

Notes on the founding of the Church of the Messiah, Woods Hole

1. Sacred to the People

The Church of the Messiah, Woods Hole rests on a ridge of land, part of the rocky moraine left behind by the retreat of the Laurentide Glacier some 17,000 years ago. As the mastodon and woolly mammoth retreated with the glacier, the First People arrived, following herds of deer onto the broad coastal plain of wooded hills, grassy valleys and wetlands that stretched beyond the shores of Nantucket ¹.

The First People settled in the verdant landscape, giving thanks for the animals, plants, trees and fish that provided them food and shelter. At first hunters and gatherers, the People adapted over time as the landscape was shaped and reshaped by the rising seas. Rivulets became rivers, ponds became bays, and ridges and outwash formed Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket ².

The People built sturdy wetus using soft saplings and bark, establishing small villages in the wooded hills and sheltered valleys in the winter and near the shoreline in the summer. They taught their children to track the movement of the stars which told of the changing seasons, and to welcome the rising sun each day with a song of prayer. They called themselves "Wampanoag", people of the First Light.

Over time explorers and settlers found this sacred land, wondered at its abundance and claimed it for themselves. In less than a hundred years the 69 tribes of the Wampanoag nation had been swept from their sacred homeland, including the Quamquissett, Sokones, Succonessett and Wakoquet tribes of Quissett, Woods Hole, Falmouth and Waquoit, leaving only the Mashpee and the Aquinnah with small fragments of their ancestral land ³.

Many years later, newcomers to this place would gather to consecrate a small wooden Church but the land itself, sacred to the People of the First Light, had already been blessed.



Watercolor, Maria Denny Fay 1859 ⁴

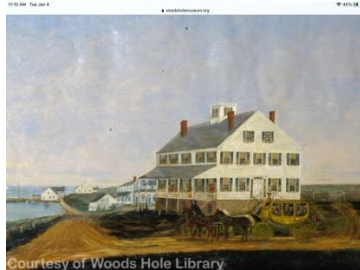
Wampanoag Prayer

*Great Spirit, I thank you today
Mother Earth, I thank you Grandmother Moon, I thank you
Grandfather Sun, I thank you
I offer thanks to the four directions
to the east, to the south, to the west, to the north
I thank you for all my relations
the winged nation, the creeping and crawling nation
the four legged nation, the green and growing nation
and all things living in the water
Honoring the clans
the deer, the bear, the wolf
the turtle, and the snipe
Great Spirit I thank you today.*

Prayer of Slow Turtle, medicine man of the Wampanoag ⁵.

