



PULPIT AND SOUNDING BOARD, ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE,
AMESBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

Photograph, 1936, courtesy of H. A. B. S.

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The West Parish of Salisbury, Massachusetts and the Rocky Hill Meetinghouse

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THE Rocky Hill Meetinghouse, now in Amesbury, Massachusetts, was until recent years in Salisbury, an adjoining town; during the greater part of its existence it was the home of the West Parish of Salisbury. All of the present town of Amesbury originally was part of Salisbury, but the Rocky Hill district was not annexed to Amesbury until 1886.

Rocky Hill is a ledgy slope where a plain drops to a lower level; outcroppings of the ledge are much in evidence around the meetinghouse. Elm Street, the main highway from Amesbury to Salisbury, passes in front of the meetinghouse while directly across Elm Street Rocky Hill Road, the oldest road in the vicinity, leads from Elm Street to the Point Shore and the Merrimac River half a mile to the south. Half a mile to the east, toward Salisbury, is the Salisbury-Amesbury town line, while little more than two miles to

the west lies the center of the town of Amesbury, formerly known as the Mills Village or more often as the Mills.

The most important part of the neighborhood now is the Point Shore, the northerly shore of the Merrimac River. Before 1792 this was an isolated bit of territory along the river, cut off from approach by land except by the one road which leaves Elm Street opposite the meetinghouse. About a mile from the Rocky Hill Meetinghouse, as the roads now are, the Powow River flows into the Merrimac from the north, having passed through the center of Amesbury flowing underground through the busiest part of the Mills Village where the mill buildings of a century ago are closely built on either side of the river. Below the mills the river comes to tidewater and then through marshland winds a devious way to the greater river below. In one place it flows west a half mile along a ridge north of the Merrimac, parallel with that river and only a few hundred yards distant from it, before the Powow turns sharply

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to the south and becomes part of it. This long finger of land with the Merrimac on the south and the Powow on the north and west in the early days could be reached only by the Rocky Hill Road, located on the Point Shore at the first place where the long bend of the Powow to the east can be passed by foot travel. Here, in the early eighteenth century was lo-

he traveled this route, and in the space around the meetinghouse and the parsonage, across the Portsmouth Road, the people of Salisbury assembled to do him honor.

The Point Shore remained cut off from intercourse with the surrounding neighborhood, except by water or an inconvenient roundabout passage by land,



ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE, NORTH AND EAST ELEVATIONS

Photograph, 1936, courtesy of H. A. B. S.

cated the Rocky Hill Road; on the river end of the road a settlement was located devoted to shipbuilding. In time, a ferry from Newburyport landed passengers on the Point Shore near the road on their way to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and the road, as it crossed Elm Street and passed the meetinghouse, became the Portsmouth Road.

When Washington came to New England in 1789 and went to Portsmouth to visit his former secretary, Tobias Lear,

until after the Rocky Hill Meetinghouse was built in 1785. Then, in 1792, the first bridges were built across the Merrimac River at Deer Island where the Chain Bridge is today.¹ These bridges were followed immediately by the building of a bridge across the Powow River, on the westerly end of the Point Shore, and the laying out of a highway along the entire length of the shore connecting the Powow River Bridge with the two

¹ Currier, *History of Newbury*, p. 277.

bridges below. This gave a direct path for travel from Newburyport to Amesbury, the Merrimac Valley and southern New Hampshire. The Point Shore became a through route. Business moved to the Mills Village, the steam railroad came to town, and shipbuilding gradually ceased. Both Rocky Hill and the Point Shore became residential communities. The Rocky Hill Meetinghouse decreased in importance as an institution as the population from which it could draw dwindled, and new churches were so situated that they could give more convenient service. Two churches on the Point Shore, one started in 1827 and the other in 1835, made it unnecessary for the people of that locality to travel back into the country to attend the older meetinghouse and thus Rocky Hill slowly but steadily lost its congregation.

FIRST ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

For the story of church and parish, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the town of Salisbury. The town was authorized in 1638, settlement was begun in 1639, and was actively carried on in 1640. The settlement was a Puritan settlement carried out by men and women of that faith and mode of worship.² This was a matter of importance then for the Massachusetts Bay Colony Charter defined the northern boundary line of the Massachusetts Colony as three miles north of the Merrimac River. To make itself as secure as possible, Massachusetts in the same year that it authorized the settlement of Salisbury authorized the settlement of Hampton, still farther north of the Merrimac. Thus began a contest over the proper location of

the Massachusetts-New Hampshire state line which was not settled until just after 1900.³

When the first settlers located at Salisbury they settled in the vicinity of what is now Salisbury Square where as early as 1640 they built a meetinghouse. Religious worship was then a municipal matter supported by general taxation with regular attendance at meeting obligatory; failure to attend without a good reason was a criminal offense. There are many instances in the early court records of prosecutions for such violations of the law.

As the settlers went farther and deeper into the interior the burden of returning each Sunday to the settlement at Salisbury for worship grew greater and heavier. Salisbury then extended to Hampton and Exeter on the north and to Haverhill on the west. Settlers in the outlying districts soon began to insist upon church opportunities nearer their homes. The early town meeting records contain many accounts of controversies on this subject and of bitter, long, continuing contests.

