

***Second Congregational Church, Beverly MA
Tricentennial Topics
Fall 2013***

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*Read aloud by church members during worship services in Fall 2013,
in celebration of Second Church's 300th anniversary*

Tricentennial Topic #1: Our Founding Years 1713-1715

Many events were happening in the world between the years 1713 and 1715. The Queen Anne's War came to an end, granting Acadia, Hudson Bay and Newfoundland to England. King George I became King of England. Tea was introduced to the American Colonies. The slave trade began gaining momentum. Puritan theology and culture continued to dominate the New England colonies, and the church meeting house remained the center of the community.

A bit closer to home, in the neighborhoods of North Beverly, Ryal Side, and the eastern part of Salem Village, which today is Danvers, residents were eager to establish a church more convenient to their homes. The Sabbath day was taken quite seriously in Puritan New England, and families would pack their wagons and travel for miles on bumpy dirt roads to attend the generally required worship service. For many of these residents, the closest churches, the Salem Church and First Church, today the Unitarian Church on Cabot Street, were too far away. Local families like the Woodberrys, the Rayments, the Dodges, the Herricks, the Trasks, the Reas, the Conants, the Batchelders and the Haywards petitioned the General court for a new parish. Their wish was finally granted after three years. On October 24, 1713, the General Court of the Colony established the Precinct of Salem and Beverly, officially joining North Beverly, Ryal Side and the eastern part of Salem Village, and providing the path for a new house of worship. Ebenezer Balch sold six and one-half acres of land to the Precinct, and on June 8, 1714, the meeting house was raised. On March 29, 1715 the Reverend John Chipman, our first minister here at Second Church, was called to lead the congregation. A covenant was signed by Reverend Chipman and 15 men. The covenant begins, "We do in some measure of sincerity, this day, give up ourselves and our offspring unto the Lord Jehovah, the One True and Living God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to be his forever, promising (by the help of Grace) to Live unto and upon this God, hoping at length to Live with him forever...." (1). Between the years 1713 and 1715, the foundations of Second Church were established through the persistence, dedication and vision of the colonists who lived here.

Tricentennial Topic #2: The Meeting House that Grew

Our Meeting House tells the story of a nearly 300 year old building that has grown, stretched and turned to accommodate the needs of a dedicated and growing parish. The original Second Church Meeting House was raised on June 8, 1714. It was a simple structure with no steeple or bell—only a porch or turret at the west end, and it sat quite close to where we sit today, on the corner of Cabot and Conant Streets. The interior was rough with no plaster, few windows, and two rows of long seats with an aisle in between. Men sat on one side of the aisle, women on the other. Later separate pews were built for the growing congregation, and families could purchase these pews and sit together. In the 1750s, a steeple replaced the turret, and the first bell was donated by Mr. Hooper of Marblehead.

In the 1830s the Meeting House was moved slightly to the north and turned one quarter. During the Victorian Age colored glass windows, oak furniture and stenciled walls were added. In 1908 a separate Parish House was built on the property.

The way Second Church looks today, however, is largely a result of the huge renovation that took place in the 1950s under the guidance of Reverend Rasche. The Meeting House and the separate Parish House were too small to accommodate the growing post World War II congregation. The solution was a creative one: build a new central structure and join it to the Meeting House on one side, and to the Parish House on the other side. So, in the 1950s, Fellowship Hall, the Lovett Chapel and the classrooms between them were built as part of this new central structure. The Meeting House was turned again, and all three structures were joined together. Today you can see the 1953 cornerstone when you ascend the Conant Street stairs and look to the left of the columns.

Sixty years ago, in the midst of that great renovation, the church wrote, "Our enlarged building is a symbol of our desire to keep the consciousness of God at the center of life and the Church of Christ at the center of our community's life. A noble past, which we gratefully cherish, inspires us for a glorious future which is now in the making" (2). Today, during coffee hour, take a look at the pictures that hang next to the kitchen and across from the Parlor. They are a wonderful pictorial history of the way our Meeting House has grown with the vision, dedication and love of every generation since 1713.