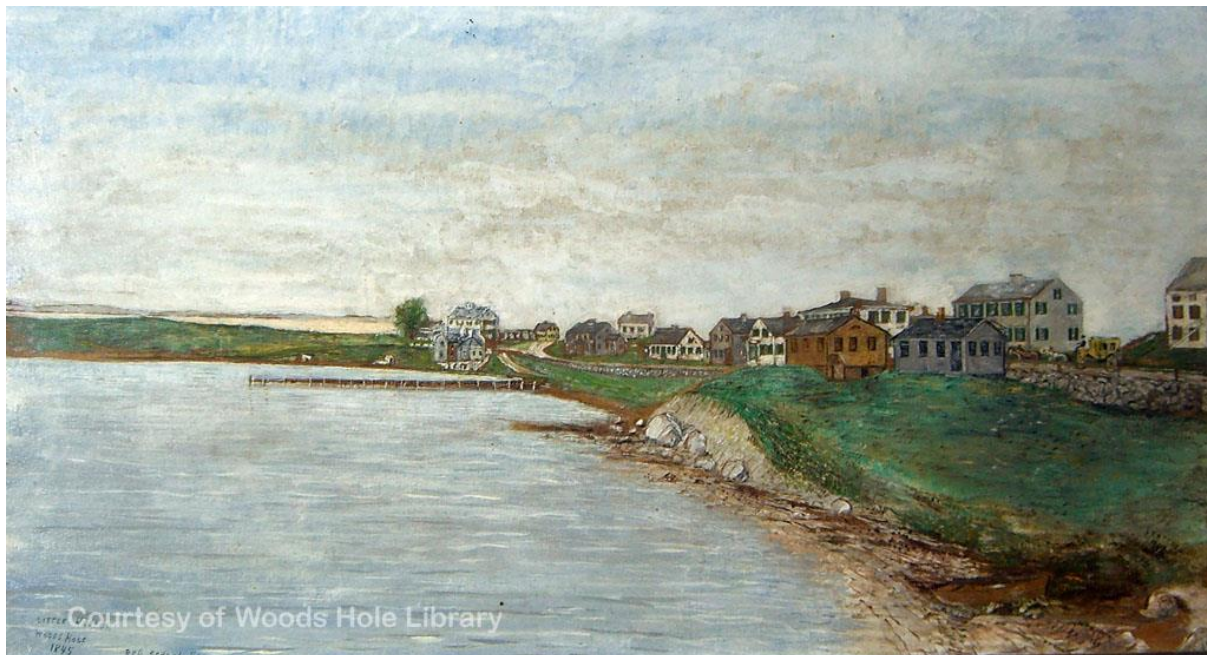
2. A Church for Woods Hole

There were no churches in Woods Hole village when Jeremiah Hopkins arrived from Boston to become innkeeper at the old Webster House on Little Harbor. Formerly the Parker Inn, a favorite drinking spot for British troops, the Inn had become a relay point for passengers arriving by stage coach to board ferries to New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket ⁶.



Jeremiah Hopkins ⁷, Webster House ⁹.

Active Episcopalians, Hopkins and his wife, Margaret, had taught Sunday school at the Church of the Messiah, Boston ⁸. So when the Rt. Rev. Manton Eastburn, Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts arrived at the Inn on his way to Nantucket in 1849, Hopkins invited him to conduct the first Prayer Book service at the little red school house overlooking Little Harbor ⁶.



Scene in Little Harbor with Red Schoolhouse. F. L. Gifford, 1845 ⁹.

In 1852, another of Hopkin's guests, the Rev William Rouse Babcock, of St. Peter's Church, Salem, preached a sermon at the schoolhouse that inspired the congregants to consider establishing a parish in

Woods Hole 6. Rev Babcock had encouraged his own parish to form a second Episcopal Church in Salem's growing western neighborhood, now Grace Church, Salem 10.

In 1852 Hopkins and a group of local residents met at the Inn to sign an agreement to purchase capital stock in "The Society of the Church of the Messiah". Shares were fixed at fifty dollars with the understanding that when the building was complete, the pews would be sold at auction (a common practice in early churches) with the proceeds divided among the shareholders. The group of twenty five included two women, Sarah Fish and Mary Ann Gardner, both mariners' wives. At four shares, Sarah Fish held the most stock, Mary Ann held two 11.

Two years earlier, Sarah's husband, Elihu, had set sail for the South Pacific, master of the infamous whaler, Triton 12. On its previous voyage to the South Pacific, the ship had been overrun, set adrift, and the second mate and several crewmembers killed 13. The Captain, Thomas Spencer, was held captive until rescued by the ship Alabama out of Nantucket, but chose to remain in Hawaii and establish a ship's chandlery. Captain Elihu Fish would return from his successful three-year voyage the following year. The Triton continued as a whaler and was crushed by ice in the Yukon Territories in 1895.

Mrs. Elihu Fish	\$200.00	Albert C. Gye	100.00
Thos. J. Davis	100.00	Bradford Gould	100.00
Thos. J. Foster	100.00	Oliver L. Swift	100.00
Alex ^r . F. Swift	50.00	George W. Swift	100.00
Mrs. Joseph Gardner	100.00	Henry C. Bunker	100.00
Andel Freeman	50.00	Isabel Davis	50.00
Ezekiel E. Swift	100.00	Thos. L. Swift	50.00
Edward D. Herrick	50.00	Levi F. Dwyer	100.00
Bradford Gifford	100.00	Jos. L. Fay	150.00
Joseph M. Hatch	50.00	Orlando A. Wood	50.00
Leonard S. Dexter	50.00	John L. Webster	50.00
Calvin C. Childs	50.00	Thos. Hinckley Jr.	20.00
Veremeah Hopkins	50.00		\$2020.00

Mary Ann Gardner's husband Joseph, Master of the whaling ship Falcon, had sailed earlier that year on a three year voyage 14. Joseph died less than a month after his return in 1855 at the age of 48 15. (Woods Hole artist Franklin L. Gifford was Joseph and Mary Ann's grandson). The other members of the Society, including four mariners, a spar maker, cooper, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, farmer, laborer, innkeeper and a summer resident provide a glimpse of village life at that time 16.