At that period the unit of church worship was the parish. A small town was a parish in itself, but a larger town might contain two or more parishes. Only the legislature, the General Court, could create a parish; every attempt to secure such legislative action was bitterly resisted by the existing parishes because each new parish meant a loss of income to the old body, the members of the new parishes paying their church rates to the new organization instead of to the old. These controversies often ran for years and petitions were addressed to one legislative

² Charter of Massachusetts Bay Colony, March 4, 1628-1629. Belknap's *New Hampshire*, pp. 20, 21.

³ Joseph Dow, *History of Hampton, New Hampshire* (Salem, Mass., 1893), Vol. I, 6, 7, 22, 23. *Massachusetts Acts of 1899*, c. 334; *Laws of New Hampshire 1901*, c. 115.

session after another, often without success. In Newburyport alone there were two fiercely fought battles of this nature, each of which had a marked effect upon the ecclesiastical history of that town and left a deep scar. In one case, the unsuccessful petitioners gave up the idea of forming a new Puritan parish and became a Presbyterian church,⁴ and in the other organized a Church of England Church.

Such contests were so bitter and so expensive that sometimes the contending parts of a town would agree to maintain two meetinghouses rather than to have a legislative controversy over the formation of a new parish. From what happened in Salisbury some such agreement seems to have been reached there.

By 1710 the demand for a second meetinghouse had become so great that the town voted, January 30, 1710/11, to build a new meetinghouse in the west part of the town, at "Rockkie Hill." According to the vote, the new building was to be 52 feet long, 38 feet wide and 24 feet "post or stud." But having voted to build the church the voters could not agree upon its site. After much controversy the town voted, March 30, 1711, to appoint a committee of five "Indifferent on byased men out of our neighbouring Towns to conclude upon A place where the sd house Shall Be Sett." The record names as the five "Indifferent on byased men," "Decon Moss" of Newbury, "Decon Tinnie" of Bradford, "Decon Stevens" of Amesbury, "Decon Leavitt" of Exeter and "Decon Shaw" of Hampton. They are identified as Dea-

con Benjamin Morse of Newbury, Deacon John Tenney of Bradford, Deacon Thomas Stevens of Amesbury, Deacon Moses Leavitt of Exeter and Deacon Samuel Shaw of Hampton.

No report of this committee is on file but the controversy over the site is not mentioned again. It is to be presumed that the five deacons heard the contending parties, weighed the several contentions, and then made a decision which the voters who had chosen them accepted without further complaint. The five deacons having been selected for their indifference and lack of bias, the voters could not reasonably question their decision or object to the site which they selected. In any event construction of the building was begun and progressed so slowly that the frame was not ready to be raised until the summer of 1714. On July 28, 1714, the town voted:

For as much as there hath bin sum difference concerning the place where y^e new meeting house should sett, for the appeasing whereof and y^t Love & Unity may be continewed amongst us and convieny as may be attended by each part of the town.

1st. It is concluded and agreed upon the new meeting house in y^e upper part of y^e town shall from time to time and at all times be kept in good repayr, and a new one also set up at y^e lower end of y^e town when it is thought needful by y^e lower part of y^e town, and that an orthodox minister always provided to tech in y^e s^d meeting house from time to time and to all times as at present.

It is secondly for the conveniency and ease of y^e middle and upper part of y^e town. It is also agreed when that y^e new meeting house now Ready to be Rayed shall be sett at or nere the Loge house so called nere the upper Schul house in the most convenientest place there and that ther be an otoughdox minister called and settled to preach the word of God in the said meeting house from time to time as sone as may be.

Thirdly, that the charges arising for repairing and building both meeting houses, Personage houses and the Saliries of the ministers shall from time to time and at all times hereafter,

⁴ E. Vale Smith, *History of Newburyport* (Newburyport, Mass., 1854); for the Episcopal Church, pp. 29-303. For the First Presbyterian Church, pp. 304-307. Rev. Jonathan F. Stearns, *Historical Discourse of the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport*, 1846, pp. 22-31.

be defrayed and paid by the whole town according to each Persons ability.

Above said paper was voted in y^e affirmative by y^e town every Paregraft of it according to y^e mening and intent of it.

Reading between the lines, one can understand that the foregoing votes represent a compromise between the two ends of the town, very possibly reached to avoid an appeal to the legislature. The intent of the voters was to maintain a careful balance between the two ends of the town and the two church establishments; several examples of that intent will be seen in other votes of later years to be met with hereafter.

The new church was completed some time in 1716. It was located north of the 1785 building on what is sometimes called the "training field," the triangular park where the Portsmouth Road joins Monroe Street, formerly known as Dark Lane. It stood in the park near Monroe Street facing the house built by John Smith and now occupied by Alphonse M. Barcelow. In the rear of that house there is a rock of unusual shape upon which the church bell was mounted.