Tricentennial Topic #3: Calling the Pastor

An important part of Second Church's history is the calling of the very first minister. In 1713, the Precinct of Salem and Beverly was established, and in 1714 the Meeting House was raised. The next order of business was to find a pastor. Parishioners set aside a day of fasting and prayer to prepare for the process ahead. They also asked the President of Harvard College, Mr. Leverett, to recommend candidates. Mr. Leverett suggested two recent Harvard College graduates, Mr. Ames Cheever and Mr. John Chipman. Both Cheever and Chipman were invited to the church to preach, and on March 29, 1715, voting members (all male, as was the custom of the time) assembled to vote and voted in the affirmative for Mr. Chipman. Church legend, however, reveals that the vote was actually a tie, and that the securing vote was cast by a female, Mrs. Mary Woodbury, a wealthy and influential woman in the community. One Second Church historian writes, "it is said she sat upon the door-step during the progress of business within. When it was ascertained that the vote was equal, the meeting decided that Mrs. Woodbury might vote, and that her vote should determine the choice" (3).

The vote for Mr. Chipman appears to have been a good decision, for he remained minister of Second Church for almost sixty years, and records speak of his being held in the "highest esteem" and "reverence" by the congregation and the larger community (4). During the almost 60 years as minister of Second Church he received 384 people into membership, baptized 834 children and 34 adults, married 303 couples and attended 631 funerals (5). He was a very busy man! He lived in what today is known as the Conant-Chipman House, which is the large red Colonial on the right side of Cabot Street if you're heading towards Henry's Market from the church. He married Rebecca Hale, granddaughter of the Reverend John Hale of First Church, Beverly, and together they raised 15 children. When she passed away, he married Hannah Warren, aunt of the patriot Joseph Warren. Mr. Chipman passed away in 1775 at the age of 85, just before the outbreak of the American Revolution, a cause he is thought to have supported. He is buried in the Old North Beverly cemetery, along with his family and many early church families like the Woodburys, Dodges, Raymonds, Batchelders, Trasks and Herricks.

Today you can find this hidden cemetery, the original church burial ground dating back to 1715, if you walk past the church parking lot, heading towards Shaws, and turn left down the rustic pathway nestled between number 9 and 27 Conant Street. Before exploring that, however, visit the church parlor to see the large portrait of Mr. Chipman hanging on the wall. During his leadership of almost 60 years, Second Church was able to lay the foundation necessary to grow and flourish in the years ahead.

Tricentennial Topic #4: Weaving Music into the Fabric of Second Church History

As we look back on our church's 300 year history, an important part of the story is how music was slowly woven into the fabric of our worship service. Today it's hard to imagine church without music, but during a typical worship service of the early 1700s, few songs were sung and few instruments were played. Instead, churches across New England used a repeat-after-me method of singing called *lining out*. The Deacon would read each line of the psalm and provide the pitch for the tune, and then the congregation would repeat the psalm with the given tune. Most singing was unaccompanied since musical instruments were frowned upon. Lining out was necessary, at first, to help with the issues of illiteracy and a lack of psalm books, but as years passed and those issues faded, support for regular singing began to grow. By the 1760s, Second Church began assigning its best singers special seats toward the front, sort of an unofficial senior choir, and it voted to abandon the old system of lining out in favor of singing in unison right from the start. In 1770 it introduced a new version of Watts Psalms and hymns into the worship service, and in 1804 it hired a Singing School for three months to provide interested parishioners instruction in musical sight-reading and choral singing.

Thoughtful planning and generous donations helped keep the momentum for music and singing growing during the next two centuries. A clarinet, a bass viol and a vocation, which is an early kind of organ, were all acquired. A music committee was established, more song books were purchased, and the choir was moved behind the pulpit. In 1802, Israel Thorndike, a prominent Beverly merchant, donated funds for the "permanent encouragement of choral singing" (6), in 1908 Anna Phillips donated a new organ, and in the 1970s two sets of hand bells were given to the church.

Today, under Bob Lague's leadership, every Sunday the Senior Choir performs two anthems. In addition to our Senior Choir, we have a Junior Choir and a Hand Bell Choir. We enjoy cantatas for Christmas and Easter, and look forward to Jazz Sunday and Choir Sunday. We hear brass, string and wind ensembles and sponsor public concerts. And to begin our 300th Anniversary celebration last October, Second Church hosted the Cape Ann Big Band for a night of Jazz. We've come a long way!

