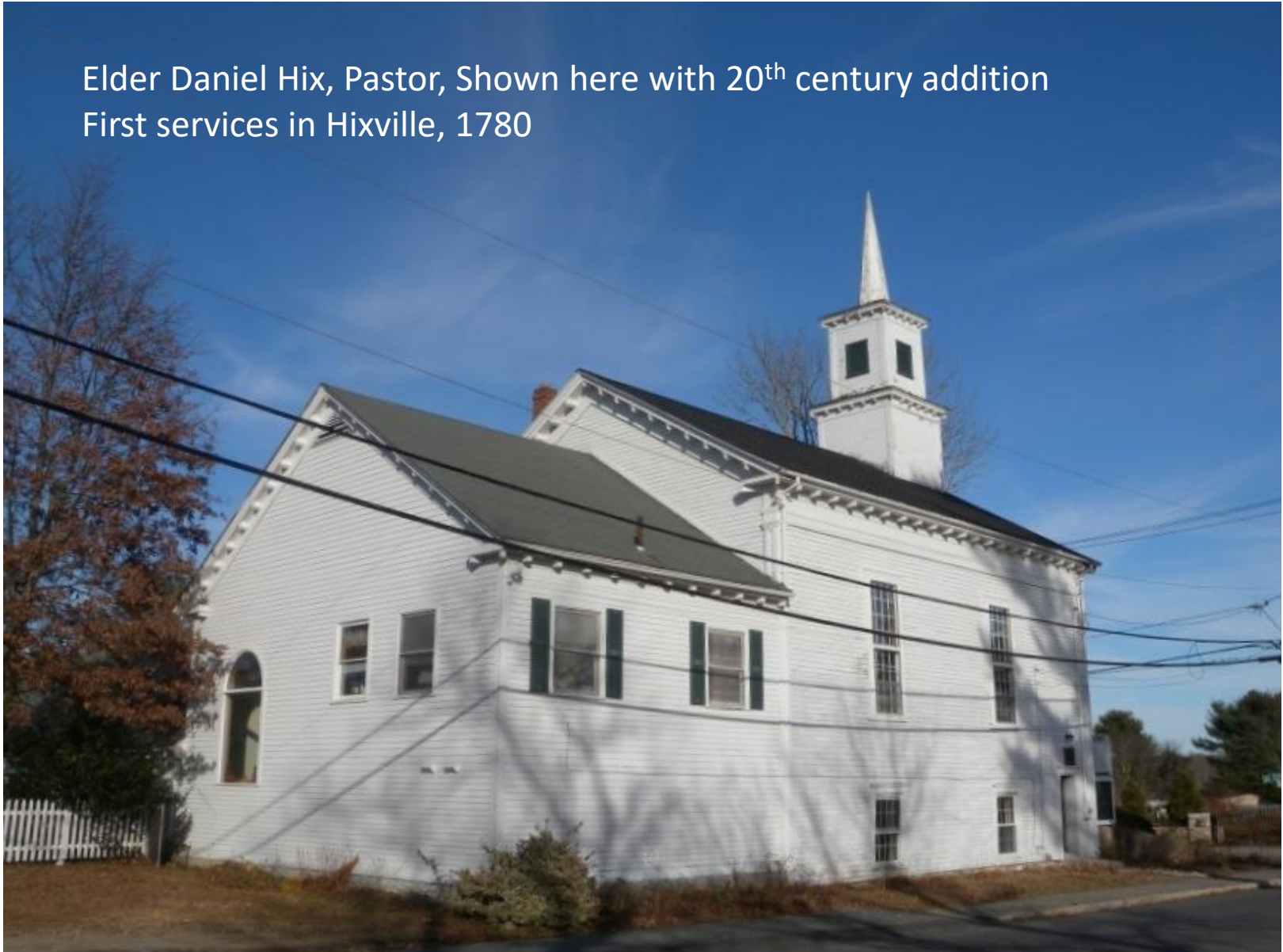
# First Amendment

- Backus also supported the First Amendment as proposed by James Madison. Backus saw the First Amendment as an extremely positive step for America, believing that it would ensure a freedom for true religion. The First Amendment, overwhelmingly supported by the Baptists, prevented a national church from being formed but left the individual states alone to decide for themselves.
- <http://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/isaac-backus-a-force-behind-the-first-amendment/>
- On **June 8, 1789**, James Madison introduced his proposed amendments to the Constitution, which would eventually become known as the Bill of Rights.