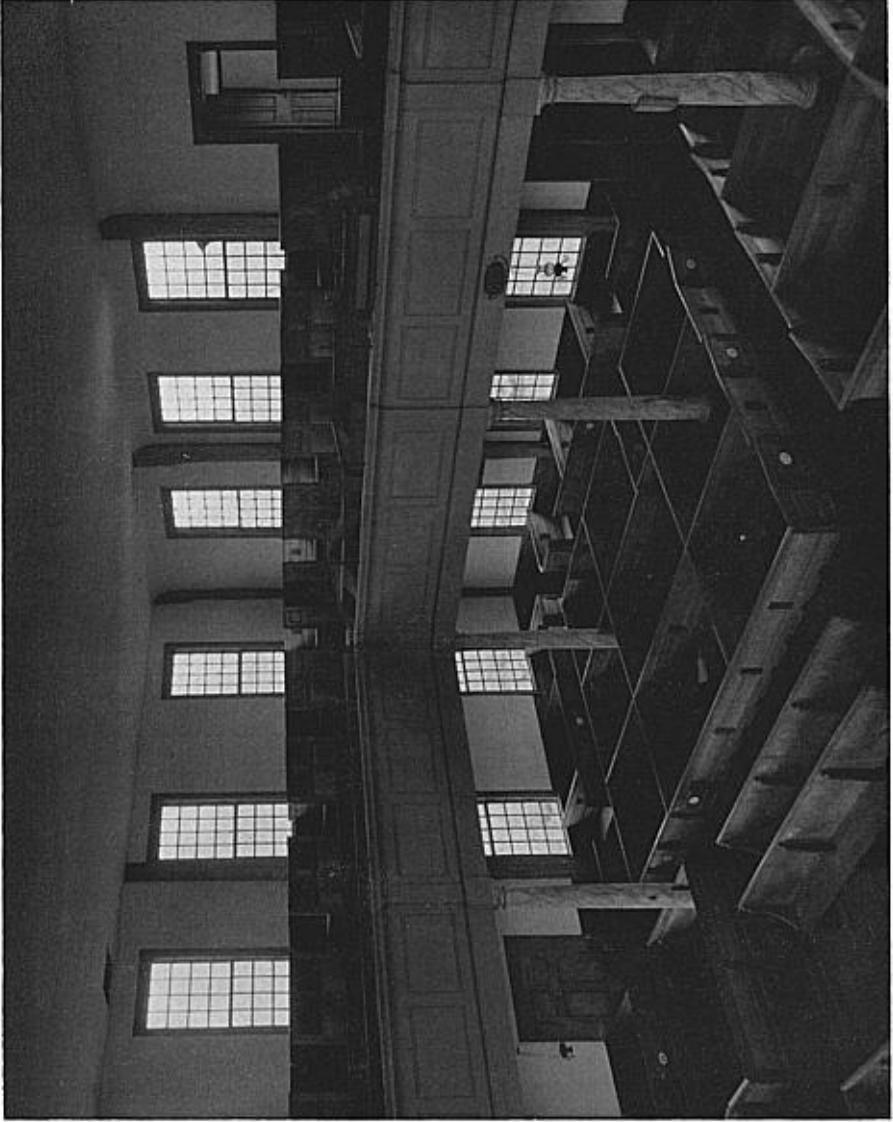
One not familiar with the conditions and practices of that time might well say that such a location was a strange one for a meetinghouse as there could not have been more than a half dozen houses in the vicinity. If, however, the situation is analyzed the reason for the site is obvious. The people who were to attend the new meetinghouse included not only those living at Rocky Hill but all those farther north at Salisbury Plains as well as those still farther north at what is now South Hampton, and some in parts of the present Seabrook; it included, also, those at the Mills Village or vicinity of the present Market Square, and last but not least, the inhabitants of the small village on the Merrimac River now known as the Point

Shore. To serve such a scattered community efficiently a meetinghouse necessarily had to be located at some central point geographically without regard to the number of houses or families in its immediate vicinity. The five "on byased" deacons understood all this and undoubtedly gave careful judgment after weighing scrupulously the claims of the several districts.

The amount of territory that the West Parish originally included in what is now New Hampshire may be realized from the fact that the establishment in 1742 of the boundary line between the two Provinces cut off from the control of the West Parish of Salisbury six parcels of parsonage land, one of which contained twenty-eight acres and another eighteen acres. Thirty-nine church members left the West Parish in a group to join a new church formed in South Hampton, New Hampshire, and many others left individually for that purpose.

Thus was chosen the site of the original meetinghouse, and from 1716 to 1785 the congregation came there from all directions for worship. A few years after the church was built in 1716, probably about 1718, the parsonage was erected, not near the new church but just across the street (Portsmouth Road) from the site of the 1785 building. This is the house now occupied by George E. Collins.⁵ All the land in the area enclosed by Elm Street, Monroe Street, and the Portsmouth Road was then parsonage land.

⁵ EDITOR'S NOTE: The parsonage, described by the author and moved across the street by the Society to the rear of the Meetinghouse property in 1965, gives no indication of being as early as 1718. Unless portions of an earlier structure have been successfully hidden from view it would appear rather to date to the second half of the eighteenth century.



INTERIOR OF ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

PRESENT ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

After nearly seventy years of use the old meetinghouse needed repairs. On January 18, 1785, the town, after voting not to repair it, appointed a committee of eleven to consider the expediency of erecting a new meetinghouse in the west end of the town with authority to select some other site. On February 3, 1785, the committee recommended a new building to be placed not on the old location but on the parsonage land to the west of the parsonage. This vote, if carried out, would have placed the new meetinghouse on the westerly or Amesbury side of the present Collins house. According to the vote the building was to be 60 feet by 44 feet. It is, actually, about 61 feet by 49.

