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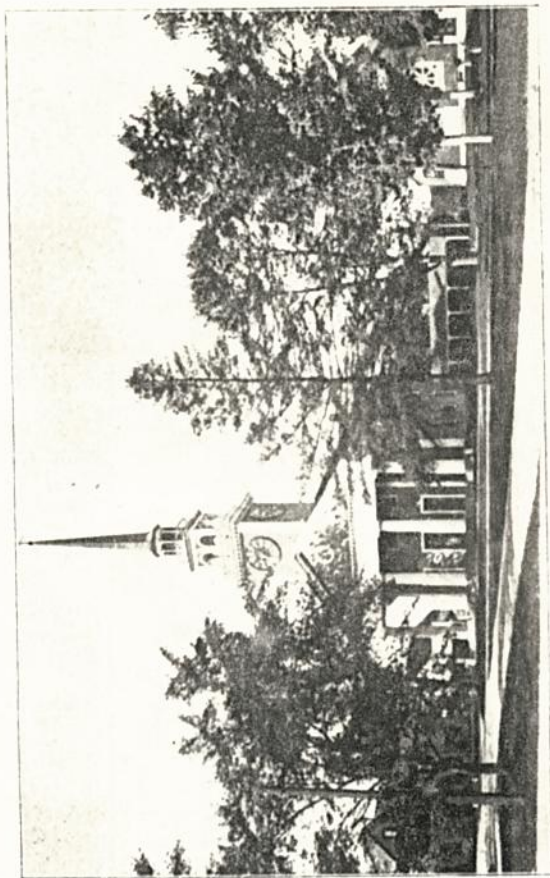
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OLD FAMILIES
OF THE
FIRST PARISH, BILLERICA

BY

MRS. M. H. SAGE.

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OLD FAMILIES
OF THE
FIRST PARISH.

BY
MRS. M. H. SAGE.

Read at the Centennial of the First Parish Church, Billerica,
Massachusetts, June 30, 1898.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION BY JOSHUA BENNETT HOLDEN, 1898.

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The fathers' many worthy deeds
The children would perpetuate,
And here to-day within these walls
Their memory we commemorate.

Their ready zeal, their patient toil,
Though sown in doubt and tears,
Was dropped amid the richest soil ;
Has blessed us for these many years.

The granite shaft on yonder green
Records the tale of valor won :
We pause, and think how in these years
Our God hath led us on.

M. H. Sage.

Y request of our minister I shall attempt to recall the names of some who formerly worshipped here, and some things respecting the church itself; if it could speak, it could do it better than anyone. This ancient temple is very dear to many of us, for there are over a score of those who worship here who are the lineal descendants of those who planted this church.

Its pleasant appearance this beautiful June day is a marked contrast to what it was in the early part of this century, when there were no fires in winter, for only the grandmothers and invalids of the families brought their footstoves. The last time that that honored servant of God, Rev. Dr. Andrew Preston Peabody, was in this church, he described it as it appeared to him, when he was at the Pemberton Academy, a boy of seventeen. He said it was barn-like within, and one morning in January was so cold that he noticed many of the youths blew upon their finger-tips to warm them, and that it was no uncommon occurrence here for one whose occupation kept him much upon his feet or out in the open air during week days, when he felt

sleepy in church during the sermon, to rise and stand awhile, and often there would be five or six standing at once.

Everyone stood in prayer time; the prayers were longer then than now, and there were more of them. The pews had hinged seats, which were lifted at the beginning of prayers, and at the close of the very long prayer some of the roguish boys would, accidentally, of course, put them down with such a slam, the good doctor said it re-echoed through the church, and was like unto a volley of musketry. Those boys were forgiven long ago. It was all the way they had for "getting even" with the minister, for being obliged to listen to such weary, dull sermons and tedious, long prayers. My neighbor, Miss Susan Hill, who left us four years ago, at the age of ninety years, told me that the quaint cottage on Andover Street, where Mr. Benson now lives, was built for a "Sabba'-day house," a sort of commons, where the parishioners from a distance could assemble at noontime to warm themselves and eat their dinners. Some preferred, she said, to be by themselves, and her father, Mr. Job Hill, with his large family of sons, daughters, and workmen, and his neighbor, Mr. John Stearns, the father of the late Gov. Onslow Stearns, of New Hampshire, hired each a front chamber in the house where I now live for a "noon rest." Several cords of