Tricentennial Topic #5: Second Church Divided and Reunited

The firm foundation Reverend Chipman and our founding families built for Second Church in the 1700s was about to be tested one century later. With the rise of Unitarianism in the early 1800s, a growing tension was being felt in numerous Congregational churches, including Second Church. Some people liked the new liberal theology that was emerging, which included a new interpretation of the trinity, while other people did not like this new theology at all. The differences grew so deep within Second Church, each party decided to worship at the church on alternating months. This arrangement did not last long, however, and in 1834 Second Church officially split into two congregations. A new church was formed, called Fourth Church, and it built its meeting house on Cabot Street just across from the Conant-Chipman House. The founding members of Fourth Church rejected the new liberal theology and continued to adhere to orthodox Congregationalism, while their neighbors at Second Church embraced the new liberal theology and were leaning towards Unitarianism. This was not the first time a church had separated in Beverly. A dissenting party from First Church left in 1802 to form Third Church, today the Dane Street Congregational Church, and years later, in 1830, First Church officially became Unitarian, as it is today.

Here, in North Beverly, Second Church and the newly formed Fourth Church coexisted for close to 30 years. During this time a Temperance Society, an Anti-Slavery Society and a Sunday School were formed. (The Sunday School had been inspired by two women from First Church, Joanna Batchelder Prince and Hannah Hill, who are credited with starting the first Sunday School in New England.)

By the 1860s, however, both Second Church and Fourth Church were struggling; neither one had a settled pastor and membership was beginning to decline, due in part to the outbreak of the Civil War. Talk began of rejoining the split congregation. One Second Church parishioner, eager for a reconciliation, wrote, "More than one hundred and fifty years ago this venerable edifice was erected by our ancestors for the worship of God...But one Meeting house is required for the accommodation of this population and this old church stands on the very best spot to make it convenient for every part of the Parish" (7).

In 1865, the same year the Civil War ended, the Second and Fourth Churches merged on "fair and honorable terms" and decided to adhere to orthodox Congregationalism (8). Second Church had been divided and was now reunited. Money from the sale of the Fourth Church building was put into a special repair fund, and the communion set from Fourth Church was given to a small church in Litchfield, Maine. The newly joined congregations embarked on a large renovation of the Second Church Meeting House, which included the installation of a stained glass window behind the pulpit. This renovation project served as an important part of the reunification process. Reverend Charles S. Porter, the great grandson of Reverend Chipman, preached the rededication sermon in 1865. Perhaps he served as a subtle reminder of the firm foundation the church was built upon and the strength that can emerge from any great struggle.

Tricentennial Topic #6: The Rasche Years

At the turn of the 20th century, changes at Second Church came quickly, ushering the church into modern times. The Sunday worship service was changed from the afternoon to the morning, the common communion cup was replaced by an individual service, dancing was now allowed in the Parish House, and a Women's Union was formed. The church also became creative about fundraising. To pay for fuel in 1911, it was voted, "to take a special collection...on the last Sunday in February if it should be a pleasant Sunday; but, if stormy, it would be taken the next fine Sunday" (9). In 1917 the organization of the church became more streamlined with the establishment of the Prudential Board, the Church Council, and other committees such as Missionary and Religious Education. Despite this careful planning, however, during the Depression the church saw its budget sink to below \$5000. These were indeed bleak years. To save money one year, it was voted to unite with other Beverly churches for worship when the Second Church pastor was on vacation.

After World War II ended in 1945, Navy Chaplain Dr. Robert Rasche was called as pastor. He swiftly met the challenges of the post-war growth of the community. Within two years of his ministry, two morning services were required to accommodate worshippers, the first candlelight service on Christmas Eve was held, and plans were developed to double the physical size of the church plant. The work would be done in three stages over a period of four years. First, a new central portion would be built, including Fellowship Hall, The Lovett Chapel, and the Sunday School rooms. This central portion would join the original 1714 Meeting House with the 1908 Parish House. (Incidentally, a lawn tennis court at one time occupied the green space between the two houses.) During the second phase, the chancel would be enlarged, with the addition of the transept, and during the third phase, the Parish House would be renovated. A Men's Fellowship Club was formed to help with the labor, and the three-phase project was completed in 1956. During the Rasche years, in addition to the doubling of the church plant, the current parsonage on Conant Street was built as well as the church parking lot.