Then began a determined attack upon the whole proposal. At town meetings held May 17, July 18, and August 1, 1785, attempts were made to reopen the matter and to reconsider the vote to build on the new location. At the May meeting twenty-one voters were against the new building and in July some thirty went vigorously on record against it. Most of these dissenters were persons living north of the old meetinghouse. On July 20, 1785, twenty-one persons petitioned the parish in Seabrook, New Hampshire, to join with them in building a new meetinghouse upon the Province line, "or move their meeting house on to the said line." This would have meant a meetinghouse located about where the Smithtown church is now, close to the State line which has replaced the Province line.

What had happened was that the Point Shore district had grown to such an extent that it could outvote the church members to the north. It was the desire of this larger group to have the new building nearer the Point Shore and its mem-

bers refused to give up the advantage of their superiority in numbers. Despite the protests of the minority at the north, the only change made was a vote on August 1, 1785, to locate the new meetinghouse east of the parsonage instead of west of it. That vote determined the present location of the 1785 building. One reason for changing the site from the west side of the parsonage to the east was that building to the west would have deprived the parsonage of some of its best garden land. The land east of the parsonage was not as valuable for garden use as is attested by the ledges to be seen near the present building.

Until 1793 the town continued to maintain two meetinghouses, the old one in the east end of the town and the one at Rocky Hill, with a minister for each. On March 15, 1793, the Legislature divided Salisbury into an East and a West Parish. After that division the town ceased to have anything to do with the present church, each parish assuming the expense of the maintenance of its church and collecting the necessary funds by church rates levied upon all the inhabitants of the parish. This was hard on the Presbyterians, the Baptists and the other denominations who were thus compelled to contribute to the support of a church which they did not attend.

In 1799, 307 persons were assessed in the West Parish to raise the money necessary to meet its expense which that year amounted to \$469.14. It was not until about 1830 that church rates were abolished and churches were supported by voluntary subscription.

In this way the erection of the present building took place. It is of some interest that the Point Shore which played such a part in determining the location of the new church in 1785 grew so rapidly that

by 1835, fifty years later, it had two churches of its own. Each of these bodies drew members from Rocky Hill and weakened it, which with the loss of many of the members from the north, who never forgot their grievance in the choice of the present site, and the continued establishment of other churches at the Mills Village had much to do with the ultimate closing of this meetinghouse.

When the town voted to build the new building it instructed the committee to salvage from the old structure whatever material was usable. Much material thus salvaged was incorporated in the new building. The sill on the east side of the building came from the old church and is, therefore, all of two hundred and twenty-eight years old.

BUILDERS OF ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

When we come to the builders we run into a mystery. The tradition has always been that the builders were Palmer & Spofford of Newburyport, which may be the fact. William D. Lowell of the Point Shore who was a local historian sixty years ago stated at the exercises at the One Hundredth Anniversary in 1885 that William E. Morrill of the Point Shore had two papers showing that Palmer and Spofford were the builders. He did not state what the papers were nor whether they specified which Palmer or which Spofford the builders were. No one knows now what became of the papers.

This matter of the identification of the builders is important. There was in 1785 in Newburyport one Timothy Palmer who was a genius in his line.⁶ In 1792 he

⁶ Timothy Palmer, Bridge Builder, John J. Currier, *Newburyport*, pp. 368 and following; *Old Newbury*, p. 597. Note: for the Piscataqua Bridge, see "Rockingham Rambles," *Exe-ter (N. H.) News-Letter*, August 24, 1934.

engineered and built the first bridge across the Merrimac River at Deer Island where later, in 1810, he built the first chain bridge, although another person had designed it. He built bridges also over the Piscataqua River in New Hampshire, the Kennebec in Maine, the Potomac in Virginia, and the Schuylkill in Pennsylvania, this latter bridge at Philadelphia being accounted one of the marvels of that time. Each of these bridges away from Massachusetts contained long spans, the longest arch in the Piscataqua Bridge being two hundred and forty feet. These bridge-building accomplishments of Timothy Palmer are well authenticated and are easily proven. He was a well-known person, surveyor of highways in Newburyport in 1800, and an officer in the militia.

Palmer & Spofford have been credited with building the Unitarian Church in Newburyport which is considered one of the finest pieces of Federal architecture in New England with a steeple widely known for its beauty. The designing of that building has also been credited to Timothy Palmer.

But, as far as any record can be found, there is nothing to show that Timothy Palmer the bridge builder ever designed or constructed a building. In the case of the Unitarian Church at Newburyport there is evidence that Palmer & Spofford furnished material for the building but were not the builders, and John J. Currier, Newburyport's accomplished historian, identifies them as a firm composed of Ambrose Palmer and Daniel Spofford who did business as Palmer & Spofford. Ambrose Palmer may have been a son of Timothy Palmer; there probably was another son named Andrews Palmer as a child of Andrews Palmer is buried in the Timothy Palmer burial lot at Newbury-

port, but there is nothing to show that Timothy Palmer, the bridge builder, had any connection with the firm of Palmer & Spofford, or that he had anything to do with the Newburyport Church. Ambrose Palmer and Daniel Spofford may have been the same Palmer & Spofford

read that in 1835 the parish voted to allow the town to floor over the upper portion of the building to make a room in the upper part nine feet in height to be used for town purposes. This vote was never carried into effect. The first stove in the building was installed some time between



ROOF CONSTRUCTION, ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

Photograph, 1936, courtesy of H. A. B. S.

who are referred to in the papers which William E. Morrill had in 1885, and we still are in the dark both as to what their connection with the church was and who the builders were.

