

Chapter II

BAPTIST AND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

First Baptist Church — Temple Baptist Church Third Baptist Church — Portuguese Baptist Church

On February 15, 1781 "The Second Baptist Church in Freetown" was established. Organization was in the house of Jonathan Brownell at what is now the northeasterly corner of North Main and Brownell Streets. There were thirty constituent members, sixteen men and fourteen women, of whom there were six Boomers, six Bordens and four Warrens. On May 22, 1783, Amos Burrows was ordained as pastor by a council of ministers from nearby towns. On account of a dispute between the pastor and church members, the church withdrew its fellowship from Mr. Burrows and he removed to Vermont in 1784.

Five years after Mr. Burrows left, the church chose two of their own young men to conduct the public services and three years later they were ordained as pastors by a council of ministers and it was voted that one of them, Job Borden, who had been blind since he was eighteen years old, should "improve" one half of the Lord's Day and Nathaniel Boomer the "other half" and that Boomer should lead the singing. Boomer was granted a dismission and Job Borden remained as pastor of the church until his death in December 1832. "Father" Borden was a familiar figure in the village of Fallriver as he made his pastoral calls, riding an old white horse, which took his blind master, with almost human intelligence, to his destinations. For many years Job Borden occupied his own house situated on South Main Street near Borden Street.

A meeting concerning the building of an house of worship was held June 13, 1789. The authorized house was opened about 1800, near the "Narrows" on what is now the park grounds at the northeasterly corner of Pleasant and County Streets. The baptist folk were evidently not very

highly regarded by some of their neighbors from "over the pond" for soon after the church was opened, it is reported that wags posted on the church door the following —

"Great house
No steeple
Blind guide
Ignorant people"

This, the first meeting house, was just over the line and the name of the church was changed to the Second Baptist Church of Tiverton.

When this plot of land was sold to the City of Fall River in 1908, the First Baptist Society removed the remains in the old burial grounds to Oak Grove Cemetery and there erected a monument.

The church increased in membership and usefulness and a new church building was erected on South Main Street in the village. The church was then known as the First Baptist Church of Troy. The dedication of this building was on July 30, 1828. Enoch French and John Davol were ordained as younger deacons. A Baptist Female Charitable Society was organized and directed to procure "trimmings" and "dress" the meeting house. Candlesticks were purchased for the evening meetings.

When in 1834 the name of Troy was changed to Fall River, the church changed its name to the Baptist Church of Fall River. It was at this time that the Rev. Asa Bronson was pastor. The lay men and women began the work carried on by them and their successors for many years, of establishing religious centers and Sunday schools in outlying districts.

On Sept. 16, 1840 another house of worship called the Baptist Temple was completed and dedicated. The old church building on the corner of South Main Street and Charity Lane was conveyed to the Church of the Ascension for \$4,500.

In 1847 one hundred and seventy persons, by agreement were dismissed from the church to become members of the Second Baptist Society. The "First Church" sold the Baptist Temple to the "Second Church", for \$7,000. The deed, not recorded till April, 1848 describes the land as "bounded easterly by South Main Street; southerly by land of John And Jesse Eddy; westerly by land of Seth Darling and northerly by land of James Ford and others". The sale included many specified pews.

The "First Church" then started to build its presently occupied edifice on North Main Street. Pending its completion in 1850, when the Rev. A. P. Mason was the pastor, meetings were held in Union Hall at the north-westerly corner of North Main and Bank Streets. Union Hall had been a

place for public meetings and entertainments and was also used as a public school. It was subsequently removed to Portsmouth, R. I.

The Rev. A. P. Mason was a descendant of Samson Mason, who had been an officer in Cromwell's army and came to America in 1650, joining with Rev. John Myles in organizing the "First Swansea Church".

In 1855, Rev. P. B. Haughwout became pastor. Just before and during the Civil War, he was an influential local leader. His marked abilities extended beyond his pastoral duties and his community leadership. He was a natural philosopher. He, together with his friend Norman Easton, (a boss engraver in the American Print Works) discovered a fossil which was of great importance in its relation to the geological history of the Narragansett basin. The discovery was published in the scientific periodicals and Norman Easton was elected an honorary member of the Boston Society of Natural History.

Pentacost the evangelist was connected with a very extensive revival in Fall River in 1879, during which many members were added to the "First Church" and its debt of twenty thousand dollars was cancelled. In continuation of this revival, a very successful one was conducted in the Baptist Temple by Moody and Sanky. Mr. Moody himself led the services which were attended day and evening by very large congregations. The sacred songs were very popular and were sung in the homes and on the streets as well as in the religious meetings.