# First Church of Hixville (Baptist)

Elder Daniel Hix, Pastor, Shown here with 20<sup>th</sup> century addition  
First services in Hixville, 1780



# Isaac Backus

- Meanwhile
- The thrust of his argument was that the Massachusetts tax exemptions granted to certain denominations violated the law of God, because the government had assumed the right to determine those denominations it would tolerate and at what price and those entitled to exemptions
- <https://mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1158/isaac-backus>

# John Leland

- In 1791, Leland moved back to New England, where the Congregational Church still maintained its place as the established, preferred church in both Massachusetts and Connecticut. Leland fought to end religious establishment in both states and saw Connecticut end establishment in 1818 and, finally, **at long last**, in Massachusetts in 1833.

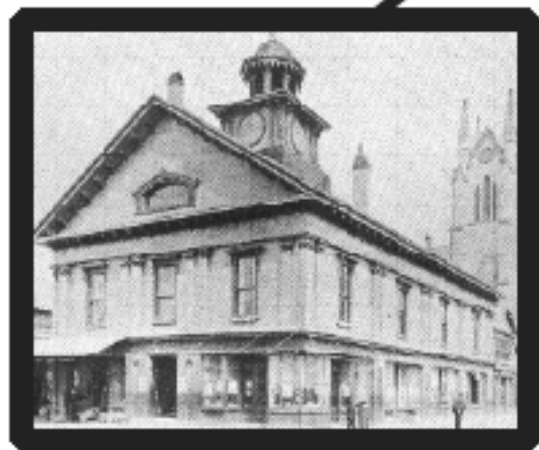
# Precinct Meeting House Head-of-the-River

