

# The Treasurer's Book of the Rocky Hill Church

By NINA FLETCHER LITTLE

AS mentioned in the foregoing article on the West Parish and the Rocky Hill Meetinghouse, the town of Salisbury maintained two churches, each with its own minister, until 1793. In that year, however, the town was legally divided into two parishes and thereafter the East and West Parishes each assumed the expense of supporting its own church.

Funds were raised by a tax levied upon the inhabitants whether church members or not, although refunds were made to the Quakers, Baptists, and Presbyterians on a yearly basis. Charges for the services of assessors and a tax collector appear regularly in the accounts. This separation of church and town in 1793 explains why the old calf-bound Treasurer's Book, covering the financial transactions of the West Parish Church, begins with an entry dated 1794 instead of at an earlier time. This one volume contains the Treasurer's accounts from 1794 to 1941, a period of one hundred forty-six years, and careful perusal of such items as appear here often provide a more intimate picture of the activities of a congregation than do more formal historical records.

During 1797 occur the first small payments for three basic expenses which were to reappear in varying amounts during the entire life of the church: sweeping and care of the meetinghouse for the year 1796, \$3.00; mending and setting glass in the many large windows, \$1.00; repairs to the parsonage fence, \$2.41.

On June 28 of that same year Reverend Andrew Beattie commenced his four

years of service to the parish, and as might be expected the old parsonage needed sprucing up for its new occupants. Accordingly, major renovation of the house and outbuildings were undertaken which appear to have cost in the vicinity of \$453.57, a large sum for those days. When Mr. Beattie died on March 16 of 1801 the parish dutifully paid both his medical and funeral expenses and generously allowed Mrs. Beattie his full salary of \$150 for the ensuing three months. However, no time was lost in gaining income for the then vacant parsonage: "Aprille 22nd, 1801, the Assessors let out the parsonage agreeable to the parish order for the sum of \$42.35." This arrangement was repeated in 1802 and was to become a regular procedure in the future, during the several periods when the church was without a settled pastor.

During 1806 to 1816 shingles and more window glass were required for the church, and the "Parish Buildings" were repaired at small expense. Yearly cleaning and sweeping of the church still stood at \$3.00 annually, which figure was to continue for many years.

In the meantime Reverend William Balch was installed in November, 1802, but after some years friction developed with the congregation, and he was asked to terminate his services in Salisbury. Unfortunately, this was not accomplished without considerable expense to the parish—September 21, 1816, "By an order in favr. Mr. Balch, for the purchase of his contract, \$230.00."

The church now entered a thirteen-year period without a settled minister. The parsonage and its large acreage were rented again (for as high as \$65 in 1822), and some rather sizable sums were regularly expended for supplying the pulpit, boarding and "entertaining" candidates, and "horse keeping" for visiting clergy. Six to eight dollars per Sunday seems to have been the average amount paid to a clergyman for taking the services, with extras for traveling and accommodation. In 1820 the Reverend Hosea Hildredth, instructor at Phillips Exeter Academy and pastor of the Second Parish in that town, "preached for 6 Sabbaths" and received \$42.

Small outlays for repairs on the parish buildings occur from time to time but it is noticeable that until the mid-nineteenth century most of the upkeep was on the old parsonage, with only relatively minor amounts spent on the newer church. In 1821, for instance, the pulpit was repaired for \$6.81.

The accounts shed but little light on the use of music, the first reference occurring in 1821: "Cash paid for musical books for the singers, \$3.75." This probably reflects the activities of a "singing school." In the following year: "Cash paid for bass viol strings, \$2.75." Instrumental music, of course, was to be expected in country churches at this period.

In 1830 the charge for care of the meetinghouse, which had remained pretty consistently \$3.00 per annum, rose sharply to \$5.25 "for taking care of the meeting house & building fire." Although Mr. Pettingell says that the first stove had been installed between 1794 and 1797, no charge for its purchase, or other reference to heat in the building, appears before this date.

