

Address by Mr. David Floyd

At the Unitarian Church Revere

Delivered March 7, 1901

On the Occasion of the 200 Anniversary

of the

Beginning of Preaching in the Old Town of Chelsea

Winthrop's Church History

The little peninsula of a thousand acres lying on the Northerly side of Boston Harbor, and connected with the town of Revere by a narrow neck of land known as the Short Beach, soon after the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was called Pullen Point. The land is rudely sketched on Governor John Winthrop's map of 1633. On a map of the South part of New England published the next year, the name of "Pullen Poynte" appears for the first time on a map. The General Court in 1632:

"Ordered that the necke of lande betwixt Powder Horn Hill and Pullen Poynte shalle belonge to Boston, to be enjoyed by ye inhabitants thereof forever."

From this time Pullen Poynte, together with Rumney Marsh and Winnisimmet continued under the jurisdiction of the Town of Boston, the three places being designated in the assessors' books and in the selectmen's and clerk's records, as Rumney Marsh, or Number Thirteen.

In 1739 this territory was all included in a new town called Chelsea. In 1846 the town of North Chelsea, comprising the present towns of Revere and Winthrop, was incorporated, and in 1852 the three hundred people living at Pullen Point, or Chelsea, as it was sometimes called, asked for and obtained an act from the General Court incorporating the present town of Winthrop.

As to the church privileges of the people of Pullen Point in the 17th century, I quote the late Judge Chamberlain who, writing of Old Chelsea, says:

"During the Colonial period, and even as late as 1710, the inhabitants of the three precincts sought the privileges of religious worship in the neighboring towns where they had formed church connections; and as this was a condition to citizenship, this class embraced all the leading inhabitants."

The names of the children of Deane Winthrop, of the Hasey and Gibbons families, appear in the list of baptisms in the First Church, Boston. The names of the Bill children appear only among the births recorded in the town records, although several of the Bill family were members of the second church.

Judge Samuel Sewell, under date of July 11, 1699, writes of his attending the marriage of Mercy Winthrop in the old Deane Winthrop house still standing on Shirley Street near Fort Banks. He went to Pulling Point with Rev. Samuel Willard, pastor of the Old South Church, who performed the ceremony. Mr. Willard, (so says the diary,) "gave good advice and exhortation; especially most solemnly charged them never to neglect family prayer."

Others of the inhabitants of Pulling Point of that century were married by Governor Richard Bellingham, and one at least by Samuel Sewell.

The shortest journey to Boston in those days was by water, and it is probable that some of the inhabitants of the Point went to the Boston churches in boats when the weather was favorable.

The establishment of preaching at Rumney Marsh at the beginning of the 18th century attracted the attention of the Pullen Pointe people and at the organization of the church in 1715, and for an hundred and more years thereafter, the church records contain names of many inhabitants of Pullen Point and Point Shirley. This is not the time or place to mention them specifically, but it is enough to say that the following family names appear often among the list of "baptized" "to own the covenant" "received to full communion" "marriages and deaths:" Hasey, Sargent, Bill, Tewksbury, Belcher, Gleason, Sale, Floyd, and Chamberlain.

John Chamberlain, deacon for thirty years, being chosen to the office in 1719, moved to Pullen Point in 1734, at which time he asked to be relieved of the 12 pounds lls. in his hands as the "churches stock," "which they did and gave Deacon Chamberlain a receipt by their pastor." The record says further, under date of Feb. 2, 1749, Deacon John Chamberlain acquainted the church with his desire of resigning his place as deacon, being obliged through the infirmities of old age to be often absent from duty, etc. upon which,

"Voted, Deacon Chamberlain have the thanks of the church for his past services, and that he be released from his office."

Deacon Chamberlain died in 1753. The house he occupied in Pullen Point was built in Governor Winthrop's time and was torn down in 1860. It stood under the old elm near the present Thornton station.