wood were prepared in the fall and brought to the place, and on going to church one of the boys would stop and build a fire in the fireplace, which would be cared for by some member of the family who lived below, detained from church for that purpose. For the noon lunch she said her family always carried a large, round, wooden butter-box, full of doughnuts, some home-made cheese, bread and butter, and any cold meat that might be handy, and a jug of cider, which was poured into large quart mugs and made hot by having irons placed in it which had been heated by being thrust into the coals on the hearth. After an hour or so the people assembled at the church again to hear another long sermon and long prayer.

Before 1844, when this church was moved and turned half around to face the east, the pews were square with high partitions; the high pulpit was reached by long, straight stairs.

At that time the present pulpit and pews were placed here, taken from a church in Boston.

Some have questioned whether this pulpit was the one from which Ralph Waldo Emerson preached. I wrote to his daughter, Miss Ellen Emerson, and this is her reply: "My father's church was the Second Church. Henry Ware, Jr., was the minister before my father, and Chandler Robbins was his successor. I think the meeting-house was taken down

when the society built a new one on Bedford Street. From there they moved to Boylston Street, where the Second Church is now, with Mr. Van Ness as its minister. Your pulpit certainly was Henry Ware's, and in it my father was ordained."

The desk in the Sunday-school room below has been occupied by many eminent men. It was formerly the pulpit in the old Orthodox Congregational church in Woburn. When the society moved into their new church home, the building was sold to the Unitarians. I was a girl at school in Woburn during the palmy days of the Lyceum. Lyceum Hall was not then built, and in the vestry of the Congregational church those who attended the Lyceum assembled, as it had the largest seating capacity of any place, except the church room above.

But when the great lights came,—and they were always coming then, as now,—it was often expedient to adjourn to the church room above. When Mr. Barnes was preaching at the Woburn Unitarian Church, this pulpit was received by us at the time we made the vestry, in the early seventies, I think. From that pulpit I have heard speak, A. L. Stone, a former minister of Park Street Church, gifted John Pierpont, two ministers that our soldiers, in the Civil War, loved so well, Thomas Starr King, Anson Burlingame, at one time our commissioner to China, Governors

Banks and Boutwell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, President Felton, Agassiz, Roswell D. Hitchcock, an eminent Hebrew scholar, Edward Chapin, who charmed us with his eloquence, Richard Salter Storrs, that prince of preachers; and most wonderful of all to me were Henry Ward Beecher, who took us right along with him, and made us laugh or cry at will, and Charles Sumner, who spoke for nearly two hours on the dignity and practicability of the anti-slavery enterprise, and the time seemed but fifteen minutes, he had such a hold upon us. We are pleased to differ from the Second Church in Boston and the church in Woburn in this respect: when we "fix over" our meeting-house we hold on to our old pulpits with their many associations. One of the parishioners here, Miss Abby Jaquith, has recently performed, in a beautiful way, a delightful labor of love, "Memory's Tribute,"—selected words of a former revered minister, Rev. Christopher C. Hussey, which she has given us in book form; and in recalling the names of some who formerly worshipped here, it seems most appropriate that they be introduced to you in his words: "Often as you gather in this house of worship, you can see around you, in seats vacant, those who worked and worshipped, prayed and suffered and enjoyed in the midst of these scenes. Their invisible monuments builded by deeds of goodness remain."