The First Baptist Church has been enlarged and renovated several times. During the pastorate of Dr. E. C. Herrick (1914-1926), a finely equipped parish house was erected on Pine Street, west of the church.¹ At the time of the influenza epidemic, the parish house was opened for the care of children, who could not receive proper care at home on account of the illness of their elders. Dr. Herrick is now President of the Andover-Newton Theological School.

Stores have been built in front of the Temple Baptist Church. The interior of the church has been reconstructed and beautified.

The history of the Baptist churches would not be complete without some mention of their local commitments. In the early fifties the "First Church" assumed the care of a mission on lower Spring Street. Here a

¹ The church vestry and the parish house, now known as "Herrick House" did not provide adequate quarters for the large Bible School connected with the church. The corporation has purchased the land and building next north of the church edifice, which was the homestead of Stephen Davol, and remodeled the interior of the dwelling to accommodate children's classes. The building has been named "Davol House" in honor of members of the Davol family who, over a long period of time have faithfully served the parish.

small chapel was built. This building was moved to a lot on Brownell Street and a mission school conducted. In this same building, in 1871, the Mechanicsville Baptist Church was organized and incorporated as the Third Baptist Church in 1874. The land and building was deeded to them by the "First Church" as a Christmas gift. This church disbanded in 1881 and the "First Church" again assumed charge. Later a much larger chapel was erected on the same lot, east of the old building.

To replace the Spring Street mission, a chapel was erected on Columbia Street, on a site now occupied by the Church Santo Christo. The work was continued for a time on the second story of the Ferry Street Railroad Station; then the Broadway Chapel was constructed in 1894 and services continued until 1916.

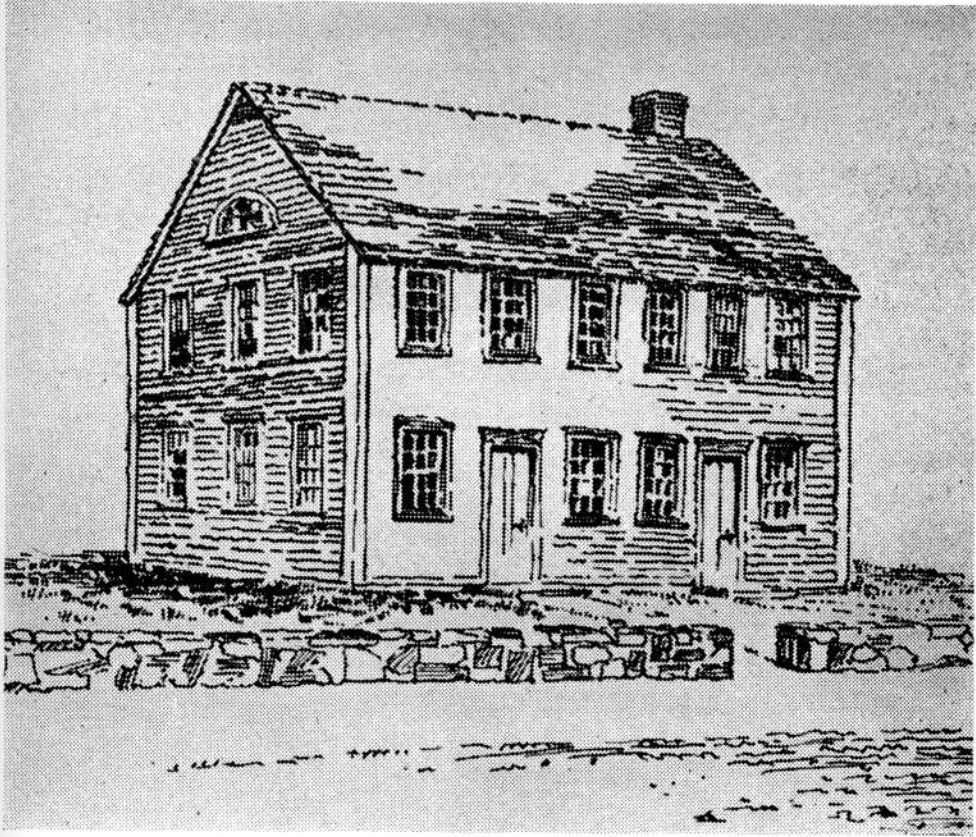
A Harrison Street development began in 1885 and for thirty-four years served that community. The Harrison Street Chapel is now occupied by the Syrian Presbyterian Church.

