

Within Patriarchy: Gender and Power in Massachusetts's Congregational Churches,
1630-1730

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the relationship between gender and power in the religious culture of Massachusetts's Congregational churches during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. It contributes to the fields of women's history, church history, and colonial American history by complicating both the static concept of patriarchal New England society and the historiography, which largely portrays Puritan women as either saints or disorderly sinners. It addresses questions of the average Puritan woman's religious experience, something that is lacking despite the plethora of studies on Puritan culture, and demonstrates that women's place in the church was not fixed and immutable but fluid and varied geographically from congregation to congregation.

This study charts the gendered dimensions of changes in church practices, such as giving public confessions of faith and worship singing, which had the effect of temporarily silencing women's voices within the meetinghouse and reveals how women and men responded to those changes. It demonstrates how despite the ambivalent nature

of Puritan culture—women joined the church as full members, for example, yet the meaning of that membership was restricted— church membership and affiliation afforded women a position of influence with their husbands, their ministers, within larger society, and with each other and that women benefited in tangible ways from church association such as during times of domestic discord and during the Salem Witchcraft Crisis.

Although these women left few extant documents, church, court, and probate records, conversion narratives, ministerial diaries, sermons, and essays, and letters reveal that they acted both as independent religious agents, changing churches apart from their husbands, for example, and corporately in political solidarity, as in the case of the women of Boston Third church, even challenging the civil authorities on occasion when a church/state conflict impinged on their practice of religion. Within a decidedly patriarchal culture, women were both key participants in and patrons of their individual congregations and shapers of both their and their family's religious experience throughout the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

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Chapter One

Women and the Congregational Church: An Overview

In a patriarchal society such as Puritan Massachusetts, women were under the political, legal, and familial authority of men. Yet fundamental to the workings of that society was one's relationship with God, and here, the average woman could attain a place of influence and power through membership in and affiliation with the established Congregational church that was unavailable to her in civil society. As historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has remarked, church membership offered "one of the few public distinctions available to women" during this era. Indeed, for the English nonseparating Puritans who founded the Massachusetts-Bay colony in 1630, the very public act of being received into church membership, or "joined in full Comunion," was the culmination of a process that by its very nature recognized a woman's personal power—that is the ability to make decisions based on one's own spiritual beliefs, knowledge, and desires—even as she placed herself under the authority and governance of the congregation.¹

As extant church records make clear, church membership not only mattered to women in the early decades of settlement, it mattered more to the daughters and granddaughters of first generation goodwives than it did to their sons and grandsons. It mattered to Anglo women and to women of African ancestry alike. As the seventeenth

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 216; Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts 1629-1736* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute: 1974), 5; On the definition of personal power, or personhood, see Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality," *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 63-64.

century advanced, women made time to frequent church services, or “publick meetings,” not once but twice on Sunday, the Puritan Sabbath, more often than their male counterparts despite the time-consuming demands imposed upon them to “look well to the ways of [their] household.” That women dominated the membership rolls and filled the pews of most Bay-area churches by the end of the seventeenth century is illustrated by the eminent Puritan minister Cotton Mather who remarked in 1692 that “in a Church of between three or four Hundred Communicants there are but few more than one Hundred men; all the rest are Women.”²

Despite the thousands of average Puritan women throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries who faithfully attended Sabbath services and endured the arduous process of becoming church members or “visible saints” in numbers that eventually exceed their male brethren, Puritan society remained ambivalent toward women. The Congregational church, for example, afforded women the opportunity to become church members even as it restrained the meaning of that membership. Women could not become ministers, elders, or deacons within the church nor could they serve as the pillars upon which a new church was gathered. Significantly, they were not permitted to vote upon the selection of a new minister despite the fact that lay participation in

² Anne Bradstreet, “An Epitaph On My Dear and Ever Honoured Mother Mrs. Dorothy Dudley Who Deceased Decemb. 27. 1643 and of Her Age, 61,” *Several Poems: Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight, Wherein Especially is Contained a Compleat Discourse, and Description of the Four Elements Constitutions, Ages of Man, Seasons of the Year: Together with an Exact Epitome of the Three First Monarchyes viz. the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian. And Beginning of the Romane Common-Wealth to the End of Their Last King: with Diverse Other Pleasant & Serious Poems, / by a Gentlewoman in New-England* (Boston : Printed by John Foster, 1678), 220; Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion: A Facsimile Reproduction with an Introduction by Pattie Cowell* (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978; reprint of the 3d ed., Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741), 93, 48. *Ornaments* was first published in 1691 in Boston; On female predominance as church members see Gerald F. Moran, “Sisters’ in Christ: Women and the Church in Seventeenth-Century New England,” *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980).

ministerial selection was a key tenet of the sixteenth-century English Puritanism upon which seventeenth-century New England Puritans established their congregations, nor did they vote to accept new applicants into church membership.³