At the time this church was new, the deacons were Samuel Whiting and Ralph Hill. Deacon Whiting was a soldier of the Revolution, an honored citizen, and deeply interested in the welfare of this church. The same was equally true of his associate, Deacon Ralph Hill. In the "seating of the meeting-house," soon after Deacon Hill's death, his widow was given a sitting "in ye fore seat below." It was an ancient custom here, a Sunday or two before Thanksgiving, to take a contribution, so that the poor of the town should have an abundant Thanksgiving dinner; and Col. John Parker, the grandfather of our Mr. Charles Henry Parker, always looked out that his own contribution should be large enough to cover all unexpected needs. Mr. Nathan Mears always retained an interest in this church and town after he left for another home. His gifts to this community before his death testify to this; and the same may be said of Mr. John Corbin Hutchins.

Judge Locke, whose home was at the Hillhurst, was not only a noted but a just judge. Later on, this place became the home of Mr. Joel Richardson. Marshall Preston, whose home was where our minister now lives, was an honest lawyer who always advised people not to go to law but settle their disputes among themselves. Later on, Marshall Preston's house became the home of Lyman Haynes; and as I am

only speaking of those who have passed on, I cannot in this connection speak of the benefactions of the children of Lyman Haynes to this community. Dr. Zadoc Howe has his permanent monument among us in the Howe School, which he founded, leaving his money for this purpose. The town erected a memorial to his memory in our old South Burying Ground. I well remember what a vision of brightness Dr. Howe's sleigh made upon the snowy landscape, as I stood, a child of eight years, one cold winter morning, in the doorway of the old yellow schoolhouse in South Bilerica. For you must know that the sleighs of those days were high-backed and invariably of a tawny yellow, dull blue, or dingy brown; and if one was a little more "forehanded," as they expressed it, than his neighbors, that fact was often emphasized by a white border (never more than half an inch wide) around the top of the sleigh. Dr. Howe's sleigh was a bright scarlet, and what there was of it bore about as much resemblance to others then in use as the first monitor in the Civil War did to a regular ship of the line. It consisted of a pair of runners, to which was attached a semi-circular chair for a seat, and had one shaft. Below the chair was a box seat to hold the large, green woollen bag, in which his medicine was kept. It was always a mystery to us who were children then, why the bottles did not get broken, and the pills,

powders, and squills get mixed. His horse was white, and its name was Bony, and we used to wonder why such a nice-looking horse should have such a name. Years after we found out that Bony was a diminutive for Bonaparte. No one enjoyed a joke better than the "beloved physician."

Soon after the town hall was finished, the one burned in 1893, an old-fashioned tea party was held in it. Dr. Howe contributed an immense frosted cake, in three tiers, requesting that it should not be cut until the close of the tea party. With some of my schoolmates I hovered around in the vicinity of that cake nearly all the evening, hoping to get a large piece of the frosting, and it was one of the disappointments of our lives when we ascertained that the cake was only three inverted paste-board boxes, the frosting was white wrapping paper, the seams being covered with conventional designs in little pink and white sugarplums, all being done by the good doctor himself, skilfully enough to deceive the "very elect." Dr. Joseph Hill was for a long time the organist here. While those good men, Deacon Jeremiah Crosby and Deacon James Faulkner, were deacons here, the families of Thomas Shedd, Amasa Holden, Jonathan Hill, Samuel Cole, William Whitford, Harvey Crosby, Franklin Jaquith, and Jefferson Cutter worshipped here. Many of these came a long distance, but were promptly in their pews and gave

liberally of their substance to carry on the good work of this parish. And the sons and daughters of these families love to come up to this old hill town to recall events of other days. Mr. Paul Hill and his gifted son Frederick made life more pleasant for us all, while they were with us.

Deacon Mark Lund, who has recently entered into rest, full of years and Christian graces, could say of this church, —

"I love Thy Kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode."