At subsequent meetings, the steps for incorporation as a religious society in the state of Massachusetts were completed and presented to Justice of the Peace, John Jenkins, for recognition. Jenkins then called a meeting of the stockholders to elect such officers as were required by the Protestant Episcopal Church, the chosen form of government. At that meeting, Jeremiah Hopkins and Erastmus Gould were elected as Senior and Junior Wardens. Five Vestrymen, Braddock Gifford, Esekiel E. Swift, Jos. M. Hatch, A.F. Swift, and George W. Swift were chosen, in addition to a Clerk, Jabez Davis and a Treasurer, Thos G. Davis. The shareholders voted unanimously to retain the name "Church of the Messiah" for the new Church ¹¹.

The Church of the Messiah, Florence Street, Boston, had opened its doors in a district called "New York Streets". The neighborhood, whose streets were named for cities along the Erie Canal, had been developed after the merger of the Boston and Albany railroads in Boston's attempt to compete with New York City as an Atlantic port ¹⁷.



The Church was known for making its seats available to everyone without charge. In 1890 the parish moved to the East Fens neighborhood, and eventually closed. Meanwhile, the Florence Street church became St Stephen's Episcopal Church, with a stated mission of helping the working class. St. Stephen's congregation later moved to Shawmut Street and today is a thriving multiracial parish. The Florence Street church building next served the neighborhood's Italian Catholic community as the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii until it was demolished by "urban renewal" in 1952.

The Society then directed the Vestry and Wardens to explore and report on sites and plans for the church building. A three acre lot adjoining the burying ground on the east side of Little Harbor, priced at \$150, was chosen after Joseph Fay offered to donate the funds ¹¹. Designed in the "modern style of architecture" by Billings & Sleeper of Boston and built by Dunham and Baylies of Edgartown, construction was completed in 1853 ¹⁸.

The Church of the Messiah, Woods Hole, the first Episcopal Church on Cape Cod, was consecrated by Bishop Eastburn on February 14, 1854. Senior Warden, Jeremiah Hopkins read the request of consecration, the Rev George M. Randall, rector of the Church of the Messiah, Boston, read the sentence of consecration, and Bishop Eastburn read the communion service and preached on the 132nd Psalm, "This is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it" ¹⁸.

Years later, Sarah Bryant Fay recalled walking to church as a young girl after being sent to "pick a bouquet for the Church", which was, she realized, "a device to allow my elders to array themselves in peace" ¹¹. She writes,

"No highroad to the Church! Gates to be opened to cross the field by Simeon Hamblin's house, and a cart track to follow down a hill that seemed very steep to little feet, while perhaps the last bell was tolling..... The little church with its little belfry from which this impressive voice came was painted a dark reddish brown without; and inside, in imitation of -well- marble perhaps, in blocks of

white, pink, lavender, and tan, arranged according to the painter's pleasure, for it was a vain but satisfying occupation during those early sermons, after the flowers were duly pulled to pieces, to try to follow out any pattern in them. The pews were dark brown, painted and varnished pine, and once, when newly done over, one might stick to them in a very exciting manner.”¹¹



The funds for building the new parish church had been donated by Sarah's father, Joseph Story Fay, a wealthy Savannah cotton broker. Over the years, Fay purchased many tracts of land in Woods Hole and Falmouth. He donated land for St Joseph's Catholic Church, for an expanded grade school, and for Goodwill Park, in addition to the Church of the Messiah.

Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1812, Fay first travelled to Savannah to learn the cotton trade from his brother, Samuel, at Padelford, Fay & Company. He moved to Savannah to take over the business in 1837.⁶

Joseph Story Fay ¹⁹.