where the Acushnet Cemetery is on Main Street in Acushnet



1696

1  
7  
9  
4



**Second Precinct Meeting House**  
corner of Main and Centre Sts.  
east side of the Acushnet River  
(now Fairhaven)



**Bedford Village**  
**Precinct Meeting House**  
corner of Purchase and William Sts.  
west side of the Acushnet River

1  
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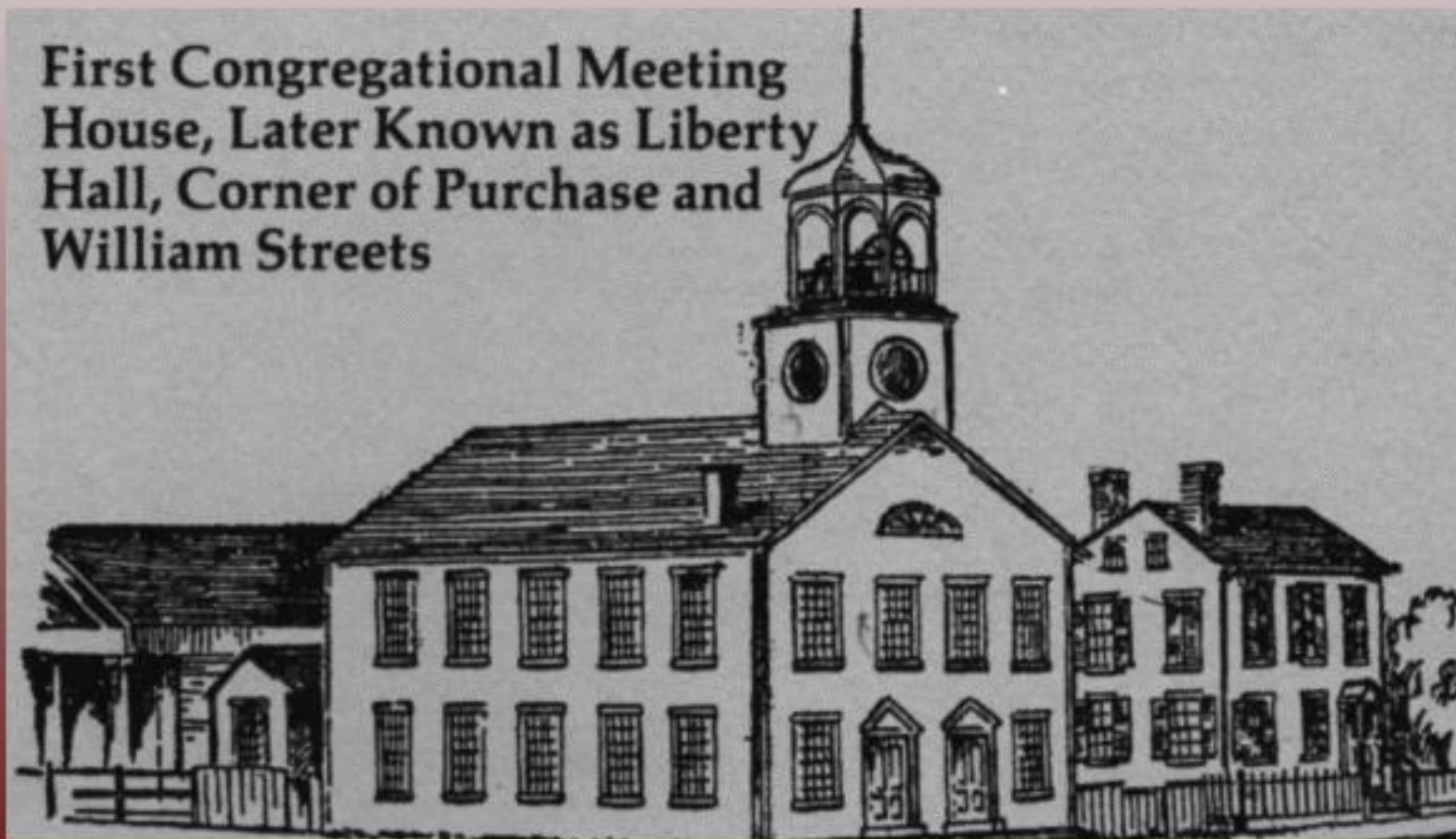
First Congregational Meeting House, Fairhaven, Photo by Michelle Medeiros

# Pastor West preached every other Sunday

- Folks walked from what is now Fairhaven to Acushnet every other week. They carried their shoes. They sat down and put on their “Sunday-go-to-meeting” shoes at a spot called Shoeing Rock (on South Main Street exact location unknown)

# Bedford Village Church

First Congregational Meeting  
House, Later Known as Liberty  
Hall, Corner of Purchase and  
William Streets