Another Pulling Point man who was prominent in the old church and also in town affairs, was Deacon John Sale, who resigned his office in 1798 as "he was unable by great lameness" etc. The thanks of the church were given to Deacon Sale,

"----for his steady, prudent, and exemplary conduct in his office, accompanied with our Christian affection and sympathy under his lameness and infirmities, hoping still to enjoy his kind assistance and advice, and heartily wishing of him the presence of God's holy spirit."

Joseph Belcher, another resident of the Point is often mentioned in the records as having served the church in many ways.

Hugh Floyd, often mentioned in the old church and town records, was the ancestor of David Floyd who moved from the part of the town now Revere to Pullen Point in 1825.

In 1753 a number of Boston gentlemen purchased all or nearly all of the fifty acres of land contained in the point of land near Deer Island, and started a great fishing station there. The Boston News Letter

gives an account of a dinner given by the proprietors to Governor Wm. Shirley and other gentlemen of distinction to celebrate the opening of the new enterprise. After the dinner the governor accepted the honor of bestowing his name on the establishment. Thus the point received a good name, and the place became a favorite summer resort; fine residences and a church were built, and one writer says a minister was settled. The fishing industry in a few years proved a failure; the fishermen moved away and the fine houses were used as summer residences by Governor Hancock and others. Among the Wendell papers is found a list of the names of fifty persons subject to military duty living at Point Shirley in 1754. Among these names are only two or three which are those of the old families of Point Shirley or Pullen Point.

All that we know about the church other than what we have stated is found in the records of the town of Chelsea. At a town meeting May 22, 1753, (the year of the big dinner) it was,

"Voted that Mr. McClenachan be allowed to preach once a month for six months at Pullen Point, and no longer with the town's consent."

The church must have been in existence for at least three years, for in 1756 in raising money for the support of the ministry by the whole town it was voted that "such part of it as shall be laid on Point Shirley go towards the support of the minister there."

The Winthrop Public Library has in its historical collection an old tax bill of the town of Chelsea for the year 1790, which is of interest in connection with the church history of the 18th century. The bill was the one rendered to and paid by John Tewksbury of Pullen Point, and is receipted by Joseph Cheever, Collector. The total bill for "State," "Town," "School," "Minister," and "County," is L9-18s-4d,

of which L3-2s-2d (or about one-third,) was for the minister.

Another item of interest in the religious history of Pullen Point is the tradition that the great Whitefield once preached under an apple tree near the old Bill house about the year 1740.

At the beginning of the 19th century there were some twelve houses in Pullen Point and Point Shirley, and no church organization or church building. In 1805 a school-house was built on land where now stands the Winthrop Town Hall. This building was the scene of many interesting meetings and among them the first preaching, followed by the formation of the first church now having an organization in the present town of Winthrop. From the records of the Methodist society, written by Joseph Belcher, a descendant of the Joseph Belcher before named as an active man in the Rumney Marsh church, we learn that on Jan. 18, 1817, Rev. Daniel Fillmore went down to the Point and preached, "but not without considerable opposition."

"----he preached three different times on Fridays, the preaching made a general impression on the minds of the people and Mrs. Susan Burrill soon experienced religion; the next preaching was from Lynn in the following summer by Rev. Mr. Marsh and Orlando Hinds; the next preaching was by the Rev. Mr. Moday from Monmouth, Maine, Jan. 18, 1818; the first preaching on the sabbath, a man of long experience and preached with power; the next was Rev. Isaac Janerson, meetings very full and solom. It was agreed by those that were friendly to form a society. Accordingly a meeting was held at the school house in the following manner:

Chelsea April 21, 1818.

At a meeting of the first Methodist society in Chelsea to transact business for the said society first to chose a moderator then a committee to give certificates etc. the following persons were chosen.

John S. Tewksbury (Moderator)
 Bill Burrill,)
 Joseph Belcher) Committee.
 Samuel Belcher.)

June 4, 1818

The society then was taken in to Malden Circet and The Rev. Orlando Hinds was stationed on the Circet by Conference which sat at Hallowell, Me. June 4th, as the Circet preacher. He preached at Chelsea Point every third sabbath beginning

June 14th, his pay was by contrabuation as was those which had preached before; the sum was 53 dollars and eighty-three cents this year.

