



THE PHILLIPS
HISTORY OF FALL RIVER

✧ *Fascicle II* ✧

Ecclesiastical and Educational History
Welfare Agencies and Charities
Financial Structure
Industries
Public Utilities

by

ARTHUR SHERMAN PHILLIPS

With additions and interpolations

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Foreword

The subject matter and personalities considered in the second fascicle were outlined by the author and the greater part written by him. It was necessary for the sake of unity, for the editor to make interpolations and complete the writing of some of the chapters. It was not practical, even if desirable, to differentiate.

The editor realized, that in using Mr. Phillips' notes, direct quotations might inadvertently be used without proper acknowledgments, which would be very regrettable and we hope it has not happened.

The reader should bear in mind that 1941 was the date set for the ending of the history. Only occasional foot notes will record more recent developments.

Mr. Phillips often spoke of the co-operation of the School Department and particularly of the assistance of Mrs. Florence Chaplow Webb, at the time a clerk in the office of the Superintendent of Schools. The editor has sought information and advice from many individuals, all of whom have given freely of their time and assistance. Many knotty problems were settled for him by Mr. Thomas R. Burrell. To Mr. Edward S. Adams, he is much indebted for kindly criticism and advice and the painstaking review of the manuscript on education.

NORMAN S. EASTON,
Joint Author and Editor

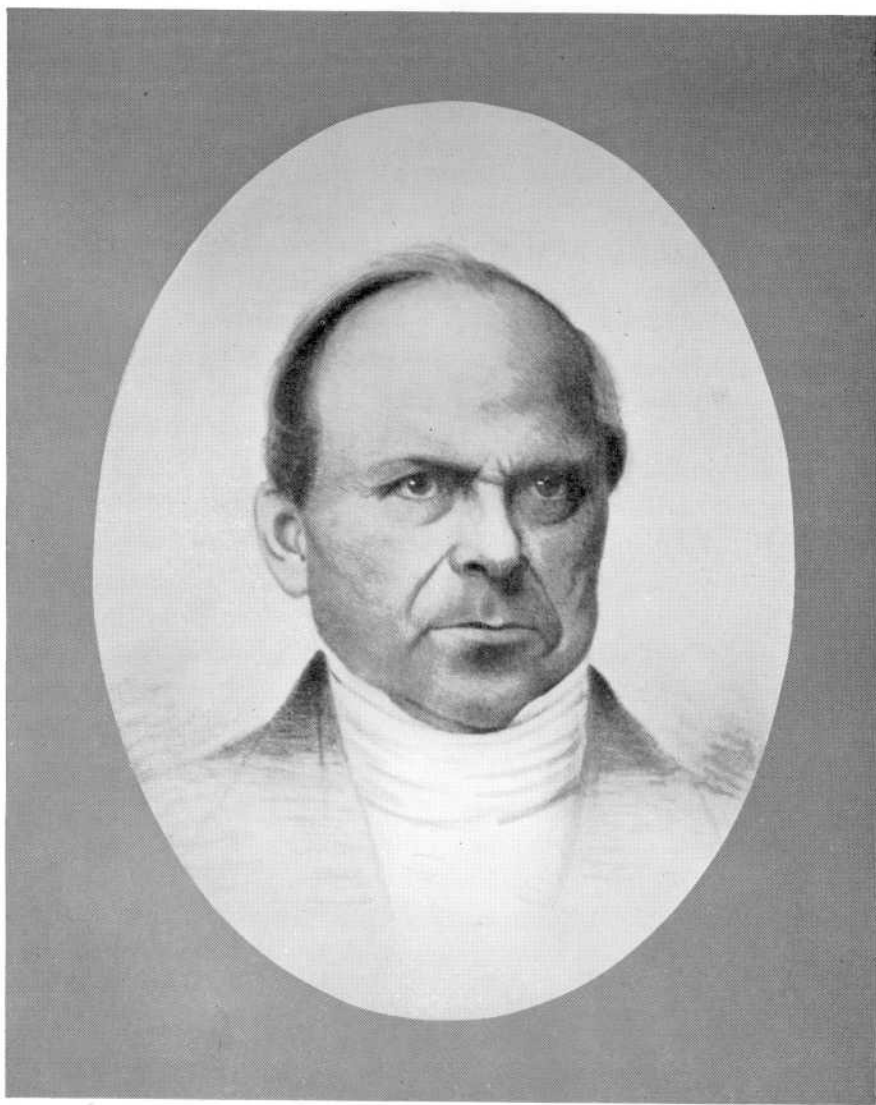
September 28, 1944

FASCICLE II

THIS PART DEALS WITH THE ECCLESIASTICAL,
EDUCATIONAL, FINANCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL
STRUCTURE OF FALL RIVER.

It includes a sketch of the status of the Pilgrim or State church, and its relation to the several sects and religious movements which supplemented it, as well as the increase in the number of church edifices and the efficiency of christian influences in our city; it reviews the development of our modern sectarian and non-sectarian schools and educational institutions; it cites the growth and reviews the development of our banking facilities and the activities of a few leading financial men; it discusses the rise and decline of the cotton industry; it deals with the history of some long time business firms and gives brief accounts of public utilities.





ORIN FOWLER

ORIN FOWLER