Fay married Sarah Smith Bryant of Boston in 1840. During the winter months, Sarah lived with him in Savannah, but returned to Boston for the summer, where Fay joined her until they established a summer home in Woods Hole in 1850.²⁰

After the marriage, Sarah's brother John, of the Boston merchant and shipping firm Bryant & Sturgis, sent business to Fay's company, making Padelford, Fay & Co, already buyers for Rhode Island cotton mills, one of the largest cotton buyers for New England mills. As the textile industry grew, the fertile land from Georgia to Texas became increasingly valuable. The opportunity to grow more cotton led to the forced removal of indigenous people and increased the demand for slaves, fueling the growing tensions leading to the Civil war in 1861.²¹

As early as 1840, seventy women of Falmouth had signed a petition to the U.S. House of Representatives calling for the abolishment of slavery in the nation's capital.²² Prior to 1830, petitioning had been a right exercised by men. However, proposed legislation to remove Southeastern Indian tribes to the West to make room for white settlement mobilized women to political action.²³

The undersigned women of Falmouth, deeply convinced of the sinfulness of Slavery, and keenly aggrieved by its existence in part of our country over which Congress possesses exclusive jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever, do most earnestly petition your honorable body, immediately to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, and to put an end to the slave trade in the United States.

We also respectfully announce our intention to present the same petition, yearly, before your honorable body, that it may at least be a memorial of us, that in the holy cause of Human Freedom "we have done what we could."

Three years earlier, 116 men and women of Falmouth had signed a petition to immediately rescind the House Gag Rule resolution that “all petitions, memorials and papers touching the abolition of slaves...in any state, district or territory...be laid upon the table...without being read...and that no action whatever shall be had thereon”. John Quincy Adams opposed stifling the right to petition. Although stricter resolutions were passed each subsequent year, he finally had the Gag Rule rescinded in 1844. ²⁴



Although the state of Massachusetts had abolished slavery in 1783, the interstate cotton trade presented difficulties for New England businessmen. Because textile mills depended on cotton and on the society that supported slavery, Joseph Story Fay opposed abolition. In Savannah, he enslaved at least two women and five children including “Judy a brown skin woman about twenty eight years of age and her two children Lucy and Henrietta”, and “Cornelia aged twenty seven, William aged six years, Stephen age four years and Douglas aged five months...and their future issue and increase”²⁵.

A slave family, Savannah, early 1860s ²⁶

Minda Campbell, a former slave, wrote to Joseph Story Fay in 1860 regarding efforts to free her daughters and grandchildren (Her letter, “They belonging to themselves”: Minda Campbell Redeems Her Family from Slavery, was featured as a Massachusetts Historical Society, Object of the Month. ²⁷)

Although Minda and her entire family had been born into slavery, records tell of a family with strong independent spirit. Minda’s son, James, who had written the letter for his mother while she lived with him in Savannah, had bought his freedom for \$740 by extra work as a carpenter. Baptized in Savannah in the First African Baptist Church, James moved to Boston in 1864, where he was ordained a Baptist minister, an ordination not recognized by the church in Georgia. Later, moving back to Georgia, he was active in the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Union League, and advocated for voting rights for blacks. He was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1868. ²⁸

In 1851, Minda’s daughter, Cornelia, was “confined in jail, kept in close confinement” for “disorderly conduct circulating abolition documents”. ²⁹

Minda’s son, Thomas Sims, escaped to Boston in 1851, but was tried under the Fugitive Slaves Act and returned to slavery despite protests and multiple attempts to free him. Hundreds of citizens watched as he was taken to the wharf under guard to be returned to slavery. ³⁰



When U.S. Marshal, Charles Devens, who had been ordered to return Sims to Georgia, became U.S. Attorney General in 1877, he appointed Sims to a position in the U.S. Department of Justice. ³⁰

“The runaway slaves Anthony Burns and Thomas Sims returned to slavery- their march through the streets of Boston”³¹

With Civil War looming, Joseph Story Fay moved his business to Boston and as war broke out in 1861 appealed to Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, to lift the embargo on Southern goods.⁶

When the slave ship, *Wanderer*, was impounded in Boston in 1860, Fay posted a bond of indemnity for its return to his business associate, Gazaway Lamar. Lamar’s son, Charles, had outfitted the luxury racing schooner to transport 500 young men captured in Africa to be sold in Georgia. Four hundred and seven survivors landed at Jekyll Island in 1858 to be dispersed across the South. As a member of the Southern “Fire Eaters” calling for secession, Lamar hoped restoring African slave trade would provoke war. ³² These events were closely followed by national newspapers, including the *Barnstable Patriot*.