The following persons were admitted into church and formed the first class:

Mrs. Susan Burrill,
Joseph Belcher,
Mrs. Nancy Belcher,
Mrs. Mary Burrill,
Mr. Andrew Tuksbury,
Mrs. Mary Tuksbury,

and ten persons by joining the society were excused by the town clerk from paying parish taxes in the Congregational society of Chelsea.

The Christian Herald of Oct. 10, 1832, contains a column article entitled "Visit to Chelsea Point" which gives an account of a most interesting Sabbath spent at the church, (the old school-house still being the meeting place) when two were baptised, two received into full communion and twenty-three were received on probation, the additions being the result of a revival of religion under the labors of Shadrach Ramsdell, a local preacher from Lynn. The writer continues:

"The largest part of those who have been converted in this revival are persons of such character and standing in society, as promise much for the upbuilding of the church.

There is a fine Sabbath school and Bible class established and in successful operation among them, and much is doing for the spiritual and eternal interests of the rising generation.

We also learn with much satisfaction that the people are awake, as might be expected, to the important subject of temperance. They have recently formed a Temperance Society, and this part of the good work of reformation is prospering admirably. The use of ardent spirits is almost, and we hope soon will be entirely abandoned by every person in the place. And in short, every thing in favor of general morals and the interest of true and experimental religion, seems to be in a prosperous condition.

The year following action was taken toward the building of a church, a meeting being held at the Chelsea Point school-house for that purpose Dec. 11, 1833.

Under Art. 1 of the warrant, Joseph Belcher was chosen moderator.

Under Art. 2, Voted to build a house for public worship, and under article 3:

- "Voted that the house be thirty by thirty-four feet.
 - Voted that the house be a suitable hight to be convenient.
 - Voted that money be subscribed toward building.
 - Voted that a committee be chosen to Present the subscription Paper to all they think proper.
- | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----------|
| Edward Floyd |) | |
| Joseph Burrill |) | |
| Joseph Belcher |) | Committee |
| Joseph Belcher 2nd. |) | |
| David Belcher. |) | " |

V.S.

The comittee began their work immediately, as the original subscription paper is dated the same day of the meeting. The heading is in the hand of Master Frederick William Augustus Stuben Brown, a school teacher of that day.

The subscribers to this paper all lived in what is now Winthrop. We find another paper which was circulated in the other part of the town, now Revere. The subscriptions on the first paper amount to \$505., on the second \$24; total \$529.

The building was dedicated Nov. 19, 1834, by Rev. Daniel Fillmore. No written or printed account of the dedication has come down to us. Many remember something about it; the church was well filled; the singing was by a choir who occupied the little gallery under which one passed in entering the church. The instrumental music consisted of a flute, a violin, and bass viol. In those times it was considered such a privilege to play in church that the society selected by vote the three or four persons who should take turns in playing the double bass during the year. The present church building was erected in 1871.

For fifty years this was the only church organization at Chelsea Point. And it should be here noted that Winthrop stands almost alone among New England towns in this particular. It is rarely the case that the first church is of the Methodist denomination.

Usually the Congregational or the Unitarian Society is the church with the longest history.

While many of those who were formerly connected with the old church here (Revere) severed their connection and joined the Methodist society, there were a number who kept their membership and attended church here as long as their health permitted. Well remembered instances were those of the late John W. Tewksbury who for years attended the Unitarian Church here, and of Deacon David Floyd who for years never missed a journey across the short beach to the Congregational Church for the Sabbath service. In the early part of the century the journey used to be made from Point Shirley by boat passing up Belle Isle Inlet to a point near Slade's old grist mill, where the boat would be left until after the service, and then the man and his wife would sail or row back to Point Shirley. The tide only served for this method of conveyance twice a month.

At Point Shirley during this period, after the establishment of the Revere Copper Works there, meetings were held under the direction of H. H. Fay and a few others who had a Baptist preacher named Hawes, and probably other ministers preached in the Point school house. During the '60's a small building was erected in which Roman Catholic services were held until the closing of the works in 1867. In the year 1867 meetings were held in the town hall at which the preaching was mainly by the Free Will Baptists. These services resulted in the formation of the First Baptist Church of Winthrop Oct. 27, 1871. The present house of worship was dedicated in May 1873 and the church has continued to grow in numbers and in influence.