The extent of women's power and influence, the form it might take, and the context within which it might be expressed was frequently the subject of debate in the meetinghouse, at weekday lectures, through correspondence, and likely in person between individual men and women. Questions arose and debates ensued about whether or not women should give their confession of faith—a requirement for church membership—in public or in private, whether or not they should wear veils—which were a sign of submission to male authority—whether or not they should sing or speak in the public space of the meetinghouse, and whether or not they should speak at private church gatherings. As these debates illustrate, women's place within the church was not fixed and immutable but fluid and, as befits a Congregational system where individual churches were generally free from outside control, often dependent upon the way that ministers, ruling elders, and laymen debated, interpreted and applied scripture since the Bible was the basis for the religious and social construction of Puritan culture. In the same way that that the infant Massachusetts Bay colony endeavored to define itself politically, economically, and spiritually, individual church congregations wrestled with interpretations of doctrine and polity, some of which pertained specifically to women.

³ Edmund Morgan's *Visible Saints The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963) popularized the term "visible saint" to refer to those men and women who were accepted into membership in the Congregational church, but the term was contemporary to seventeenth-century Puritan ministers such as Thomas Hooker in *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline* (London: John Bellamy, 1648), 16, 30; The text of Henry Ainsworth and Francis Johnson, *A True Confession of Faith* (Amsterdam, 1596), in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960) states that "Every christian Congregation hath power and commandement to elect and ordeine their own ministerie" (66); Richard Mather in *Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed* (London, 1643) states that "women ... ought not to vote in Church matters" (60). Mather was the minister at Dorchester from 1636-1669.

Although the degree to which women's voices might be heard both inside and outside the meetinghouse, both literally and figuratively, varied over time and from congregation to congregation, the trend over the latter half of the seventeenth century was toward an increased silencing of both women's speaking and singing voices within the meetinghouse. Yet this trend was not the result of a deliberate effort by ministerial elites to silence "female voices with particular force," as one historian has concluded. Indeed, this trend can only be fully understood when it is placed within the context of the development of Congregationalism during the seventeenth century and alongside women's behavior in response to the development of this system.⁴

To understand the various debates about women's place within the church, however, some brief but necessary background on Puritans, Congregationalism, and on the process of becoming a church member or "visible saint" is required. This chapter begins with this background. It then highlights the fact that from the beginning of settlement, women sought church membership in numbers equal to men, and it introduces the idea that church membership gave women a demonstrable influence with others, a topic that will be developed further in subsequent chapters. Finally, it examines some of the debates that reveal the ambivalent nature of Puritan society as it sought to define the context within which women's voices might be heard and their influence expressed.

⁴ Historians uniformly agree on the idea that Congregationalism was not a fully developed system either in Old or New England in the 1630s but was something that needed to be worked out in practice. See Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 64-112. As Morgan states, "the Congregational system had not yet been fully worked out by the nonseparating Puritans of Massachusetts before their departure from England" (84-5); Jane Kamensky, in *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93, concludes that the "doors of the church were closed to female voices with particular force." Kamensky relies, however, on just two cases of women who openly challenged authorities, Anne Hutchinson and Ann Hibbens, to prove her point. I would argue that her conclusions are one-sided since they omit the perspective of thousands of "average" women who embraced full church membership and gave their public confessions of faith before the entire congregation into the eighteenth century.

In sum, this chapter argues that the degree to which women's speaking voices were or were not heard within the meetinghouse must be seen within the context of the development of Congregationalism. Practices varied. The trend toward the silencing of women's speaking and singing voices represents the pragmatic reality of life within a Congregational church system where individual ministers and laymen wrestled with issues of biblical interpretation and polity within an increasingly secular culture. This is not to say, however, that Puritan society was not hierarchical or that gender equality existed. Women's presence within the church was a gendered one and Puritanism was a patriarchal system in which men controlled a disproportionately large share of the power. Significantly, within this patriarchal system the seventeenth-century trend toward the silencing of women's speaking and singing voices did not mean that women's influence as goodwives, friends, mothers, and church members, or "sisters," diminished accordingly or that women were unable to act both as independent religious agents and corporately in political solidarity, even challenging the state on occasion. Indeed, because female church members, unlike their male brethren, were denied participation in the formal political process, women's attempts to challenge the state in the context of their status as church members takes on even greater significance. Even though their literal voices were often quiet within the meetinghouse, women responded by finding alternative ways to give voice to their opinions and desires. Despite the ambivalence of Puritan society toward them, women were both key participants in and patrons of their individual congregations and shapers of their religious experience throughout the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

