

Jan 17, 2021 Presentation to Candia Congregational Church

What exactly are we celebrating? On Jan 17, 1771 a 21-year-old Harvard grad by the name of David Jewett entered the pulpit of the Candia Meeting House to begin what was called a “settled ministry”. Itinerate preachers had come to deliver sermons, but with the call to David Jewett, we became a church.

Let’s consider 1771. We were a British colony. In 1722, entrepreneurs from the well settled NH coastline attained a land grant and surveyed what we now call Chester, Raymond, Auburn, Hooksett and Candia. Here’s how the survey reads: *“We begun at a Marked white pine Tree Standing on the Supposed Kingston line, where Haverhill Supposed Line Cutts it, and run Ten miles upon a W.N.W. Line to a pitch pine Tree notchd on four Sides; then.... “* and it continues like that. The large area was set into divisions. In the geographical center of what would become Candia was designated a Parsonage Lot and beside it, the school lot. The King of England knew we needed preaching and teaching! And where was the Parsonage Lot? Right here! God’s church, God’s Light on the Hill even before there was a Candia.

Our first settler came in 1742. Gradually brave homesteaders came to clear land, build cabins, plant crops and find ways to survive in this wilderness.

This region was called the Chestnut Country, or Chester. A meeting house had been built in Chester, the place where men met with God, where men met with each other. Our region was called the North Parish of Chester. But the Meeting House in Chester was a long distance in a horse drawn buggy for settlers. So, these homesteaders petitioned the governor of the province that we could become our own parish because of the great difficulty it was to get to worship. Candia separated from Chester in 1763.

Towns were required to hold yearly meetings. Imagine, our iconic town meeting was mandated by King George! At our very first, money was allocated for preaching and teaching. The next year, they decided to begin the building of the Meeting House, a project that would ultimately take three generations and end in a disastrous fire. But that is another whole story. That structure stood approximately at the location of the Soldiers’

Monument across the street. As the congregation grew, the parishioners were able to seek a “settled pastor”, which brings us to Jan. 17, 1771.

Now let’s consider what was happening in the colonies. Tensions were growing with the English. Representatives from every town met in Exeter to negotiate disagreements. Inventory was taken of ammunition, powder and flint. At the news of Lexington, Candia men set out immediately with other local militia to see if they were needed. Candia men also fought at Bunker Hill.

As men joined the war effort, their wives and children were left on their own. Homesteaders were still clearing land for crops and building stone walls with their oxen. How did they manage? Wives had no income. The town tried to pay a stipend to support the soldiers that had left.

What would have happened to Pastor Jewett’s salary? He was hired with the British pound. Massachusetts began to print the first ever paper money, supposedly backed by silver. It depreciated rapidly. Called Old Tenor, it was replaced by New Tenor and then a Continental Currency, came to have no value. Pastor Jewett stayed here in Candia for 10 years during which we fought a war gained independence and continued to build our Meeting House. Wouldn’t Pastor Jewett be amazed to know generations would celebrate his ministry!

When the church celebrated its Centennial, James Fitts wrote a church history. At its Bicentennial, Paul Sargent continued that history. And now at 250 years, it is time for another update. I have started with the early days, some of which I have shared with you this morning. My history extends through its first 3 ministers: David Jewett, Joseph Prince and Jesse Remington. This is available on line at the church web site and in printed form. I hope to be able to distribute it to all of you.

Your 250 committee, Pastor Steve, Ed and Sandy Whitcomb, Liz Claver, Sharon Packard, Rob Crain and myself have seasonal plans, real or virtual. We have started today with some of the early history. In the spring Pastor Ed Whitman will be presenting the next portion, a history of Congregationalism. During the summer we should be at Joy and able to have real events. Our year will culminate on Thanksgiving Sunday. By the end of the year, we will have “new history” – the last 50 years written. You will be participants in our legend.

Today's presentation of early history makes us consider the struggle and deprivation to build our church. Historian F.B. Eaton questioned in 1852 whether the present parishioners would sacrifice the time, labor and money as did our fore-fathers.

We have inherited so much! We did not earn it – we don't deserve it - it has been gifted to us.

We have an amazing history. God placed his church on this hill in the 1700's. He gave his church generations of people who have served him. Generations that have come under the same covenant of faith.

Our challenge is that when this church celebrates its TriCentennial that they will have found us faithful.