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FARMINGTON'S FIRST MEETING HOUSE
and
ITS FIRST DEACON

Dea. BENJAMIN FURBER

An Historical Memoir

Presented at
The Farmington Congregational Church
January 1, 1978

Ethel W. Mazza

Though my topic this morning is Farmington's First Meeting House, and its first Deacon, it seems advisable to trace some of the historical background.

It is generally well known that the first settlements were in the vicinity of Great Bay: Dover Point, Strawberry Banke, Little Harbor, and along the Piscataqua River -- these occurring in the early 1620's. The names of many of the early settlers are a matter of record, though the names of some have been lost with the passage of time.

One of these early settlers was James Newt, who was sent as a servant of John Mason Esq. into the Province of New Hampshire (Register: 2-29), on or before 1631; was a freeman in 1653; lived on Dover Neck where he was taxed between 1648 and 1677; and was still living in 1691 (Register: 7-259). At least two sons were born: James Jr. in 1643 and Abraham in 1644. Both sons acquired land from their father on Feb. 15, 1671. (Ibid)

James Jr's. estate was inventoried in 1691, with reference being made to his widow; James III, born July 27, 1687, Samuel, born in 1689 and at least two other children.

Another early settler was Capt. William¹ Furber, of Dover Neck, 1639, and Bloody Point, 1657, Constable, 1645, Freeman, 1653, sergeant, 1657; who was born in England about 1614, came in the ANGEL GARRETT with John Cogswell from London in 1635, and wrecked at Pemaquid. He was dead in 1699 when there were prayers for the distribution of his estate.

It is important to remember that many of these early settlers left whatever comforts that they may have known for an unknown future because of religious

persecution, and their dissatisfaction with the Church of England.

As land grants were made, provision was made for a meeting house, and land was reserved for the minister. As we sit here in the comfort of this church today, having come from our comfortable homes, many find it nearly impossible to visualize the hardships of these early settlers, who had to erect temporary shelters while land was cleared for their new homes. There were no roads as we know them; only trails through the woods. Their building tools were most primitive, and the clearing and building process must have been most arduous.

Most likely, even as they were doing their own building, thought was given to the meeting house, where they could worship God.

William Furber had at least six children, and possibly others of whom no record has been found.

Lt. William² Furber Jr. was born in Dover about 1646, and lived at Welch Cove, Blbody Point; was an ensign in 1694, ferryman, member of the Colonial Assembly. His first wife was Elizabeth _____, by whom he had at least two children, and possibly more. Following her death, he married Elizabeth (Hurd) Nute, daughter of Capt. John and Elizabeth Hurd, and widow of James Nute Jr. Thus the union of two early families, as William Furber became stepfather to the Nute children, and she became stepmother to the Furber children.

William³ Furber of Newington, born 1672 and died 20 Mar. 1757, married Sarah Nute, daughter of James Jr. and Sarah (Hurd) Nute. She was born 1675 and died 28 April 1762. William's brother Jethro married Sarah's sister Leah, further cementing the Furber-Nute connections.

The Town of Rochester was granted in 1722, and the drawing of proprietor's grants followed soon after. This first division included the land from Dover to a point approximately near the present Rochester Common. William Furber III was a full share proprietor, while James Nute III, his brother Samuel Nute, and Thomas Tuttle were third share proprietors. Settlement was slow because of Indian raids, but by the 1750's, there was a Meeting House at the top of Rochester Hill.

These same proprietors also acquired lots in the second division of 1730, and also in the later third division.

Attendance at Meeting was considered compulsory, and those who did not attend regularly were severely admonished, and not infrequently penalized.

As late as 1750, the area above the Common was described by McDuffee as unbroken wilderness. Traveling from place to place was usually on foot, by way of narrow blazed trails, later widened enough for a horse, and still later for wagons.

Many of these first proprietors did not live long enough to settle on their own grants, and the grants were passed to sons or grandsons, or were sacrificed for unpaid taxes.

Richard⁴ Furber, son of William III, was born about 1700, and baptised at the Old North Church in Portsmouth. He married, had two sons in 1723 and 1725, and died soon after.

Richard⁵, born in 1725, a soldier at Louisburgh in 1747; married first Abigail Wadleigh; and secondly, Elizabeth Downing on 28 Jan. 1748. There were at least seven children of this second marriage, but the three

brothers Samuel, Benjamin, and Richard are of concern to us today.

Ens. Richard Furber⁵, acquired part of his grandfather's grant in the second division by deed on July 10, 1746. It is not known when he actually settled on the land, as his children were all baptised in Newington between 1749 and 1762. Nevertheless, his gravestone together with that of his second wife have been located near the property of Alice and the late Cecil Dustin, just off Route 202A in Rochester.

According to the narrative section of the 1871 Strafford County Atlas, "Among the first who settled in the Merrill's Corner section were Benjamin, Samuel, and Richard Furber, Samuel Jones, Benjamin Chesley, and Paul DeMeritt, who settled between 1770 and 1783. On the Ten Rod Road, Joseph and Levi Leighton were located.

