

# Congregational Parish Here Observing Its 146th Year Of Service In 1957

The First Congregational Church of Houlton dates its history as far back as four years after the founding of the plantation of Houlton in 1807. It is, in this Sesquicentennial year of the town, observing the 146th year of its service to a congregation which first numbered seven males and nine females when it gathered to worship on the Sabbath Day of October 13, 1811.

The early history of Houlton, as written by Joshua Kendall, explains the inspiration which led to the establishment of this church as the few early settlers, then so far away from their home church in New Salem, Mass. felt the need for the guidance and comfort of divine worship in their remote situation.

## SMALL GROUP ORGANIZES

Accordingly, so it is written, a small group held a meeting on October 10, 1811 for the purpose of organizing themselves into a church group and mutually subscribed to a covenant and eight articles of faith.

The prelude read: "We, the inhabitants of the Plantation of Houl-

ton, being members of the Church of Christ of New Salem, Mass., considering that God in His providence hath removed us from the stated means of grace, and cast our lot together in this wilderness, where we hope again to enjoy the smile of His countenance and His presence, do unitedly agree to embody ourselves with such as may

be pleased to unite with us and do hereby bind ourselves in the following articles of faith".

## EIGHT ARTICLES OF FAITH

The eight articles to which this small group subscribed were: (1) We do believe that there is one God, who created all things and who governs and preserves the same.

(2) We believe in one God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are united in God.

(3) We believe in Christ as the only son of God, only Saviour and Redeemer of this sinful, dying world.

(4) We believe in the Holy Scriptures, that they are the Word of God, wisely and mercifully designed by Him to instruct mankind in duty, and lead him into all truth.

(5) We believe it was appointed of God for all men once to die; and after death the Judgement by Jesus Christ.

(6) We believe in the immortality of the Soul and in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(7) We believe in the solemn ordinances of the Gospel — Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and that these are sacred institutions appointed by the great Head of the Church, while he dwelt among men, and to be observed by all His humble followers, until time shall be no more.

(8) We believe it is the duty of all believers to profess Christ openly, not only in joining themselves to the visible church, but to give up their children in solemn covenant of Baptism.

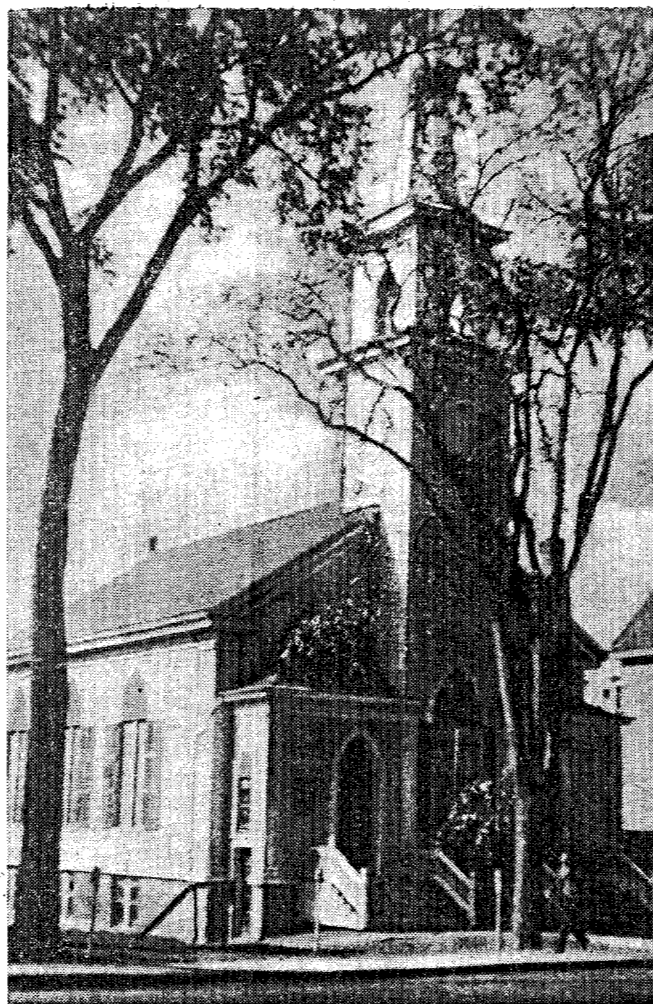
## THE COVENANT

Then came the covenant.