The Portuguese Baptist Church on Rodman Street was assisted in its formative stages by the "First Church" and volunteer workers from its membership.

The Temple Baptist Church was responsible, by its assistance and support of chapels on Tucker Street and on Foster Street, for the establishment of the Third Baptist Church on Brayton Avenue. The "Temple", by giving assistance to a neighborhood effort helped to establish the Temple Chapel in North Tiverton, now known as the North Tiverton Baptist Church.

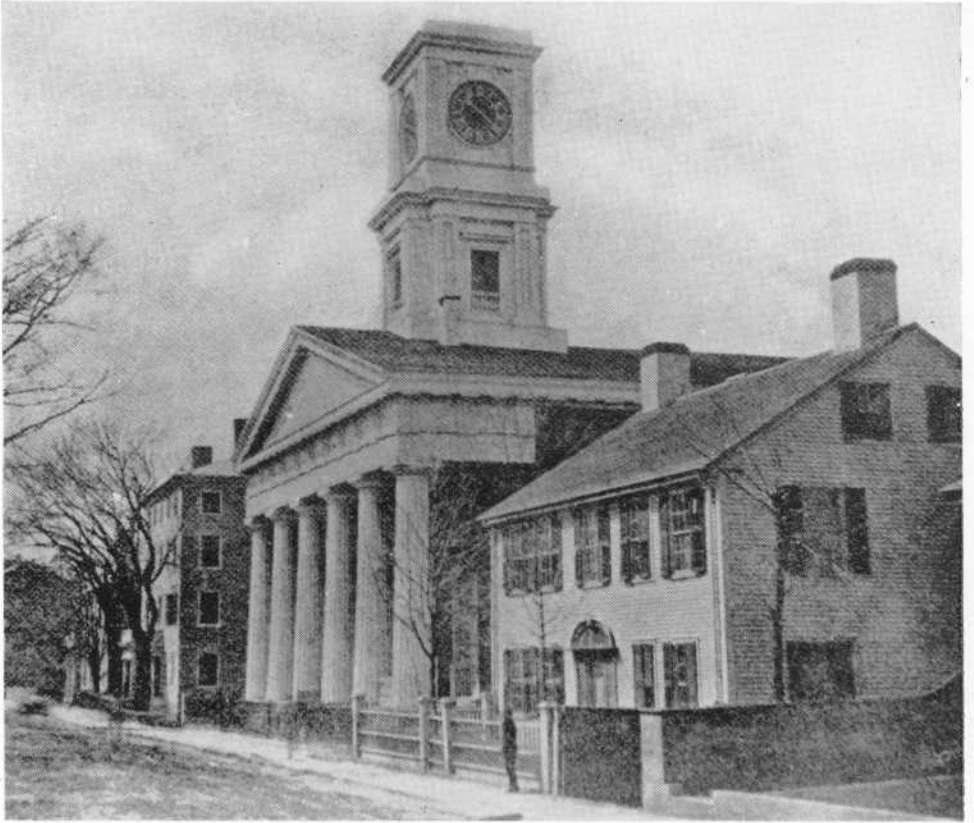
The First Congregational Church

The First Congregational Church of Fall River, then Troy, was organized by a council of pastors from neighboring towns at the home of Deacon Richard Durfee, on January 9, 1816. There were five members, four of whom were Durfees. The members met at the homes of Deacon Durfee and others and occasionally in the school house or at the Line Meeting House until 1823. ("The Line Meeting House" was built in 1798, on the easterly side of South Main Street, at the line which separated Massachusetts from Rhode Island. It was erected through the efforts of various denominations living nearby in both states as a "house common to all but controlled by none". With the exception of an Indian meeting house east of North Watuppa Pond, this was the only church building in Troy and



LINE MEETING HOUSE (1798)

From sketch by Philip D. Borden



THE OLD STONE CHURCH

Slade House

William M. Hawes, Residence

there had been none since Fall River was incorporated in 1803. The old Freetown church built in 1714 near Mother's Brook was in ruins.)

The congregation gradually increased in numbers and by 1822, with help from outside, the fellowship was able to erect its first church and call a pastor; the Rev. Augustus Reed, a native of Rehoboth and a graduate of Brown College. His yearly salary was fixed at four hundred and fifty dollars. The meeting house located on Anawan Street near South Main was enlarged in 1827 and later sold to the Unitarian Society, who in turn sold the building to the town for a school house. It was destroyed in the fire of 1843.