The first known use of the building was December 7, 1785, when a town meeting was held in it, the first of many, as it became the usual place of such meetings of the town of Salisbury. In this connection it is with a feeling of horror we

1794 and 1797. An early picture of the building in Merrill's *History of Amesbury* shows a chimney on the southerly side of the roof about halfway up. There is in the ceiling a hole for a smoke pipe, but there are no exterior signs of a chimney today. From newspaper accounts of town meetings held there we learn that they were very cold affairs. Apparently the stove was not in operation then or was working unsatisfactorily.

The last town meeting was held there in 1884. One reason why it was in demand for that particular use was its seating capacity for seven hundred persons. At the time there was no other auditorium of that size in Salisbury. In order to get such numbers in there had to be some crowding. In those days everyone rose and remained standing during prayer. As many of the pews had seats on all four sides this brought all of those present into the centers of the pews so that for standing room it was necessary to turn up the hinged seats. When the prayer was concluded the seats came down with a bang like an irregular gunshot volley. One who visits the building for the first time notes that much of its interior has never known paint. Strange as it may seem to us today, who think of our ancestors as always profusely using white paint on all buildings, paint did not come into general use until after the Revolution. Although the exterior of the meetinghouse has been kept carefully painted for years, I have seen a picture of it taken years ago in which the exterior woodwork was unpainted and weather-beaten.

No organ has ever been permanently installed in the building. Instrumental music has been provided in modern days by a harmonium. There is at the Whittier home a similar instrument which was found in the Rocky Hill Parsonage and may have been used in the meetinghouse. It is unusual in that it is pumped not by the feet but by the hands or elbows.

MINISTERS

On December 16, 1717, the Reverend Joseph Parsons was called as the first minister of the new church at a salary of £80, one half in money and one half in provisions, and the use of the parsonage at Rocky Hill with three pieces of land.

The parsonage had not then been built and it was voted to proceed at once. At that time the Reverend Mr. Cushing, minister of the old church, was apparently getting a smaller salary than that voted for Mr. Parsons. Two days after the vote fixing Mr. Parsons' salary at £80 a vote was passed making the salary of the Reverend Mr. Cushing £80. Mr. Parsons' salary was then reduced to £70 and in open town meeting the vote was accepted by him as satisfactory.

The Reverend Joseph Parsons was born at Northampton, Massachusetts, June 28, 1671, the son of Joseph and Elizabeth (Strong) Parsons, and was graduated from Harvard in 1697 with the degree of A.B., receiving that of A.M. in 1700 three years later as the common custom then was. He was ordained at Lebanon, Connecticut, November 27, 1700, and was dismissed from there in 1708. He married Elizabeth Thompson, daughter of Dr. Benjamin Thompson of Roxbury, Massachusetts. At that time students entering Harvard College were given fixed standings which they retained all through the college course. This standing was determined by the social rank of the family. Joseph Parsons was ranked last in his class of fourteen.

He was one of the founders of the town of Lebanon as well as of the church there and had been appointed by the General Assembly of Connecticut to settle the boundary between Lebanon and the town of Colchester on the west. It is interesting that he should have left Lebanon for a town which also, at one time, many years before, had been called Colchester.

The Church, that is the ecclesiastical body which controls matters of worship as distinguished from the Society which

has charge of prudential affairs, was formed November 19, 1718, and Mr. Parsons was installed as pastor November 28, 1718.

In 1724 £15 4d was added to the salary of each of the ministers. In 1736 the salary of each was raised to £150. Thus was preserved the even balance between the two meetings.

members were added to the church. This makes an average of nearly fourteen a year. In the year 1728, however, one hundred and eight members came in. On October 29, 1727, there had been an earthquake of considerable severity which so stirred the people of New England that a religious revival followed. Salisbury was not the only place where there was a great



PEWTER COMMUNION SERVICE (IN PART), ROCKY HILL MEETINGHOUSE

Photograph, 1936, courtesy of H. A. B. S.

Mr. Parsons died March 13, 1739, in the sixty-ninth year of his age after serving nearly twenty-one years. Although the Salisbury church had prospered under his leadership no personal tradition of him remains. In one respect he was outstanding. Despite his small salary he sent all four of his sons to Harvard, three of them graduating and becoming ministers. His one daughter married a minister.

During his ministry of nearly twenty-one years two hundred and ninety-one

influx of new church members in 1728. One church in Newburyport had one hundred and forty-one that year. The church at Bradford, now a part of Haverhill, Massachusetts, had sixty-nine.

When Mr. Parsons died the inhabitants of the town met to arrange for his funeral and appropriated £80 for that purpose. Then in keeping with the spirit of parity which had marked their other votes in church matters they made a like appropriation for Mr. Cushing's funeral,

"Whenever it shall please God to remove him by death." The town voted also to allow Mrs. Parsons the use of the parsonage for a year, reserving accommodations, however, for "ministers' horses which come to preach at the West meeting house," as the record puts it.

On March 24, 1741, the Reverend Samuel Webster was called as pastor. He was born at Bradford, Massachusetts, August 16, 1718, the son of Samuel and Mary (Kimball) Webster. He received his A.B. degree at Harvard in 1737, his A.M. in 1740, and the degree of S.T.D., or Doctor of Sacred Theology, in 1792. His family must have had some social prominence as he was placed eighth in his class of thirty-four.