1795

# New Friends Meeting Houses

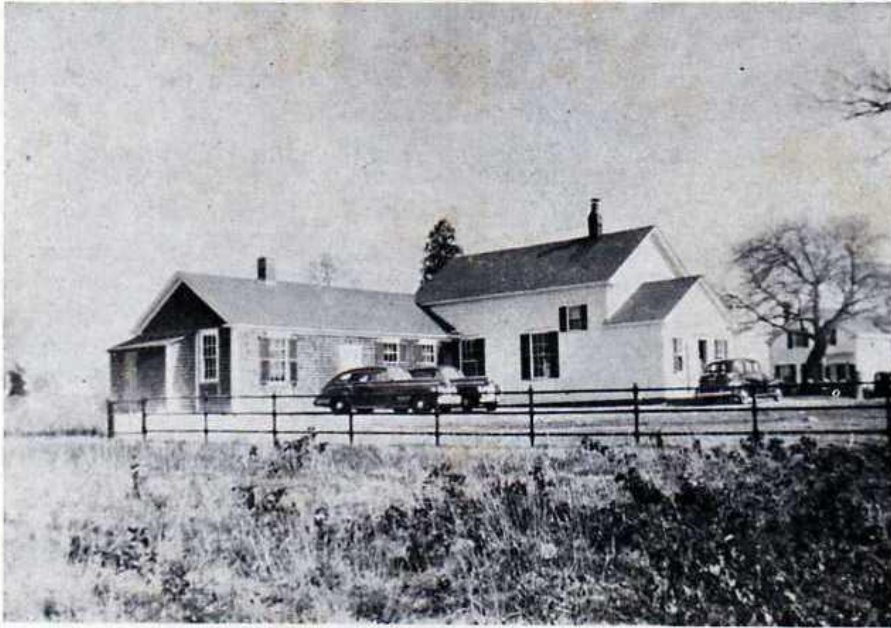
- In the 12th month, 1792, New Bedford monthly meeting was set off with 204 members. In the seventh month, 1813, a preparative meeting was created at Allen's Neck, known as the "west preparative meeting." By the year 1817 a meeting house had been built there, and one at Smith's neck by 1819. In 1829 the west and south preparative meetings were united and a new meeting house completed early in the year at Newtown, which was occupied for 60 years and then removed.