ORIN FOWLER was Fall River's leading historian. His history of Fall River, published in 1862, is a classic upon which subsequent historians must largely rely. He had fitted for and entered Williams College in the autumn of 1811, but he soon decided to study for a term at Colchester Academy. He entered the sophomore class of Yale College in 1812. Before graduating he became a teacher in the Academy at Fairfield, Connecticut and taught there until 1816, when he decided to devote himself exclusively to theological studies under the direction of Dr. Humphrey who afterwards became president of Amherst College. He was licensed to preach in October 1817 and after spending a year of missionary labor in Ohio and other midwestern states, he accepted a call to become a pastor at Plainfield, Connecticut. He was installed there in 1820 and was married October 16, 1821. In 1831, he was called to preach in Fall River and was installed here as pastor of the First Congregational Church on July 7th of the same year.

The Rev. Mr. Fowler was much interested in historical matters. In 1841 he delivered three discourses containing an historical sketch of Fall River. He was asked to defend the interests of Fall River before the boundary Commissioners (See Fascicle I p. 143) appointed to settle the line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and after an unfavorable decision by the commissioners, he published a series of papers which were printed in Boston, in favor of the claims of Massachusetts. The capacity which he had shown in this series of papers resulted in his election as a Senator of the Commonwealth in 1847. His influence secured a rejection of the report of the Commissioners; whereupon he was elected to represent his district before the Thirty-first Congress in Washington. He was influential in Washington in securing the passage of a cheap postage bill. In May 1850 he was released from his pastoral charges in Fall River, but he often supplied pulpits while in Washington. In 1852 he was taken seriously ill and he died on September third of the same year. He was buried in Fall River. He left no children.

A miniature of him, loaned to me, has been reproduced under my direction, and is published herewith. It shows the sturdy, forceful yet kindly countenance of him who, in addition to the performance of important pastoral duties and public offices, will ever be known as our first efficient historian.

Chapter I

THE PHILLIPS HISTORY
OF FALL RIVER

Chapter I

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY – BAPTIST BEGINNINGS

Early Church History

The early church history of Fall River coincides with the history of that portion of its territory which was a part of Freetown where the first colonial church was built, but in Freetown the influence of the first Baptist Church of Swansea antedated that of its own colonial church, and when the orthodox church was organized, the Baptists and Quakers were each of equal or superior numerical strength, and the Unitarian section of the Orthodox church soon became of importance. There were also many Tory church-members who believed that opposition to political separation from England was more important than religion. Harmony seemed impossible.