This was his first and only pastorate; he was ordained here August 12, 1741, and continued here until his death, July 18, 1796, at the age of seventy-eight, a pastorate of nearly fifty-five years. During his service in Salisbury he saw the old meetinghouse abandoned and torn down, and replaced by the present building in which he preached for nearly eleven years. He saw, also, the town divided into two parishes and lived through the troublous years of the Revolution. In his lifetime he witnessed great changes, economic, social, political and spiritual. Moreover, he was an active participant in some of those changes.

It was a custom at that time for the authorities at Boston to choose each year a minister to preach a sermon at the opening session of the General Court, the predecessor of our Legislature. This sermon was known as the election sermon and was printed and distributed throughout the Province. At first it was an indication that the minister chosen had earned a reputation for scholarship and ability. As the Revolution drew nearer the choice

meant, also, that the minister was further regarded as an ardent patriot. In 1770 the choice fell upon Dr. Samuel Webster of the West Parish of Salisbury. As far as I can find out he was the only clergyman in this vicinity to receive this distinction.

The sermon preached by him on this occasion is in existence and is surprisingly modern. A book by Franklin P. Cole, published in New York in 1941, gives extracts from it and other election sermons. It is entitled, "They Preached Liberty," and Dr. Webster's sermon is one of the most frequently quoted sermons in the book. One quotation is characteristic of it and I give it to show its nature and tone:

But depend upon it, no government is God's ordinance, but that which is for the good of mankind.

In July 1774 Dr. Webster preached a sermon on "The Misery and Duty of an Enslaved People" dealing with the conditions of that time. As he was a man of strong convictions and fearless in his expression of them, it may be that some of his parishioners thought that he was giving them too much politics and too little theology. In 1778 the town passed the following vote:

With due respect and regard to our reverend ministers, it is the opinion of the town that our reverend ministers are deficient in preaching some of the most important doctrines of the gospel, such as these following: the depravity of human nature, the necessity of regeneration and free justification before God by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. To see if it is the opinion of this town that if our reverend ministers would preach up the before mentioned doctrines of the gospel and change with the neighboring ministers, viz; Rev. Mr. Noyes of South Hampton, Rev. Mr. Hibbard of Amesbury and the Rev. Mr. Noble of Newbury, it would have the greatest tendency to unite the inhabitants of this town together in love and peace and the only means of their having a free and generous support from the town.

It would seem from this vote that the Reverend Mr. Webster was not as orthodox as a majority of the voters thought proper. Another indication of his laxity in theological matters was his stand in opposition to Whitefield and Whitefield's methods when that famous evangelist was preaching in New England. Such a position was not a popular one to take.

But on December 28, 1772, the town, greatly stirred by the events of the day, voted:

1. That the essential rights of mankind are Life, Liberty and Property.
2. That the only end and design of government is to secure these.
3. That gross invasions have been made upon these our rights by the British administration till our grievances and our oppressions are become intolerable.
4. That our Representative be instructed to use all his influence in the house that all proper measures may be taken to obtain a redress of these grievances.
5. That if this fails of effect, this town is ready to unite with the other towns in this government, and with all other British governments on this continent in all lawful measures which in joint consultation shall be judged necessary to save our sinking state and to obtain redress of our grievances.
6. That a copy of the above resolves be transmitted by the town clerk, to the gentlemen of the Committee of Communication and Correspondence at Boston, thanking them for their seasonable and prudent care of the public good.

These resolutions, nearly four years before the Declaration of Independence, contain the same strain of complaint and threat to be found in that document. After reading Dr. Webster's election sermon of 1770 I have no hesitation in naming him the author of the 1772 resolutions. There were not many men in the town who could have drawn so logical and concise a set of resolutions.

In 1773 the Point Shore and the Ferry were visited by what appears to have been

a cyclone or tornado. It swept a path the whole length of the Point Shore and across the Powow River to the Ferry, wrecking buildings, lifting vessels off the stocks in the shipyards and otherwise doing considerable damage. What we know about that tornado is due to a report⁷ carefully prepared by Dr. Webster, who must have gone over its route carefully and painstakingly examined in detail the damage wrought. This report was prepared by him, "at the desire of many, and is now presented to the public to gratify them, and to enable them so far as is possible to see our ruins with their own eyes and to judge themselves of our loss (which is hard, perhaps impossible exactly to compute) in order to excite their Charity towards the many unhappy sufferers."

We have no way of knowing to what extent the charity of the public was "excited," or what financial return followed Dr. Webster's labor; but we do know that his report of the damage constitutes a complete catalogue of the houses on the Point Shore in 1773, giving information as to their ownership at that time and in many instances telling us the dates of their construction. In this way, he made a valuable contribution to our local history.

The next minister was the Reverend Andrew Beattie, born at Chelmsford, Massachusetts, January 16, 1767, the son of Robert and Hannah (Perry) Beattie. He received the degree of A.B. from Harvard and from Brown in 1795, and that of A.M. from Harvard in 1798. At Harvard he is listed third in a class of forty, the highest social standing of any of the ministers of this church.

⁷ A copy of Dr. Webster's report with an added identification of some of the houses still standing made by some later person is in my possession. C. I. P.