"We then, in the presence of God, angels and men, take this one God to be our God, who hath revealed Himself to us in the work of nature and in His own Word, and we do hereby accept and acknowledge Jesus Christ as our only Saviour, the Holy Spirit of God to be the comforter of our spirits and the Sanctifier of our Souls.

"We engage to take the Holy Scripture to be our guide, the man to our counsel to direct us into all duty.

"We promise to walk in all the ordinances of the Gospel from time to time as far from blameless as God in His grace and Providence shall give us strength and opportunity. We promise patiently to submit ourselves to the discipline of the Church of Christ in this place and that with much meek-



The Congregationalists of Houlton first attended services in this church in 1879 after it had been removed from its original location near the intersection of Main and Military streets and greatly improved. They continued to worship here until the fateful Sunday morning of New Year's Day, 1956, when fire completely destroyed this edifice.

ness and prayer, we will watch over ourselves, and one another in the Lord. This we profess and promise".

To these articles of faith and covenant, the following names were affixed: Malés; Samuel Kendall, Deacon; Joseph Putnam, Aaron Putnam, Samuel Rice, James Houlton, Eben Warner and Joshua Kendall. Females; Betsy Putnam, Isa Putnam, Betsy Rice, Sally Cook, Sarah Houlton, Sally Houlton, Polly Houlton, Louisa Houlton, Hannah Shaw.

## FIRST SERMON PREACHED

Six persons were present at the first Sabbath meeting who were members of the visible Church of Christ of New Salem, Mass. These, with 12 others who were added to the membership by subscribing to the covenant, comprised the first congregation which met to hear a sermon Oct. 13, 1811 by Rev. Edmund Eastman, pastor of the

Church of Christ in Limerick and to witness his baptism into the church of one adult, Hannah Shaw, and two children, Putnam Shaw and J. B. Putnam, after which the Lord's Supper was administered for the first time in Houlton.

The ensuing six years were drab ones indeed for this tiny congregation so far removed from their former homes and many of the relatives of the members. The stay of Rev. Eastman was a short one and from his departure until the third Sunday in September, 1818, the parish was left without a pastor and without preaching of any kind.

## HELD FIRMLY TOGETHER

But the little band held firmly together during this long period of being without the guidance of their own minister. In this they were helped greatly by the Mother church in New Salem with whom a constant correspondence was maintained. Rev. Alpheus Harding

was the pastor of that church with whom Deacon Samuel Kendall kept in touch and it was through his efforts that the second preacher made his way over the long trail that led from Massachusetts to Houlton.

Rev. Seth E. Winslow was sent here by the Evangelical Missionary Society of Massachusetts, from Barre, Mass. and he preached his first sermon here September 20, 1818. On that day he received one person into the church and baptized a number of children.

A little more than a month later, on November 1, the parish extended a call to Rev. Winslow to accept the pastorate of the church at a salary of \$400 a year. This offer was declined and, toward the end of that month he left here on his return to Massachusetts.

## MET IN HOULTON'S HOME

During the brief tenure of Rev. Winslow, the people met for their worship in a hall in the residence of Joseph Houlton which was described as being "large enough to accommodate the inhabitants of Houlton and their neighbors from the Province of New Brunswick."

In these quarters the church members continued to foregather on each Sabbath even though they had no minister. The correspondence with Rev. Harding continued and the historians of that day agree that the church in far away Massachusetts never lost sight of the small flock in remote Northern Maine. But many more years were to elapse before another minister of the Gospel would conduct services here on a regular basis.

Proof of the bond between New Salem and Houlton is proved by a generous action of the New Salem church in sending to Houlton two of their precious Communion tankards for the use of the struggling pioneer church so far away.