# New Bedford



# Smith Neck Friends - 1947 photo

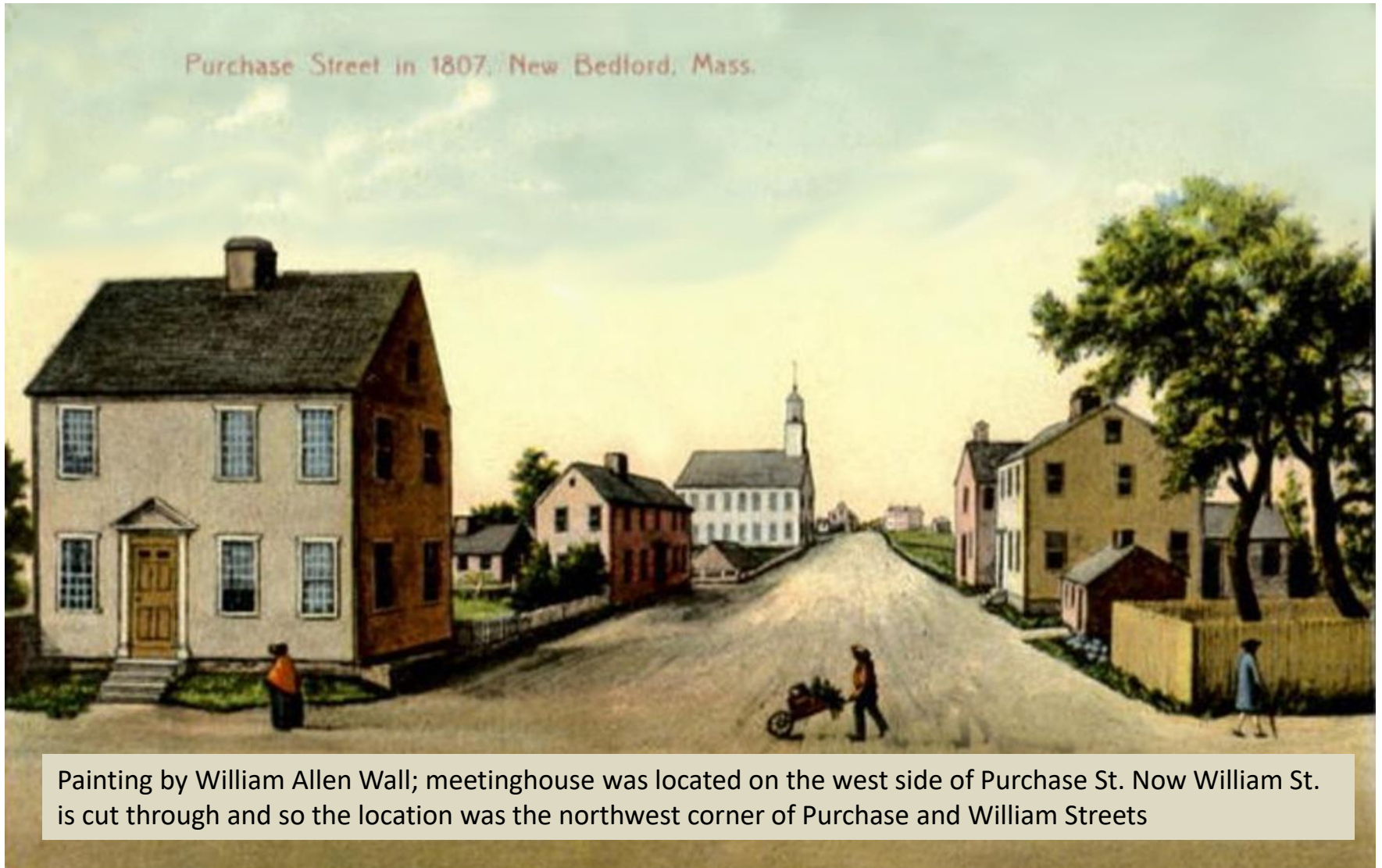


SMITH'S NECK FRIEND'S ANNIVERSARY  
of the PASSING of the DEED (1822-1947)

- On December 26, 1822, Caleb Anthony deeded a parcel of ground to the Smith Neck Friends at the corner of Smith Neck Road and Rock O'Dundee Road. A Meetinghouse was erected and regular meetings have been held since October 1819. The building formerly had two doors, one for women and one for men who sat on different sides of the meeting with shutters between as was the custom in those days. Then it was remodeled, turned around, and a vestibule added with one entrance at the front.

# New Bedford Precinct – 1807

when the waterfront area was settled, the General Court established the New Bedford Precinct Church



# Unitarian Controversy

In 1807, the pulpit committee was primarily composed of those with Unitarian beliefs. They chose a like-minded minister.

The Trinitarians broke away and built a church just north in 1810

The Unitarians remained at the Third Precinct (Bedford Village meeting house)



1  
8  
1  
0



**North  
Congregational  
Church  
founded  
from  
Third  
Congregational  
Church**

located  
corner of  
Purchase  
and Elm Sts.

# Allen's Neck Friends Meetinghouse – 1817





# Westport Friends Meetinghouse - 1831



# Second Great Awakening

- The second Great Awakening was a Protestant religious revival from 1790 – 1820.
- Many churches began in the Old Dartmouth communities.



# Baptist timeline conclusion

- C. 1791 – The “Bill of Rights” Ratified, with Religious Liberty clause
- D. 1833 – Massachusetts becomes the final state to grant full religious liberty
- <http://www.brucegourley.com/baptists/persecutionoutline.htm>

# Long Plain Baptist

Thursday, Aug. 8, 1795, "A Public Meeting for Building A Baptist Meeting Houfe on the Long Plain" was held at the residence of Deacon Silas Sweet. Deacon Sweet and Elder Hix were appointed a committee to "select a lot of land."