In 1829 the Reverend Thomas Rich

came as pastor for five years, to be followed in 1835 by the Reverend Benjamin Sawyer. The parsonage was again due for renovation and new door handles and butt hinges (probably replacing ancient H and L's) were installed, together with some up-to-date interior decoration—"7 rools paper hangings, \$2.10." Hereafter modest sums for whitewashing, plastering, painting, and wallpaper appear frequently as evidence that the parish was keeping its ministerial house in good repair.

Following 1837 there is a completely unexplained hiatus in the Treasurer's records until the year 1856, although it is not apparent that any pages have been lost or removed from the book. In 1856 (and we cannot tell for how long previously) the town of Salisbury paid cash amounting to \$30 "for the use of meeting house." This payment continued regularly through 1872 when it was increased to \$50. It was entered under the heading, "Town of Salisbury, Rent," and as such continued through 1886, the last town meeting having been held in the church in 1884.

The Reverend Benjamin Sawyer, who served for thirty-five years as the last regular pastor, died in 1871 and his widow rented the parsonage at \$50 per year from 1874 through 1878. Thereafter, for thirty-three years G. W. Collins rented it for the same yearly sum until he purchased it from the parish for \$3,000 in 1913. Because of the construction of State Highway No. 495 the parsonage has been happily reunited with the meetinghouse, and was moved onto land directly in the rear of the church building during the spring of 1965.

As Mr. Pettingell states that no organ was ever permanently installed in the church (although a harmonium was

found in the parsonage), it is interesting to see what the records contain in this respect. We have noted evidence of singing and instrumental music in 1821 and 1822, but not until 1861 does the next pertinent reference occur, "Paid Rev. Benjamin Sawyer, tuning ministerial instrument, \$1.00." In 1873 comes the first direct mention of an organ, "M. C. Osgood, for use of organ, \$11.00." In 1875, "G. H. Briggs, organ, \$6.67." Directly below this entry is the possible explanation, "Expense for Concerts, \$11.10." In 1891 the "church organ" was repaired at a cost of \$1.00, and again in 1898. Perhaps these instruments were moved in and out when occasion required.

In 1875 appear the first really substantial items for repairs to the meetinghouse, and in view of Mr. Pettingell's observations on the absence of paint one cannot help wondering if these bills signal the first coat to be applied to the exterior. Paint, oil, and painting added up to \$289.65 and further repairs, lumber, glass, and glazing brought the total up to \$412.93.

In the following year a new barn (now disappeared) was built for \$340, and there was a \$60 payment to "P. A. True for choir." In 1880 nine cords of birchwood cost the parish \$27, and new blinds were acquired for the parsonage at \$31.80, for which the hanging cost an extra \$6.45. Cleaning of the church had now doubled since 1875 to \$10 per year.

Few interior fittings are mentioned over the years but in 1885 a cushion and curtain were purchased for the pulpit at \$2.25, a carpet and curtain for same in 1892, curtains again in 1938, and "stock & labor for case in front of pulpit" (for

display of the pewter communion set) cost \$21.50 in 1931.

In 1885 the Centennial Celebration of the building of the meetinghouse was marked by the publication of Centennial Books at \$191.75. Receipts from this observance, combined with sales of the books, netted the treasury \$243.69 which indicates a profitable investment even after deducting the expense of the new curtain and cushion, acquired for this important occasion. In 1888 appear two new items—preaching at \$90 and singing at \$50—which were to continue in slightly varying amounts for the next fifty years. In 1893 the parsonage was painted white with green blinds and probably took on much the same appearance as many old-fashioned houses in the neighborhood.

During the first half of the twentieth century the church was painted three times, the roof was shingled in 1927, and lightning rods costing \$110 were installed in 1930. As this work was fortunately all on the exterior the fine, original interior finish escaped virtually untouched except for "refinishing interior of building" for \$62.42 in 1922, and "refinishing the ceiling" with staging, at a cost of \$120.58 in 1923.

The Treasurer's Book comes to a close in 1941 after having chronicled the expenditures of the West Parish in Salisbury (since 1914, Amesbury) for 146 fruitful years. The final entry in the old volume, dated December 19, 1941, reads as follows:

Final papers signed by George E. Collins, and William D. Stearns, to complete transfer of property of the West Parish to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.