## COMMUNION TANKARDS

In his letter apprising the Houlton Congregationalists of this gift, Rev. Harding reported that, "We shall send by Amos Putnam two of the tankards which we use in commemorating the sufferings and death of our Redeemer, in this place. We give these as a pledge that we are still mindful of you, though far separated from us, and though they are of little pecuniary value, yet being the vessels we had so often used on this solemn occasion . . . we trust you will receive them as the strong pledge of continued love . . ."

by the church. After they were replaced later with others, the ancient tankards were deposited in the vault of the Houlton Savings Bank where they have since remained. The church plans to exhibit them during Sesquicentennial week and they will be on display in the window of the bank.

In the meantime the pulpit was filled occasionally by an itinerant pastor. In the summer of 1822 the hopes of the congregation to have their own minister were aroused briefly with the visit here of Rev. Howden, a Scotch Presbyterian, from New Brunswick, who preached several Sabbaths. The people of the church were interested in having him remain. They considered the idea of putting up a house for him but sober thought brought the realization the expense of finishing the home and raising a competent salary was out of their reach. Reluctantly, it is certain, they abandoned the project and permitted the framework they had started to be appropriated for a school house.

## HAPHAZARD METHOD

And so the haphazard method of worship was resumed with only the exception of the visits of other itinerant preachers. This was continued until 1826 when, through the efforts of the Maine Missionary Society, Rev. Samuel B. Whitehall of Norridgewock was sent on a mission to Houlton. He was to remain here for only three months. Six years later, in 1832, he returned again for another stay of three months duration.

In the meantime, however the Maine Missionary Society, still concerned with the welfare of this remote parish, commissioned Rev. Joseph B. Stevens to come to Houlton. It is noted that he reorganized the church on January 24, 1833, an action that was carried out because the records of the church as it was established in 1811, had been destroyed by fire. Only 14 people were members of the reconstituted organization. Rev. Stevens left Houlton in the fall of that year.

## MISSIONARY PASTORS SERVE

Over the next half a dozen years the First Congregational Church of Houlton was served only by missionary pastors working in this section of Maine through the offices of the Maine Missionary Society.

Rev. Joseph N. Munsell was here in 1833 and was not heard in Houlton again until 1839. In 1841 Rev.

Nathan B. Shields, who was working in the field from Bangor to Aroostook, was an occasional supply pastor. In 1835 it was Rev. John Ballard, under the same auspices, who was here for four months. Rev. Jonathan Sewall made an appearance here for three months in 1836.

In the year 1835 when a theological controversy raged among New England Congregationalists, the Houlton church saw the establishment of two separate societies, one dedicated to orthodox Congregationalism, the other sympathetic to Unitarianism. The history of the local church reports that the latter erected the first church building in 1837; the former dedicated their new meeting house in 1839.

Oddly enough, it was the circumstance of a war, although a "bloodless" one, that was to crystallize the sentiment among Congregationalists in Houlton to have their own church edifice.

In mid-December of 1837, Rev. Charles Beaman of Ipswich, Mass. arrived in Houlton and preached his first sermon here on Sunday, the 17th. His coming was the result of a petition by Dr. Lyman Sprague, a surgeon in the United States Army, then stationed at Hancock Barracks in Houlton, that Rev. Beaman be transferred from his religious work at Andover Seminary in Massachusetts, to Houlton, Maine.

## MILITARY-CIVILIAN

He had a full congregation at his first service, which was held in the school house on the hill. The historian of that era described the service as presenting "a novel appearance with officers and soldiers in uniform, and ladies of the garrison, mingled with merchants and citizens, to all of whom this service was wonderfully blessed."

Early in the next year the movement for a church was begun. On January 4 a church conference and prayer was held at the home of Samuel Houlton. Rev. Beaman presided and while it is reported the "time was occupied by prayers, exhortations, and by hymns of praise", there can be little doubt that the subject of a new church that was now uppermost in the minds of all of the parish, was discussed.

At this meeting it was agreed that Saturday, January 10th should be set apart as a day of fasting and prayer for the revival of God's work in Houlton, and this observance was carried out.

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