Dr. Jonathan Bowers' home was where Dr. Savage now lives. After Dr. and Mrs. Bowers died their four children, all unmarried, each lived to a good old age, — Priscilla, Polly, Fanny, and William. Polly and Fanny attended church here; Priscilla attended the Baptist Church, to which she left her money. These sisters had a wonderful flower garden; many here remember the stately hollyhocks, foxgloves and crown imperials. Polly was a unique character, the first woman in town to wear a hat, I presume, not like the dainty ones of to-day, but her brother's old palm-leaf one that had seen service for a series of years in his hayfield. With that upon her head and his thick cowhide boots on, she was a familiar figure to many here. She had a white dress, made of sheeting, with "Merrimack Mills" in large, blue letters upon it, which she wore when and

where she pleased. Yet she had many nice things. We remember her pretty white silk bonnet, and wondered why she wore it when her face was wrinkled, and she not a bride. She had a most accommodating way of wearing her rings to church on the outside of her gloves, and of placing her hand so the little girls could look at them when tired of listening to the minister. Polly and Fanny were ahead of their time; others have given of their abundance, but they gave their all to the town of Billerica as a fund, the interest to be used for the poor. And the "Bowers fund," when rightly administered, is an angel of comfort in homes of sickness and want.

To-day, in the midst of our joy, I must confess to our shortcoming as a town, and with others I hang my head in very shame to-day because we have no public memorial of them to point out to our guests on this occasion. Reverently we mention them to-day, Polly and Fanny Bowers! Blessed be their names forever! Mr. Gardner Parker, father of Fred H. and J. Nelson Parker, was long active in town affairs, a trustee of our Howe School, one of the committee for the erection of our soldiers' monument, and their good friend during the Civil War. Mr. Parker's sister, Mrs. Clarissa Osborn, gave her beautiful strawberry garden for the site of the Bennett Library, and she gave herself to every good work in the village, and was "Aunt

Clarissa" to many of us not a bit of kin. Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Rogers, father and mother of Miss Harriet Rogers, and their daughter, Miss Eliza, have an abiding memory in our hearts to-day. Miss Eliza and her cousin, Mrs. Belle Faulkner Ranlett, daughter of Dea. and Mrs. Luther Faulkner, were both interested deeply in our Sunday school. During Mrs. Rogers' long life of ninety-five years she was full of good works. Mr. Hussey once told me she always kept him supplied with money for unexpected wants in parish work.

The long life of Mrs. Joshua Bennett was full of deeds of helpfulness. This church was a frequent recipient of her bounty.

To her generous munificence we owe our library, which bears her name, and her daughters, Mrs. Ellen B. Holden, mother of Joshua B. Holden, and Mrs. Rebecca B. Warren helped furnish the building and supply it with books. William Wilkins Warren, the son-in-law of Mrs. Bennett gave the fireplace and mantel in the reading-room of the library. There were three men who kept the store where Mr. F. A. Morey now is, who had a deep interest in this society. The first of these, Col. John Baldwin, father of Miss Lizzie Baldwin, was the treasurer of this parish for over forty years and without any expense to the society. The mantle of his interest in the parish fell upon his daughter, Miss Sarah, who also had a pleasant way of

remembering the nephews and nieces of other people at Christmas time, as well as her own. Col. Baldwin's son, John, Jr., succeeded his father in the store, and he and his excellent wife gave proof of their regard for this church after they went to their Chicago home. Next in the store was Sylvester Hill; he knew every girl and boy in the village who came into the store, that had no money to spend for candy, and calling them by the same endearing name that he used in addressing his own little ones, he patted them on the head with one hand and gave them candy with the other. And who of us will ever forget his wife, Mrs. Abby Hill, with her wondrous gift of song, so freely given to this church for many years. There are those here to-day who can tell you how she came to their sick-rooms and sang "Consider the Lilies" as no one else in Billerica could have done it. And in other days there was one with us whose reputation was not confined to town limits or State bounds, whose name was a household word throughout the community, — his Excellency, Thomas Talbot, governor of Massachusetts, he had other titles here in the home of his adoption, — a citizen who always looked out for the best needs of our town, regardless of personal interests; men older than himself looked to him for counsel. He was the promoter of every good cause, the generous supporter not only of this church, but also of every church in town,