He was ordained here June 28, 1797, and died here March 16, 1801, after a pastorate of three years and nine months. On January 29, 1799, he was married at Newburyport to Mary Boardman, daughter of John and Judith (Marsh) Boardman of that town. There is in the *Columbian Centinel*, February 6, 1799, an interesting account of an incident of that marriage.

On their way to Salisbury the bridal pair were met by eighteen sleighs filled with the most respectable of the bridegroom's parishioners, who congratulated them on the joyous event, and accompanied them to the parsonage house where a liberal entertainment was provided. One such mark of respect to the Rev. Clergy reflects more honor on the inhabitants of the Northern States, and more fully demonstrates their good sense than were ever conferred on, or exhibited by the deluded idolaters of French massacres and principles, in civic ox feasts, choruses and riff-raff processions.

The latter part of the article is, of course, a comment on the French Revolution, then shocking the world, but finding support in some parts of America.

The Newburyport *Herald*, on March 17, 1801, said of Mr. Beattie:

The pious and devout life which Mr. Beattie exhibited both as a neighbor and a friend, a husband, parent and pastor, and that resigned and submissive temper which supported him during more than eighteen months of consumptive illness, call on the public to mourn the loss sustained, and to mingle the tears of condolence with the deeply afflicted widow, connections, and destitute flock.

One child, Elizabeth Boardman Beattie, was born at Salisbury, November 8, 1799.

The next pastor was the Reverend William Balch, born at Danvers, Massachusetts, January 17, 1778, son of the Reverend Benjamin and Joanna (O'Brien) Balch. At the time of the Lexington Alarm, April 19, 1775, his father was a

lieutenant on the third alarm list of the town and was present at Lexington; later he served in both army and navy as chaplain and was known as the "fighting parson." The son prepared for college at Phillips Exeter Academy and entered Harvard in the class of 1798 but did not graduate, leaving college at the end of three years. He was ordained here November 17, 1802, and was dismissed February 20, 1816. He was installed at Salem, New Hampshire, December 1, 1819, and dismissed August 6, 1835. He died at Dedham, Massachusetts, August 31, 1842.

During the latter part of his pastorate there was much opposition to him and great dissatisfaction. An ex-parte council was called by the church which Mr. Balch agreed to make mutual; the council so adjusted the differences that he was given an honorable dismissal.

This council, composed of five churches, those of Seabrook, Hampton Falls, the Fourth in Newbury, Exeter, the West in Amesbury and the East in Haverhill, required refreshment to the amount of \$46.90, the items of which are interesting and enlightening. The bill is as follows:

The West Parish in Salisbury to
David M. Leavitt, Dr.

| | |
|---|---------|
| To brandy and rum as per bill | \$9.20 |
| To 4 turkeys | 4.60 |
| To 8 chickens | 2.00 |
| To 5 lbs. loaf sugar, at 37½ cents per lb. | 1.88 |
| To 16 lbs. bacon, at 12½ cents | 2.00 |
| To 38 lbs. beef | 2.82 |
| To 3 lbs. raisins and currants | .40 |
| To 6 lbs. brown sugar \$1.00; ½ lb. tea | |
| \$1.00 | 2.00 |
| To butter, cheese, horse-keeping, potatoes and lodgings | 10.00 |
| To time and trouble in attending on council and others | 10.00 |
| To journey to Exeter and Hampton Falls with horse | 1.50 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$46.90 |

From 1816 to 1835, the church was without a regularly settled pastor. There was much dissatisfaction in the parish and much uncertainty as to its future. Various ministers were heard and one, the Reverend Thomas Rich, stayed for five years, from 1829 to 1834, when failing health compelled him to retire. No one of the others was able to secure the united and harmonious support of the entire parish.

Among those who preached in these unsettled years was the Reverend Thomas C. Upham, later a professor at Bowdoin College.

In 1834, an invitation was extended to the Reverend John Gunnison to become the pastor. He came, preached here for several months, and then became the first pastor of the new Union Evangelical Church on the Point Shore which was formed by the union of two groups, fifteen members from Rocky Hill and eleven members from Sandy Hill, as the First Church of Amesbury was called. The formation of the Union Church was a death blow both to this church and to the Sandy Hill Church.

On December 17, 1835, the Reverend Benjamin Sawyer, then pastor of the Sandy Hill Church was invited to supply the pulpit. He was the son of Aaron and Sarah (Hodgdon) Sawyer, born at Boothbay, Maine, September 22, 1782, having had the experience, common to that period, of earning money for his tuition by teaching in country schools during absence from college. After his graduation from Dartmouth in 1808, he studied theology with the Reverend Abijah Wines of Newport, New Hampshire. In May, 1809, he was approbated to preach by the Orange Association, New Hampshire, and ordained November 22, 1809, at Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The ordina-

tion sermon was preached by his instructor, the Reverend Mr. Wines.

The Reverend Mr. Sawyer's pastorate at Cape Elizabeth ended September 15, 1813. The Embargo Acts, followed by the War of 1812, were damaging blows to New England shipping, causing many seacoast towns substantially to decline. In this decline Cape Elizabeth shared, and the loss of business and the depression that followed made it impossible for the church, over which Mr. Sawyer presided, to continue.