The years leading to Civil War were a low period for parish membership. Jeremiah Hopkins served two years as Postmaster ³³, and in 1857 he and Margaret moved to Chicago. Eight years after the first Rector, the Rev. Thomas Brinton Flower, was called there were only twelve communicants. Between 1864 and 1866 no parish records were kept. However, with the arrival of Rev Hiram Carleton in 1867 the parish began to grow. Rev Carleton “took on all the tasks of the church, carrying out the duties of treasurer, sexton, bell-ringer, and pastor” and raised funds by sale of cemetery lots. Joseph Fay provided funds for a large rectory which served as a home for boys tutored by the Rector ⁶.



In 1887, Fay asked permission to build a stone church on the site of the original wooden Church, which was moved to serve as parish hall. ⁶ The Church was designed by William Pitt Wentworth, Boston, and built of West Falmouth, Deer Island, and possibly Stone Ridge quarry, granite. The building was completed in record time and consecrated by Bishop Paddock in July 1889, to become the first granite Church on Cape Cod, less than a year before St. Barnabas Church, Falmouth.³⁴

Church of the Messiah ³⁵

Fay remained active in the parish, and at his death in 1896, provided an endowment of twenty thousand dollars for the Church. A careful businessman, he stipulated that the fund be invested with a portion of the proceeds added to the principal until it amounted to one hundred thousand dollars. The fund was to be maintained at that level, with any additional income used for various purposes, which he outlined. Should the church building cease to be used as "a Church holding the tenets of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America" the trust would terminate and be used by the Town of Falmouth for the worthy poor and for public improvements.³⁶

With the consecration of the stone church, the Church of the Messiah as we see it today was complete. Thus we inherit the complex legacy of its benefactor, Joseph Story Fay, who provided the Church with its beautiful site, a rectory, a parish house, a stone church, and a financial foundation. The historic wooden church, moved and used as parish hall, has been transformed once again as our Parish Community Center, dedicated as a spiritual and community gathering place for social awareness, outreach and hospitality.

In compiling the story of the complex legacy of our founding, we join with other Diocesan parishes and institutions as they begin to "*prayerfully and purposefully explore their historic involvement in, and present wealth derived from the forced labor of enslaved people.* And we hold in prayer Minda, Judy and Cornelia, their children Lucy, Henrietta, William, Stephen, and Douglas, and the multitude of enslaved men, women and children whose names have been forgotten.

*O God, Giver of all good gifts,
we thank you for the grace of serving You by serving our neighbors.
May our hearts be kind and generous.
May our ministry be rooted in love and bold in imagination.
And may our lives and the lives of all who join us, continue to be renewed by Your love
and the power of the Spirit.
Amen*

A Call for Repentance and Reparations, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts 2020

Resolved, that the 235th Convention of the Diocese of Massachusetts directs Diocesan Council and invites the congregations and institutions of the Diocese of Massachusetts including the Trustees of Donations, Episcopal City Mission, the Boston Episcopal Charitable Society, and others -- in the name of repentance, reconciliation, and accountability to our siblings of color in our diocese -- prayerfully and purposefully to explore their historic involvement in and present wealth derived from the forced labor of enslaved people; and be it further Resolved, that in order to implement the above resolution, this Convention supports the formation and the work of the Reparations Committee of the newly- formed diocesan Racial Justice Commission (a continuation of the Racial Reconciliation work begun in 2018), and requests that the Reparations Committee prepare a toolbox of resources and expertise to assist congregations and individual Episcopalians in the examination of their assets and their history;

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