The earliest public action towards organizing a church was a vote of the town meeting on June 10, 1699. At the end of the three years, which followed the mere vote, little or nothing having been accomplished, the town resolved that "no building of a meeting house should be undertaken until the services of a minister, who would act also as a school teacher, had been engaged". In January 1705 Job Winslow was chosen agent of the town to act with Samuel Banford, minister in Taunton, to have William Way of Norton approved as a "minister qualified according to law". Two years later William Way consented to act as minister and school teacher in Freetown for such consideration as the people should willingly offer, but the Colonial Council of Plymouth did not consider Way to be a "learned and orthodox minister" and a complaint was made to, and an indictment was returned by, the Grand Jury, against the town, for delinquency in church maintenance. In 1707 Way was dismissed and the Court issued a peremptory writ requiring the town to provide itself with a minister. A town meeting was then held, and it seeming to the voters that the town might be excused from selecting a minister (and also from the indictment) by voting that the Bishop of England should send them a "Church of England" minister, it was so voted. In this course of action the Quaker element seemed

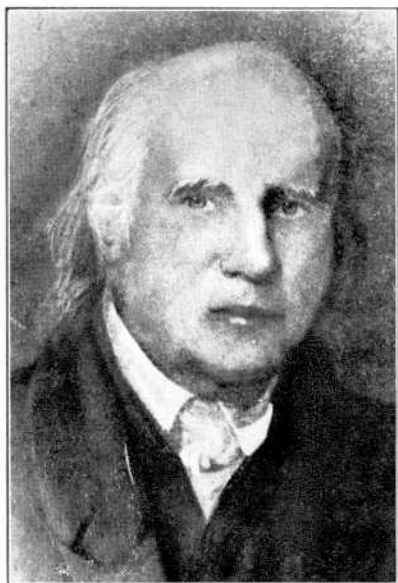
to be predominant, they believing that there should be no paid ministry. No minister came from England, so that in 1710 the town began to build its first meeting house on the land which had been deeded for its use to Josiah Winslow, Ralph Earle and William Winslow, Selectmen of Freetown, by Samuel Lynde June 5, 1710. The record is in book 2 at page 226 of the Fall River copied records.

The consideration named is "for that he would have the word of God preached in said town". The description is of two and a half acres of land, for the use of the town, to build a substantial meeting house, a training field, a school house, and a burying place and for no other use whatsoever, being a part of the 13th and a part of the 14th lot, lying westerly along the highway sixteen rods, and twenty-five rods deep by other land of Lynde.

The General Court granted twenty-five pounds to Joseph Avery when he had been selected as minister. Although Avery became the first pastor in Freetown he resigned almost immediately, and when, after strong debate, the town voted to call Recompense Wadsworth, at a salary of twenty pounds a year, the opposition led by one John Read was so great that he declined the call.

The new meeting house was very roughly built; it needed repairs within three years and was not occupied until these repairs were completed in 1713. There were objections to control of the church by the town. The Baptists were the strenuous champions of this principle, and the Quakers also protested against a paid ministry. There was constant turmoil until a Quaker meeting house was built about 1725. Then the Quakers became numerically the largest worshipping congregation in the town, and included the men of "first minds, most money and best manners". In 1725 they built a church of their own at Quaker Hill, near what is now known as Crystal Springs, and that then became the predominating religious center and parish church of the town.