In March, 1814, he was called to supply at the Sandy Hill Church in Amesbury. This church, built in 1761, stood on the Haverhill Road at its junction with Highland Street, and was already in a declining condition because it had not been placed in the center of a populated district but by compromise had been located between two such districts. In 1761 each of these districts was chiefly rural, but early in the nineteenth century the district to the north, the Mills Village, began to develop rapidly as an industrial community and as it grew demanded churches of its own. By 1830 there were at least six churches in that locality where, in 1814, there had been only three at most, and two of those on the outside edge of the territory. Each of the six was a drain on the Sandy Hill Church. The finishing blow to Sandy Hill came in 1835 when the Union Congregational Church was organized.

Merrill's *History of Amesbury* says that in 1835 the Reverend Mr. Sawyer was absent from Amesbury five months, candidating at Layman, Maine. Mr. Merrill, who was a contemporary of Mr. Sawyer, is always a competent authority for matters within his own knowledge, but I have found no other basis for this statement. There is nothing else to indi-

cate that Mr. Sawyer was absent from Amesbury in 1835. Neither have I been able to locate any such town as "Layman," Maine. It is interesting that the Reverend Mr. Gunnison, whom Mr. Sawyer succeeded at Rocky Hill, is said to have come to Amesbury in 1834 from "Lyman," Maine, a town in York County. We know definitely, however, that on December 17, 1835, after the Union Evangelical Church was organized, the pulpit supply committee of the West Parish was instructed to engage the Reverend Mr. Sawyer for a year. This engagement was repeated in 1836, the salary being four hundred dollars with the use of the parsonage. From 1835 to 1841 he presided over both Sandy Hill and Rocky Hill, but in the latter year the Sandy Hill Church was closed; from that time on, he gave his whole time to Rocky Hill. He never officially ended his pastoral connection with the Sandy Hill Church as appeared in later years when the legislature gave permission for the winding up of the affairs of the Sandy Hill Church.

Rocky Hill also, as an outlying church, was gradually declining from the same causes which had destroyed the usefulness of Sandy Hill. Mr. Sawyer, nevertheless, waged a determined battle against overwhelming odds and was able to postpone but not to prevent the final closing of that meetinghouse. On May 15, 1859, he celebrated there the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination; on October 30, 1870, when he was eighty-eight he preached his last sermon in its pulpit. He died March 27, 1871. A few years more and the Rocky Hill Church also ceased to operate as an active ecclesiastical body. In 1885 when the one hundredth anniversary of the erection of the building was celebrated, the occasion, memorable and

interesting, was a tribute to a glorious but dead past.

The Reverend Mr. Sawyer was a man of energy and activity, mental and physical. His vigor continued up to the end; when he preached his final sermon in 1870 his mind was clear and he read without glasses. This was only a few months before his death.

He served several years on the school committee in Amesbury and twenty-one years on the school committee in Salisbury. In 1844 and 1845 he represented Salisbury in the legislature. In the course of his ministry he officiated at fourteen hundred marriages and eleven hundred funerals. He was a charter member of Warren Lodge, A.F. & A.M., and its first secretary. He was also a member of King Cyrus Chapter, Royal Arch Masons at Newburyport, of Newburyport Commandery No. 3, Knights Templar, and is known to have applied for the degrees in King Solomon's Council, Royal and Select Masters, also of Newburyport. He was interested in all civic matters and active in many of them. All through the two towns he was familiarly known as "Father Sawyer."

He was an active busy man in everything, and always finding something to do which made him useful in the community. He was not, however, a leader of great causes, but was conservative and cautious. His masonic record has been mentioned, but when the anti-Masonic times came, the Reverend Mr. Sawyer lost his interest in the organization and never revived it. Masonry recovered and flourished once more, but Mr. Sawyer never renewed his old allegiance and remained aloof from the institution.

In March, 1851, when there was bitter fighting between the antislavery forces and those for slavery there was a

call for a meeting against the fugitive slave law. One of the signers of the call was the Reverend Benjamin Sawyer. A week later, in the *Villager*, he withdrew his name from the call. At that time, John G. Whittier, a resident of the Mills Village, was the local leader of the antislavery cause. One was looking ahead, the other was clinging to the past.

He was twice married, first at Newport, New Hampshire, October 30, 1810, to Mima Wines, daughter of his instructor, the Reverend Abijah Wines. She died September 8, 1817. He married, second, at Amesbury, January 12, 1819, Charlotte (Long) Wild, daughter of Nathan Long and widow of Caleb Wild. She died October 4, 1878, their golden wedding having been celebrated on January 12, 1869. Three children were born of the first marriage and five of the second.

After the death of Mr. Sawyer, the pulpit was supplied by Reverend Albert

G. Morton, who preached a part of each year until regular services were discontinued. He was born at East Freetown, Massachusetts.

It was a fitting thing that the Reverend Benjamin Sawyer should be the last regular pastor of the church. In his long life, nearly ninety years, he had only three pastorates, Cape Elizabeth, Maine, Sandy Hill, Amesbury, and Rocky Hill, Salisbury. In each case the result was the same, the church over which he presided melted away to nothing; but in no way was he to blame. He was active, attentive to his charge and industrious in its behalf. He was doomed to failure, however, for the system which placed a church in the open country between two communities was itself doomed from the nature of things. Despite every human effort that could be made for it, there was nothing that could keep such a church alive as a functioning institution.