The Rasche years mark a time of tremendous growth at Second Church. The budget, itself, grew from \$4,000 in 1947 to \$40,000 in 1963. Dr. Rasche retired after 18 years, and his retirement coincided with the 250th anniversary of the church. In 1963, reflecting on those 250 years, Robert Lovett, the church historian, wrote, "This has not been a one-man Church; it has not been a wealthy church. One of the encouraging developments of recent years has been a broadening of the base of support; we must depend upon the help of many, rather than on a few. May there continue to be persons found to serve the enlarged Church and the larger community as faithfully and well as those who served in the past, even from 1713" (10). During the early modern times, Second Church had spread its roots wide and deep into the community, honoring its legacy of faith, fellowship and service.

Tricentennial Topic #7: The Last Fifty Years

In the last 50 years, Second Church has spread its roots broad and deep into the community and the world. In 1965 with the arrival of Reverend Paul Clayton, we formed the Social Action committee, which today, true to our mission, “inspires loving service to humankind” (11). Our church doors are always open. During the week we are the home of Beacon Christian Academy and numerous other local organizations like the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, HAWC, Beverly Youth Soccer, Al Anon, the Triumph Center, and AA, to name a few. We have run a weekly blood pressure clinic for over 25 years. Our Social Action and Mission committee reaches out locally to places like Recovery High School, Beverly Bootstraps, Lifebridge, North Shore Community Development Coalition, and Family Promise. It reaches out nationally, with mission trips to Maryland and D.C, and internationally, with our support of the Casa San Jose Orphanage in Colima, Mexico.

In 1967 Second Church felt that an associate minister was needed, and Reverend Hugh Evans was called to fill that role. In 1979 we called our first female associate minister, Mary Jane Barber. During Reverend Bob Wright’s pastorate, handicap accessibility became a priority. A ramp was constructed, a chair lift installed (later replaced by an elevator in 2003), and a hearing aide system was added to the sanctuary. During the Wright years a *Building Endowment Fund* was established, and also the memorial garden was planted to provide a quiet outside space for prayer, mediation and quiet reflection.

In 1977 we became a teaching church, supporting and mentoring seminarians on the North Shore. As a congregation we know how to engage and nurture the pastor in training, and we have been blessed to have Gail Doktor, from Harvard Divinity School, as our seminarian during the past two years. During the past 50 years we have also been deeply involved with the UCC at the local, state and national levels. Ray Frost, who was once a Second Church delegate to the UCC, loved telling the story of the time he shared the stage with Martin Luther King, Jr., during the 1965 General Synod meeting.

We have learned how to model healthy, respectful and faithful conversations as modeled in the *Covenant for Working Together*, which is read before congregational and council meetings. The conversations we held regarding same-gender marriage in 2005 prepared us for our near-unanimous Open and Affirming vote in 2011. This was a clear demonstration of our open and mindful communications occasioned by our common covenant.

In 2011 we became an Open and Affirming church. All are welcome through our open doors.

We are blessed to have Alan, since 2000, and Tara, our new Pastor of Congregational Life. The vibrancy of the church today attests to their strong leadership and a dedicated congregation. From Jazz Sunday to Bible Olympics, from

Spirited Women to Bean Suppers, there are so many things we've shared. There is much to celebrate during this tricentennial celebration, for each one of us is a part of the Second Church story.

Citations

1. Stone, Edwin M., "A Lecture Comprising the History of the Second Parish in Beverly" July 1834. Page 10.
2. "The Meeting House that Grew, 1714-1954, 240th Anniversary of the Raising of the First Meeting house." Page 2.
3. Stone, Edwin M., "A Lecture Comprising the History of the Second Parish in Beverly." July 1834. Page 9.
4. Stone, Edwin M., "A Lecture Comprising the History of the Second Parish in Beverly." July 1834. Page 25.
5. Stone, Edwin M., "A Lecture Comprising the History of the Second Parish in Beverly." July 1834. Page 23.
6. Lovett, Robert W. "Account of the History of Second Church, presented after Sunday serviced during November 1982."
7. Lovett, Robert W. "Divided and Reunited." Page 72.
8. Lovett, Robert W "Divided and Reunited."
9. Lovett, Robert W. "Historical Highlights 1901-1963", Page 2.
10. Lovett, Robert W. "Historical Highlights 1901-1963", Page 6.
11. <http://www.beverlysecond.com/who.php>. October 2013.