For this and other reasons the original Freetown church did not have its formal dedication until 1747. In December of that year, Silas Brett from Bridgewater formally opened the church and caused to be entered upon the town records his formal covenant, which is often referred to, viz: that he would neither directly nor indirectly take advantage of the laws of the Province to get a salary settled upon him, and that he would look for and expect his support by the free will offering of the people. Mr. Brett's ministry was successful, and in 1748 three of the selectmen donated a farm of fifty-three acres for the use of the ministry, yet the town still refused to repair the meeting house, voting that those who were "disposed to repair it have



REV. JOB BORDEN

1795 – 1832

“He is blind as to natural sight, but he hath such spiritual light as to be a clear preacher of the Gospel.”

full liberty to do so at their own cost and charge". Pastor Brett had a small stipend from the Protestant Missionary Society and another small income for his pastoral work among the Indians at their church in Indiantown. Although he was deemed to have been very successful he resigned in 1776, giving as reason that although he had "some appearance of success and exercised great patience yet with repeated disputes and want of support, the prevailing of sectarian principles and especially the public disputes of the country made him so unhappy that he believed it to be his duty to ask for a dismissal". These troubles referred to were largely brought about because at this time (The American Revolution) the Tory and Whig disputations rendered church harmony impossible. Mr. Brett was an American patriot. Col. Gilbert, an English officer, was a disturbing element. At a later time he fled from the Province and his lands in Freetown were confiscated.

During the War of Independence the worshippers in this church were widely scattered and the old meeting house at Mother's Brook had begun to decay after February 1781 when the First Baptist Church of Fall River was organized in the southern part of the town. When the final vote, which caused dissolution, was passed there were only twenty-one church members, almost equally divided between those who had Whig and Tory sentiments. The last bitter wrangle was due to Col. Gilbert's opposition to a vote that December 15, 1774 should be observed as a day of Thanksgiving as had been recommended by the Provincial Congress at Cambridge.

In 1793 the Baptists built a house of worship in Assonet Village. In 1809 a "First Congregational Church" was built in the village (Fall River had been set off as a separate town six years before that). The location of the meeting house at Mother's Brook, then ceased to be at the geographical center of the town, but in the memory of some who are now living the decaying old church was still standing.

Baptist Beginnings

The history of the First Baptist Church in Swansea is of controlling interest. It was the earliest church established in the territory actually contiguous to Fall River, and its organization was in violent contrast to that of the colonial churches.

In Plymouth the Puritans desired to follow their own religious convictions and to conduct their own search for the truth. They had passed through a violent church disruption, they feared further dissensions; they came to America to continue their studies and to there more fully formulate

their own creed. In their new home those who became freemen also thereby became church members. It was *their* State and *their* Church; others might come and go and agree or disagree with their theology, and so long as these others had no nuisance value (as did the early Quakers) the Pilgrims remained at peace and maintained in their midst freedom of action and allowed a free discussion of religious ideas.

Rehoboth was a large township; it had a feeble Orthodox church and when (in 1667) John Myles and his congregation came to live in Rehoboth, he (although a Baptist) was allowed to preach in the Orthodox church, as Roger Williams had done in Plymouth. When, however, he attempted to form a new Baptist society in the same town, the colonists would have none of it.

As early as 1646 (Ply. Col. Book II, page 106) the Plymouth Court had ordered that something be done to maintain the liberties of the churches without intermeddling with or wronging each other, "so that they may live in peace".

On June 10, 1650 the Court further ordered that whosoever shall thereafter set up any church or public meeting, diverse from those already set up and approved, shall, unless the government consent thereto, be suspended from town meetings and presented to the next General Court, to receive such punishment as the Court shall think meet.

In 1644 it was ordered (Book IV, page 86) that "all men and women of orthodox opinions, with competent knowledge and of civil lives, not scandalous, may be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and their children to baptism, either by admitting them into a congregation already gathered or by permitting them to gather themselves into such other congregations as they shall select, where they may enjoy the benefit of the sacrament; that difference in opinion shall not break the bonds of peace and charity."

