

A
NARRATIVE

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE

NORTH PARISH OF HINGHAM,

FROM THE TIME OF THE REV. DR. WARE'S LEAVING IT,
TO THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. JOSEPH RICHARD-
SON OVER THE FIRST CHURCH AND CONGREGATION,
AND OF MR. HENRY COLMAN OVER THE THIRD
CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN THE NORTH PARISH.

—
BY AN INHABITANT.
—

"And I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame."
Nahum iii. 6.

SALEM :

PRINTED BY JOSHUA CUSHING.

1807.

Third Parish Society | New North Church Timeline

This is a brief timeline of the events leading up to the formation of the Third Parish Society in Hingham Square, based on the book, 'A narrative of the proceedings in the North Parish of Hingham : from the time of the Rev. Dr. Ware's leaving it, to the ordination of the Rev. Joseph Richardson over the First Church and Congregation, and of Mr. Henry Colman over the Third Church and Society in the North Parish / by an inhabitant.'¹

It was a contentious period in Hingham's history, with consequences that extended beyond the town's borders.

1805

In early 1805, the Rev. Dr. Henry Ware leaves the pulpit at First Parish to accept a professorship (Hollis Chair) at Harvard University, where he subsequently helped form the Harvard Divinity School (Unitarian).²

22 April 1805: Parish Meeting to find someone to fill the pulpit. Three preachers were engaged for one month each. They met again on **27 July 1805**, choosing none of the three.

Joseph Richardson, the third preacher and a stranger to Hingham, came down from Charlestown. There were 'rumors & reports' that he had broken an engagement with one Miss Robinson, and had had several run-ins with his patron, one Dr. Morse, Commodore Nicholson, and Daniel Parker, Esq. Because of all this, his character came into question. To counter this, his friends circulated various letters of recommendation.

Charles Lincoln told the story of Parker & Richardson who were out for a walk when they passed a 'well dressed' woman. Parker bowed to her, so Richardson did too. A little way on, Parker asked if Richardson had known to whom he had bowed; he did not. Apparently, she was a woman of low character herself.

To make a long story short, a group at the church, known collectively as 'the opposers,' continued to have questions about Richardson's character and deportment; his religious views were also unknown, which was important in a time when Unitarianism was on the rise.

14 October 1805: Parish Meeting, Capt. Thomas Fearing, moderator. The meeting chose a committee (Hawkes Fearing, Jacob Leavitt, Thomas Fearing, Seth Lincoln, Ezra Lincoln, Laban Hersey, and John Marsh) to hire a preacher for four sabbaths, then another four. The committee was also instructed to review Richardson's character and to report their findings.

Their findings were these: His character was still an issue; there was a belief that no ecclesiastical council of neighboring churches would ordain him; and they recommended that the church drop Richardson from consideration and hire someone else.

By this time, the parish was 'in ferment,' with many conflicting stories circulating, and it was on the verge of splitting. Church governance also became an issue.

9 December 1805: Parish Meeting. The committee concluded that ‘from the best information we can obtain, we believe him to be a gentleman of good moral character’ (Thomas Fearing, chair).

The parish then voted Richardson in, 171-41. However, the meeting was ‘conducted with confusion,’ including as it did sixty illegal voters mixed in with the legal voters. The revised total, then, was 111-41 *legal* voters. Disruptions from the balcony added to the confusion.

There were feelings that the committee had ‘neglected the good of the parish,’ that not all aspects of Richardson’s character had been examined. Up to twenty families left the parish, which is to say, the church, until these character questions were resolved.

1806

10 February 1806: Parish Meeting to decide to continue the investigation; now there was some disapproval of Richardson’s *friends* from Charlestown.

8 March 1806: Parish Meeting to vote to extend a contract & to call an ecclesiastical council.

17 April 1806: Parish Meeting to vote to separate; unanimously given.

17 May 1806: Parish Meeting at the ‘north meeting house.’ No mention in which building that meeting took place, most likely at The Old Ship meeting house.

2 July 1806: Parish Meeting to proceed to ordain Richardson.

1807

16 June 1807: Ecclesiastical Council convened in the Third Congregational Society, wherein the new church withdrew from using the name *First Church* and unanimously agreed to be known as the Third Church and Society in Hingham. Also voted to admit and ordain Henry Colman of Hanover as their pastor. Other issues were voted and settled; adjourned.

17 June 1807: The council considered these proceedings as ‘perfectly correct, regular, and satisfactory.’

Compiled from The Narrative by the Rev. Steven M. Aucella.

¹ Thaxter, Thomas, 1748-1813. Salem [Mass.] : Printed by Joshua Cushing, 1807.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=yale.39002009834004;view=1up;seq=5>

² The ‘religious Old Guard’ (conservative Calvinists) at Harvard, alarmed by this, left to form Andover Theological School in 1807, the forerunner to my alma mater, Andover Newton Theological School.