Rev. Orin Fowler was the third pastor of the church and served from July 7, 1831 until November 1849 when he resigned to take his seat in the National House of Representatives.

By 1832, the congregation had outgrown its church building and a new edifice, at a cost of \$16,000 was erected on the corner of North Main and Elm Streets, where the Masonic Temple now stands. As was the custom at that time, the masons worked from five o'clock in the morning until seven at night, with three quarters of an hour for breakfast and one hour for dinner but contrary to custom, they were served no liquor. They received one dollar and eight cents for a day's work. As was usual in larger churches, special pews were placed in the side gallery for the use of colored people.

The vestry of the church was used for relief quarters after the 1843 fire. The building itself caught fire under the eaves but the flames were extinguished by Mr. Tripp the janitor.

This building known as the "Stone Church" was a landmark for many years. The clock in the tower recorded the official time. The sweet toned bell, a "Revere Bell", probably came from the foundry of Paul Revere, the son of the Revolutionary hero. It continues to call the parishioners to worship from its position in the belfry of the new church on Rock Street.

In its early years the church maintained a chapel on Bank Street which was later moved to Hanover Street and for many years was known as the Fowler Congregational Church of which Rev. Payson W. Lyman was pastor. It is now used by a colored congregation.

The Rev. William Wisner Adams, D.D. came to the First Congregational Church as acting pastor, October 1, 1863 and was installed September 14, 1864. He was the son of a Presbyterian minister and remained a member of the church where his father was pastor until his death. He studied at Williams College but never matriculated. He received his

honorary degree from "Williams" and was a trustee of the institution. Dr. Adams was liberal minded, a forceful preacher and devoted pastor. He served the church and community for nearly fifty years. His last public service was the preaching of the Christmas sermon in 1911. Dr. Adams was allowed to select his successor. He chose the Rev. Willard L. Sperry, now dean of Harvard Theological School. Dr. Adams died October 12, 1912. He lived to take a prominent part in the laying of the cornerstone of the stately structure on Rock Street presented to the society by Miss Sarah S. Brayton for a future church home. The new church and parish house, built of granite, along gothic lines was dedicated January 9, 1913.

The Central Congregational Church

In 1840, because of disagreements, a group of seventy members separated from the "First Church" and organized the Central Congregational Church. Their organization was completed Nov. 16, 1842. Pocasset Hall was selected as a place best suited for holding their Sabbath Day meetings. The Pocasset Block was destroyed by the fire of 1843. The Baptist Temple was without the fire area and the "Central Church" accepted the invitation from the Baptists to worship with them and share the use of the "Temple", until the church which they were erecting was completed. The framework of this church, which was under construction on the corner of Bedford and Rock Streets was badly scorched but saved from destruction. The "Temple" was shared by both congregations until the completion of the new building in November.

The Rev. Samuel Washburn was chosen as the first regular pastor and served from 1844 to 1849. Rev. Eli Thurston, D.D. was pastor from 1849 until his death in 1869. Dr. Thurston and the Rev. P. B. Haughwout of the First Baptist Church, with their powers of oratory and promotion rendered valuable aid during the Civil War period.



"Are there no heathen about us, who need to be saved?" This simple question propounded by Mrs. Borden, wife of Col. Richard Borden, in a women's prayer meeting, for foreign missions, held in the vestry of the old Central Church on Bedford Street, in 1849 was the primary cause of the establishment of the Pleasant Street Mission and in procedure and time to the organization of the Boys' Club. Through the activities of these two centers, the names and deeds of Rev. Edwin Augustus Buck and Thomas Chew live in the hearts of many a Fall River citizen.

The efforts of interested members of the Central Church to reach the neglected children of the community attracted the attention of other denominations and a number of people from the several churches organized the Fall River Domestic Missionary Society. After a few years the burden of finance fell upon the Superintendent and teachers of the mission school. With the help of friends and the use of a lot of land given by the Troy Cotton and Woolen Manufactory, they erected, in 1860, a building which stood on the corner of Pleasant and Sixth Streets. The religious and charitable activities continued for a time as a united effort but finally the care devolved almost entirely upon the Central Church.

On October 27, 1867, the Mission School called Rev. E. A. Buck to be their missionary. Mr. Buck's motto was —

"Help whomever,
Whenever you can!
Man forever,
Needs help from man."