The next church to be organized was the Episcopal, in August, 1886. From that date until 1892 this church and the one at Beachmont

NOTE - THE CORRECT DATE IS AUGUST 1885

S. F. Tucker

were under the ministration of one rector.

In December, 1889, a new church building was opened for worship, the services up to this having been held in public halls, and for a number of months in the Baptist Church by kind invitation of that society.

On the evening of February 15, 1887, the Unitarian Church was organized and soon a large number of people were busy in promoting the work of the society. In September of 1889 a well appointed church building was dedicated.

The summer settlement at Ocean Spray and Winthrop Beach began in 1875. Dr. Sam'l Ingalls, who had been a pioneer in opening up some forty acres of this sandy waste for cottage lots, deeded a lot of land on Shirley Street to the Ocean Spray Hall Association for the purpose of a site for a chapel for religious and social services. A building was erected and is used each summer for about ten weeks as a house of worship, clergymen of all denominations conducting the services.

In the year 1882 Mr. John W. Tewksbury, the owner of other shore lands near Great Head, conveyed a parcel of land on Tewksbury Street to trustees to be used for religious purposes. For several years previous to this a committee had arranged for services which had been held each Sunday in a small building on the land referred to. These services were continued until 1896, when the Tewksbury Memorial Chapel was so arranged as to be used during the winter and a Congregational church was established. In 1900 this building was still further improved, and the Union Congregational Church is now well established in a substantial building.

For many years the adherents of the Roman Catholic religion in Winthrop were obliged to go to East Boston to worship in a church of their faith. In June, 1887, a large church building situated on Winthrop Street was consecrated and the congregation in the summer's season is so large as to necessitate holding two services each Sunday morning to accommodate those who attend.

Such are the main facts connected with the history of the church in the Town of Winthrop. I have thought it appropriate for this occasion to write more fully of the early period of our history, even though the facts are meagre, than to rehearse in full the history of the recent church organizations. The clergymen who are to follow me to-day and at next Sunday's meeting will doubtless draw many lessons from the church history of this locality. I have been impressed as I have re-read the annals of the old church founded here so many years ago, and followed the career of its members and their descendants here and elsewhere, with the character of the men and women who established the church; and with their far-reaching influence upon the people who have lived in the present municipalities of Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop. To one familiar with the history of the old families of the three places, it is interesting to note that many of the church workers in one part of the old town, have had much to do in helping religious progress in the other section of Old Chelsea; and that many of the men and women who were brought up in a church having its own statement of belief and methods of work, have been great helpers in building up other organizations in other sections of the town.

An instance of this has already been given in the fact that many of those who formed the Methodist Church in Pullen Point had been

connected with the Congregational Church in this part of the town. Another instance is found in the fact that one who had all his life worshipped with the Unitarian Society here gave land in Winthrop where now stands the Congregational Church and also assisted other churches in Winthrop.

In the early part of the century a young woman born in this part of the town and an attendant of the Congregational Church here, formed the first Sunday School in the present City of Chelsea. She then moved to Winthrop, where, during her long life she was a pillar of strength in the Methodist Society there. I refer to Mrs. Wm. B. Belcher, who will be remembered by the older residents of Revere as Miss Esther Fuller.

Among the many societies of these days are those whose members are descendants of the men who have fought for their country, either in the war to establish its independence, or to protect the Stars and Stripes when the flag was threatened by rebel hands or by foreign foe. It is well that the children of such sires thus honor their memory and keep alive the spirit of patriotism. May those who have in their veins the blood of the men and women who laid so well the foundations of the churches in all parts of Old Chelsea, not only remember with becoming pride that their ancestors performed a good work for God and their country, but may they strive to serve their day and generation in such a way that those who come after them will look back with equal pride to the church-workers of Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop at the beginning of the 20th century.

Read at Revere, March 7, 1901.