The first records at the Strafford County Registry of Deeds date from 1773, with all of the earlier ones at the Archives in Concord. I have not researched Furber land transactions there, but all three Furber brothers were buying land in the Merrills Corner area in 1773, 1774, and 1776, and presumably settled there very soon thereafter, as the first school dates from 1791.

All of the Furber children were baptised by Rev. Haven, and it seems likely that they made the long trek to Rochester Hill for this purpose. Thus it was not long before they realized the need of having their own meeting house, much closer to their homes.

With the establishment of Farmington as a community separate from Rochester in 1798, the need became even more imperative.

The church at Meeting House Hill was built by the

people of Farmington and were assisted by Congregation-
alists. A lot with 100 foot frontage and 75 feet deep
(Carlson's field at the top of the hill) was purchased
from Samuel Jones, an early settler of Farmington who
located in 1770 where Gen. Roberts resided in 1888.
(Duralt place in 1960).

Lemuel Meader worked at framing the building. He
was the father of Elder Jesse Meader. (I might add here,
that Lemuel was a fifth generation descendant of John
Meader; one of the seven brothers who settled the Meader-
boro section; and my own great-great-great grandfather).
Lemmy fell and was injured considerable, but recovered
after a long spell. The dimensions of the building were
40' by 50', two stories in height with windows in both
stories. It was built in 1806.

Preachers at Meeting House Hill included Tilly
H owe and Dyer Burge, and occasionally Elias Smith, a
noted minister spoke to a large audience. Parson Haven
preached on different occasions, also Elder Joseph
Boody. The only female preacheress that ever spoke
at Meeting House Hill was Miss Carissa Danforth.

(Old Time Farmington #25)

With cold weather, the meetings at Meeting House
Hill were discontinued, but were held at the "Dock"
schoolhouse instead, they having no heat in it. Some-
times they would bring their charcoal foot heaters or
warmers with them. Most all of the people would
sometimes go and meet there at "The Old Black School
House" (corner of cemetery lower entrance).

There would be Simon Dame and Benjamin Ham, both
very religious and "good exhorters"; the Wingates also
went, the Squire and his wife, she taking his arm (a
very worthy couple; Mr. Jeremy Wingate, the storekeeper

and his wife, and often his sister, Miss Nancy; Lawyer Eastman and wife; the Widow Pearl and her pretty daughter Sallie; Capt. Edgerly and wife; old Jeremiah Folsom and his worthy companion; and Thomas Ham's family; while "Cooper" Ebenezer Wentworth Jr. led the singing to the minister's great delight.

Tallow candles were all they had to light the school room with. Grown-ups attending meetings would bring a candle apiece to light up with.

All three Furber brothers served their country in the Revolutionary war. Benjamin Furber, together with Moses Furber, John Nute, and Joseph Thompson were in Capt. David Place's Co., at Seagey Island in 1775. Sgt. Richard was in Capt. David Copp's Co. at Pierce Island at the same time; later at Saratoga; and served as adjutant at the surrender of Burgoyne.

Benjamin Furber married first Deborah Tibbetts on Dec. 18, 1777; and second, Keziah Ash on July 5, 1795. He was the father of at least eight children: Jonathan, Mary, Abigail, Elizabeth, Benjamin, William, Deborah, and Richard.

Abigail married John Murray Jr on Nov. 26, 1807, and their daughter Kezia married Othniel Varney and settled on the farm about two miles above Merrill's Corner. Elizabeth married David Hayes and settled on the farm now occupied by Leslie Barden. They are buried in the cemetery in the upper corner of the field. Their daughter, Eliza Jane Hayes married as his second wife, the Hon. Josiah Bartlett Edgerly of Farmington, a man of prominence and honor in his community. Eliza was a teacher in Farmington before her marriage. They lived in the house bought of Hon. Nehemiah Eastman, originally the Jonas C. March house, the second frame

building built in Farmington. It stood directly opposite the Congregational Church.

Since genealogy is presently only a spare-time hobby of mine, I regret that I have not had time to pursue this family further. However, I would call to your attention that your own Ronald Parrock is a great-great-great grandson of Capt. Samuel Furber; further that Furber descendants were still living in the Merrill's Corner area within my own memory.

The information that I have found particularly interesting is the very early Furber-Nute connections; that Deacon Benjamin Furber⁶ was the deacon of the first Meeting House, and that Deacon Eugene Nute, generation uncertain, but probably 10th or 11th is the Senior Deacon of this Congregational Church, today.

The early Furber family cemetery is located on land originally belonging to Capt. Samuel Furber, approximately ½ mile in the woods, within land now owned by Leslie Barden, and contains 17 Furber gravestones.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I today present to the Farmington Congregational Church, successor to the First Meeting House, a mounted and framed rubbing of Deacon Benjamin Furber's gravestone, and I think that it is only appropriate that Deacon Nute be asked to unveil it.