The doors of the building were open every day in the week. The chapel became a Christian home for all nationalities. There were sometimes as many as eight different services on a Sabbath. The building was opened for relief at the time of the Granite Mill fire. Over two thousand dollars was raised by a dramatic club of the Sacred Heart Church and the money was committed to the care of two priests and Missionary Buck. The distribution was chiefly made under Mr. Buck's direction. The operatives never forgot his kindly care.

The Boys' Club

It cannot be said that the Boys' Club is a direct outgrowth of the Pleasant Street Mission but in an indirect way the two are interestingly associated. The Boys' Club was established by the National Association of Boys' Clubs, in 1890. Mr. Buck was the first president and Mr. Thomas Chew,² a partial product of the "Mission", the superintendent; a position he still maintains with skill and vigor. Matthew C. D. Borden, the son of Mrs. Richard Borden, one of the founders of the Pleasant Street Mission was the donor of the two superbly equipped buildings, one on Anawan Street for boys and one on Pocasset Street for older boys and men. These two buildings, together with the masterly management of Mr. Chew have become patterns for similar efforts all over the country.

² Died, August 10, 1944.

The French Congregational Church

The French Congregational Church³ first assembled in the Pleasant Street Mission in 1886 and somewhat later the church on Harrison Street was erected. It has continued to be a mission church under the supervision of a joint committee from the First and Central Congregational Churches.

The Pilgrim Congregational Church

The Pilgrim Congregational Church⁴ on Center Street started as a mission under the supervision of the Congregational Churches of the city. "Through the generosity of Simeon B. Chase and Leonard N. Slade, a chapel, dedicated on Jan. 13, 1893 was built and furnished on Broadway." It was known as the Broadway Congregational Church. The present structure on Center Street was erected in 1910 and was dedicated under its present title. During the nearly fifty years of its existence the "Pilgrim Church" has remained a mission church.

The Society of Friends

Friends held their first meeting in Fall River in 1819. Previous to that, local Friends had been a part of the Swansea Society. In 1821, they erected a meeting house on North Main Street. This was replaced by the present edifice in 1836. In 1834 there was a division of the Society and part of them worshiped in a meeting house on Franklin Street, known as the Green School House. The Franklin Street meeting house was discontinued prior to 1870 and the lot was then sold by Israel Buffington to James Davis and the meeting house was removed to High Street.

In 1861 when the Wilburite branch of the Society was located on Franklin Street, there were seventy members but no minister. At that time the Gurneyite branch, located on North Main Street had one hundred fifteen members. Forty-five scholars attended the Sabbath schools.⁵ The Monthly Meeting was then held in Swansea. It was a comparatively large society and accurate records were kept of its meetings. These records are now deposited in the vaults of the Moses Brown School in Providence, in nineteen volumes. They cover a variety of subjects both of men's and women's meetings, books of accounts, disownments, dismissals and preparatory meeting. They cover a period between 1732 and 1914.

³ Disbanded in 1944.

⁴ In 1944 the membership transferred by invitation, to the Central Congregational Church.

⁵ In 1944 the Society sold their church property on No. Main Street to the Y. M. C. A.

There were Quarterly Meetings, when matters of general importance were discussed and a schedule of items was prepared and recommended for action at the Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting was often held in Newport.

Mr. Phillips possessed a "Book of Disaplines" as prepared by the Yearly Meeting of Friends of New England, under date of 1785. It contained the minutes, conclusions and advices of sundry Yearly Meetings in England and America since their first institution. It was issued to a local meeting to guide their actions on discipline. This book was issued at a yearly meeting held in Providence.

The Friends, comprising almost the complete membership of the Society in and around Fall River, relying solely on their "inner light", that slavery was morally wrong, and ignoring completely any limitation on personal liberty due to social conditions and the rights of others, conspired, with other Societies of Friends throughout the North, to foment disorder and insurrection among the slaves in the South, and to establish a system known as the Underground Railroad, by which they could escape from their bondage and become either hidden refugees in the north, or else be transported to freedom in Canada, where no slavery was allowed. Of course not every conductor or director of the Underground Railroad was a Friend but their influence was predominant and controlling, as shown in the records and details of over a thousand escapes which were collected by William Still in his 780 page book on the subject. Many activities of the system in Massachusetts are collected by Wilbur H. Siebert in his pamphlet published by the American Antiquarian Society in 1936.