The lot was on the west side of the road at the end of the Rochester road, and in 1796 Joseph Samson conveyed this tract of "eight rods square to Joseph Pierce, Amos Bradley, Jesse Keen and others Proprietors, \* \*



105 NORTH  
LAKEVILLE  
MIDDLEBORO  
→

←  
ACUSHNET

ACUSHNET  
NOTICE  
ALL BECAME  
NEW LOCATION  
ACUSHNET  
REMOVING BRIDGE  
AND MIDDLEBORO

PLEASE  
DO NOT  
BLOCK  
DRIVE  
WAY



# ✧ Leland Preached at Long Plain Baptist

- An ardent supporter of Thomas Jefferson, Leland became famous for his media-savvy strategy to signal the Baptists' support of the newly elected president in 1801: the gift of a giant wheel of cheese.
- Reportedly made from the milk of 900 Republican cows, the cheese measured 4 feet in diameter, 13 feet in circumference, and weighed 1,235 pounds.
- Emblazoned on its red crust was Jefferson's favorite motto: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." As the giant cheese made the monthlong journey from western Massachusetts to Washington, D. C., pundits lampooned, ridiculed and celebrated the "mammoth cheese." On Jan. 1, 1802, Jefferson welcomed Leland and his flamboyant gift into White House. Two days later, Leland delivered the Sunday sermon in the House of Representatives, with the president in attendance.
- Refer to Howland, History of the Town of Acushnet





# Congregational Church in the Village

- The first church erected in the Padanaram village was the Congregational, now standing on the hill, and was organized in 1807, and the building built between 1816 and 1821.
- "In the spring of 1807 the church was organized by the Rev. Curtis Coe, the Rev. Mace Sheperd and the Rev. Isaiah Weston, with the following members: David Thatcher, Joel Parker, Laban Thatcher, Harmony Packard, Betsey Howes, Phebe Nickerson and Mehitable Kelley.
- "Joseph Packard was chosen deacon and David Thatcher scribe. Rev. Curtis Coe during the next six months received 16 members, when in October the Rev. Daniel Emerson of Hollis, N.H., was ordained the first pastor. He was a graduate of Harvard University in the class of 1794, and for a time studied in the law department, but left to engage in a successful mercantile business. After his conversion he abandoned his flattering worldly prospects for the gospel ministry, and was called to the pastoral office here, the first and the last which he filled. He died Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>, 1808. The impression made by his brief pastoral work is indicated by the strikingly beautiful epitaph upon his plain headstone in the cemetery, the only one there of a pastor of this parish."
- It reads:
- "His disposition was singularly mild,  
His deportment lovely, his judgment  
Sound, his labors assiduous, his death  
Triumphant "