and the friend of the poor, and it was a sad day for Billerica when he was laid to rest, for we all loved him. Mr. Ambrose Page, who lived in what was formerly the "Sabba'-day house," had a pleasant way of welcoming strangers to town by the gift of a rosebush or tree from his nursery, and the tallest shade tree towering above the roof of one home in our midst helps, in that home, to keep his memory green. Mr. John Knowles, father of our Knowles sisters, and Mr. Joel Baldwin could always be depended upon for attentive listeners on stormy as well as pleasant Sundays. Many positions of trust and responsibility were held by Dudley Foster, Esq., father of Mr. John Foster. He was one of the trustees of the Howe School; the counsellor of all his neighbors in time of sorrow, and that without pay; the trusted treasurer of our town for forty-four years, and its town clerk for nearly the same length of time. The Richardson brothers, John O. and Albert R., with their sister, Mrs. Abigail Gray, were all faithful friends of this parish, with especial interest in the church choir, and their gifts to this church were many.

Mrs. Lucy Walker Jaquith, the honored mother of Franklin and Joseph Jaquith and sisters, when she went to her "better home," over a year ago, was the oldest member of this church in years and the oldest in years of church membership, having united with this church

under the pastorate of Rev. Theodore Dorr, a consistent church member for fifty-four years, and quite likely longer. Samuel Tucker, the principal of our Howe School for twenty-eight years, was an example of uprightness to every pupil who came under his charge, and his interest in them did not cease when they left the school, but when they went out into the different walks of life he could truly say to each one, "Your success is my success and your joy my joy." Miss Mattie Hussey, the daughter of our former pastor, was a faithful teacher in our school and the interested superintendent of our Sunday school for many years, and is affectionately remembered by many here to-day. Last November the summons "Come up higher" came to the pastor emeritus of this church, one who had faithfully served at this altar for twenty-eight years. Many eulogistic words have been said respecting him, but we bring the humble violet of affectionate remembrance for his memory to-day. His pastoral calls twice in a year in every home in his parish, and more often if there were sickness or sorrow, are events of precious memory. He was a power for good in this community, and to his people he always gave his best. It was the right word, at the right time, in the right place, socially, morally, religiously. "The christening was a tender jubilee, the marriage was no ceremony, but an inspiration, the comfort was no service, but a psalm."

ALL THOSE WHOSE TRAITS I HAVE MENTIONED HAVE PASSED ON, BUT I TRUST THAT THE SUCCESSOR OF CHRISTOPHER HUSSEY, OUR PRESENT MINISTER, WILL FIND THAT THE "AARONS AND HURS" ARE NOT ALL ON THE OTHER SIDE, — AND YOU CAN SPELL THE HUR WITH AN "E" INSTEAD OF A "U," AND IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT. WE ARE A UNITED PEOPLE TO-DAY, AND WE MEAN TO BE LOYAL TO OUR CHURCH AND OUR MINISTER. AND I SPEAK FOR THE ENTIRE PARISH WHEN I SAY THAT WE FEEL THAT THE RELIGIOUS NEEDS OF THIS OLD CHURCH ARE SAFE IN THE CHARGE OF OUR YOUNG SHEPHERD. AND IN HIS DAILY ADDRESSES TO THE THRONE OF GRACE I DOUBT NOT THAT HE REMEMBERS THIS BUILDING, IN WORDS AKIN TO THOSE OF THE REV. PHILEMON HALL ON AN OCCASION SIMILAR TO THIS, — THE RE-DEDICATION OF HIS OWN CHURCH. AND THE BEAUTIFUL WORDS OF THE PRAYER TO WHICH I REFER ARE THESE: "LORD, REMEMBER THIS THINE ANCIENT TEMPLE, WHERE OUR FATHERS WORSHIPPED BEFORE WE WERE. LET THY TRUTH BE ITS WALLS, SALVATION BE ITS BULWARKS, AND MAY THERE BE HEARD WITHIN ITS GATES THE JOY OF THOSE THAT SHOUT IN HARVEST."

MARTHA HILL SAGE.

JUNE 30, 1898.