A sub-division of parishes was not approved of in Plymouth, especially where, as in Rehoboth, the place could barely support a single learned preacher. About this same time the Colonial Commissioners requested that all colonies make special provisions for a "comfortably settled" ministry in every plantation. Upon complaint therefore by the Rehoboth freemen to the Plymouth Court, the Baptist Assembly at Rehoboth was prohibited for a month, and Myles and his co-organizer John Brown were each fined five pounds for setting up their separate church. Complaints against others of the society were dismissed. The Court at Plymouth then asked the Baptists to transfer their church to some place "not already in

parish relations" and so they removed to Wanamoissett. At a later time in the same year the colony incorporated the town of Swansea, and included with it the part of Wanamoissett, where the church was located, for the sole purpose of creating a separate plantation as the seat of this first localized Baptist church. Swansea was named after "Swansea in Wales, from which town Rev. John Myles and his followers had come". They brought with them their original church book of records which is still in existence and is now deposited for safe keeping with the B. M. C. Durfee Trust Co. in Fall River. Thus Congregationalists and Baptists were joined into a new and a State church, with church members and town freemen as a single entity.

The pastor John Myles had been a learned preacher of the Church of England, but while at Swansea in Wales during Cromwell's rule, his church became a strong Baptist body. In 1662, upon the accession of Charles II, Myles fled with many others and several of his own flock and landed in Dorchester, whence they went to Rehoboth, and there Myles became an assistant pastor in the regular Congregational church.

Thomas Willet, an eminent founder of this Baptist Church, was a son and grandson of eminent clergymen in England. (See Goodwin page 521). He was reared in Holland, came to Plymouth in 1630 at the age of twenty and had many Dutch habits and sympathies. He married John Brown's daughter Mary in 1636. He entered the colonial service at the Kennebec trading post for a short time and then engaged in the Manhattan Dutch trade. In 1651 he was chosen to the Board of Assistants at Plymouth, and held that position for fourteen years, being succeeded by his father-in-law John Brown. He was chosen captain of the train-band in 1648. He was a member of the Brown household at Wanamoissett. In 1664 when the English captured Manhattan, the Dutch requested that he be chosen the first mayor of New York City and he served in that capacity for two terms. He was an incorporator of Swansea in 1667 when Wanamoissett became a part of that town. He led the Congregational element which supported the first Baptist church in Swansea, and died in Swansea in 1674, his wife having pre-deceased him in 1669.

Another eminent founder of the Swansea church, John Brown, was also a Congregationalist. He had been an English ship builder. He knew the Pilgrims at Leyden. In 1634, his age being about fifty, he and his wife Dorothy with three children, came to Plymouth. He became a freeman in 1636 and was on the Board of Assistants for eighteen years. He was one of the original purchasers of Taunton and in 1645 was a purchaser at

Wanamoissett, now Swansea, to which place he moved his family. The Indians had great confidence in him and he arbitrated many perplexing questions relating to the Indian lives and many periodical disputes between Plymouth and the Bay Colony. In 1652 he sued Pastor Newman for slander (the first colonial slander suit of which I am informed). The jury awarded him a hundred pounds, but he remitted the damage. Both he and his son James were held in high regard by the Indians and Massasoit enjoined its continuance upon his subjects. A few days before the Indian war broke out, when Brown urged Philip to keep the peace, Philip was very insolent to him.

We should learn a lesson from two votes passed in the town of Swansea in 1667, one by the town itself and the other by the Baptist Church.

Bearing in mind that important Orthodox creeds were, first the church and the State should be a single entity; and, second that the mode of baptism as an evidence of faith was optional, while the Baptists believed that proper baptism could be by immersion only and that church and state activities should be absolutely divorced, — these two religions lived in harmony in the same church for many years because each gave prominence to the *irenics* of its creed, and discarded the polemics, which would lay stress on small differences.

The church voted (see documentary history of Swansea pp 47 et seq), "the minister may take liberty to baptise as the Lord shall persuade their consciences" and "that with relation to non-admission to the town, we agree that no man of evil behavior or contentions shall be admitted which is to be understood to mean that we shall not hinder a godly man to come among us".

This was agreed to at a town meeting duly called, and fifty-five persons then signed the agreement and thus became the town's first voters and freemen.