Padanaram  
Church  
Built  
1816-1821



# First Christian, Middle Street – 1807





# African Christian Society

1  
8  
2  
6



located where  
Carney Academy now stands

founded  
from  
North Christian  
church

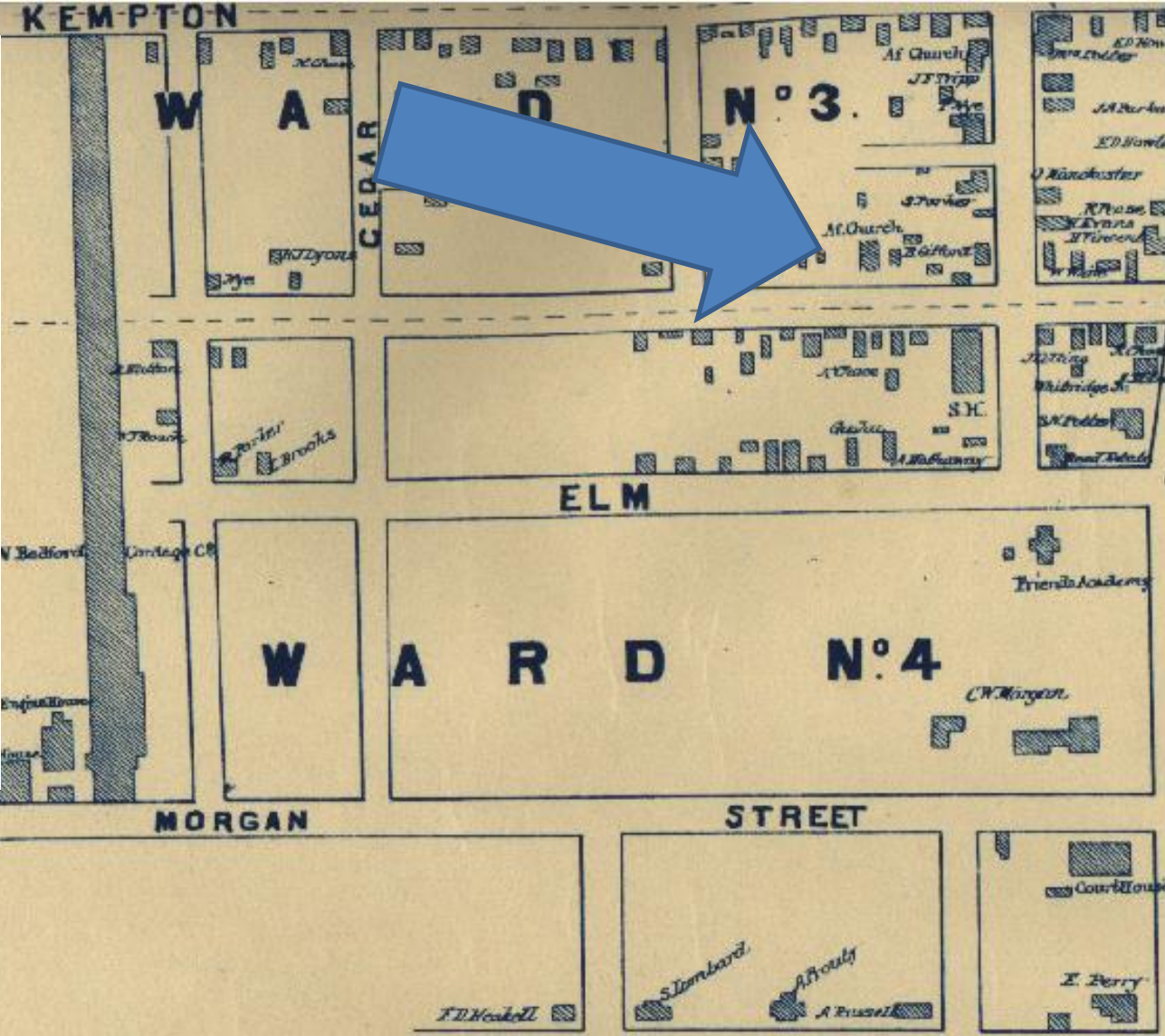
located  
on  
Middle  
Street



about the center  
of the north building

Meeting house  
built in 1830

African Christian  
Society  
Middle Street  
between  
Summer and  
Cottage Sts. –  
site of Sgt.  
Carney Academy



Standard  
A Body  
A Prusack



# African Christian Church

- In 1826 the First Christian Church, lost most of its colored members through the organization of the African Christian Society located on Middle Street between Summer and Cottage Streets.
- Sally Antone, Wampanoag from Dartmouth who with her husband, Joseph Antone, Cape Verdean were members of First Christian Church. They were constituting members of the African Christian Society together with John Christopher, N. Anderson, Moses Sheppard, Samuel Wilson, Charles R. Cook, Samuel Richards, Ruth Johnson, Dinah Farmer, Rebecca Bailey, Margaret Sheperd, Catharine Dixon, Jane Fute, Avis Williams, Charlotte Cook, and Abby Christopher.

# 1828 Precinct Church reconstituted

- 1802 Pastor West resigned
- Church went into decline
- In 1828 the three living members began holding worship services again.
- Pastor Sylvester Holmes led the Holy Communion worship at the first service in 1828

# Recorded Friends female ministers

- 1784 - Martha Gifford
- 1817 - Tabitha Gifford
- 1830 - Hannah Slade
- 1831 - Mary Davis
- minutes of the acknowledgement of a gift in the ministry

# “Aunt” Mary Hix

Said Elder Hix: 'In my younger days I used to travel considerably, and as we had no children Mary used to keep a horse and travel with me.' Mary was aunt to the whole community of Hixville..