Background

As heirs of John Calvin and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, the seven hundred Puritan laymen and women who left England in 1630 under the leadership of John Winthrop arrived in Massachusetts Bay with the primary goal of instituting a more “pure Worship of God” than that which existed in the Church of England with all of its popish remnants such as powerful bishops. Rather than separate from the English Puritan church, as the 1620 Puritan emigrants to Plymouth had done, the Bay area Puritans were non-separatists. Their goal was reformation or purification of the Protestant Church of England—which was established in the 1530s and formalized during the reign of Queen Elizabeth—and not separation from it. They believed that the Bible contained the model for both a reformed church and a civil state that would support the church, a Bible commonwealth, which God would have them emulate. As Winthrop wrote while still on board the *Arbella*, the New England Puritans hoped to create an ideal community, a “New Jerusalem,” that would serve as a “city upon a hill,” a city that would be an example to “succeeding plantations” of how to live pure Godly lives in community with other believers where one might be able to “do justly, to love mercy, [and] to walk humbly” with their God.⁵

The Puritans intended to create this Godly community within the framework of Congregationalism, a system of church government that emphasized the autonomy and self-rule of the local congregation. Synods and Councils, which served as governing bodies under the English Presbyterian form of church government, would have no

⁵ Roger Clap, *Memoirs of Roger Clap* (Boston: Printed and Published by David Clapp Jr., 1844), 28; Thomas Welde, “Thomas Welde to his Former Parishioners at Tarling,” *Letters from New England: The Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629-1638*, ed., Everett Emerson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 95; John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” in *Winthrop Papers Volume II 1623-1630* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931), 2:282-95.

binding authority over the individual Congregational church, or meeting house, but would serve in an advisory capacity only. Although historians agree that Congregationalism in New England was a system which would have to be worked out in practice, the Puritans who immigrated to the Bay brought with them several key principles that they strove to implement. Primary among these principles was the idea that the Bible, the written word of God, and Scripture alone, or *sola scriptura*, would serve as the highest law of the land. To man, however, fell the task of interpreting scripture and therein lay the genesis for debate regarding many doctrinal issues throughout the course of the seventeenth century, including the place of women. A second principle was that of free consent. Local congregations, for example, existed by the “free mutuall consent of Believers joining and covenanting to live as Members of a holy Society together in all religious & virtuous duties as Christ & his Apostles did institute & practise in the Gospell,” as stated by English Puritan minister Henry Jacob. As this dissertation will later argue, the church covenant, freely and mutually agreed to, would serve as the basis of women’s authority within the church. Thirdly, the Congregationalists endorsed the principle of lay participation. Lay men and sometimes women, for instance, voted on issues such as admissions, discipline, and a variety of other church policies and procedures. Lastly, participation by laymen would ideally serve as a check upon ministerial authority since clergy were elected by male church members.⁶

⁶ Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), 2:157. According to Burrage, John Cotton, leading Puritan divine, was most directly influenced by three leading Independent English Puritans: Robert Parker, Mr. Baynes, and Dr. Ames, who were all friends of and influenced by Henry Jacobs (1:361); For background on Congregationalism see James F. Cooper, Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapters 1 and 2; David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge:

Armed with the Congregational principles of *sola scriptura*, free consent, limited ministerial authority, and lay participation and joined by an ever-increasing number of emigrants from England, Puritan and non-Puritan alike, the immigrants went to work establishing their church-centered communities and within ten years, or by 1640, had instituted or gathered some twenty churches within the greater Massachusetts Bay in places such as Dorchester, Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown, and Salem. Unlike the Church of England, in which church membership was conferred automatically at birth and recognized with baptism, the Bay Puritans agreed that if their communities were to remain pure, only those who could demonstrate that they were saved by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, only those who had experienced conversion and could publicly relate that conversion experience, should be admitted into membership with its concomitant status and benefits. Church membership in turn enabled members to participate in the sacraments of communion, or the Lord's Supper, and to have their children baptized in the hope that as they reached the age of accountability, they too would experience conversion and become visible saints. Although church attendance became mandatory in 1646 as instituted by the court and non-attendance punishable by a fine, church membership remained voluntary and based upon one's ability to convince the congregation of one's fitness for membership. From the first, women were among those eligible to qualify.⁷

Harvard University Press, 2006), chapters 1 and 2; John Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism 1620-1957* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), chapters 1 and 2; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, chapter 1; The term Congregational was used by John Cotton and his contemporaries to describe their church system. See John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons, for John Bellamie, at the signe of the three Golden-Lions, in Cornhill, 1648).

⁷ For a list of Congregational churches in Massachusetts see Marian Card Donnelly, *The New England Meeting Houses of the Seventeenth Century* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University

Visible Sainthood, Spiritual Equality, and Public Confessions

Millicent Kingsbury's experience in becoming a church member was fairly typical of thousands of average Puritan women in Massachusetts during the first decades of settlement who sought membership in Congregational Churches as independent souls. On April 24, 1639 at a meeting of the new Congregational church in Dedham, Massachusetts, Kingsbury was received into membership, or "joined to the church," along with five other women and four men. The day marked the culmination of a rigorous process in which prospective members were asked to publicly "declare the workings of god in his hart" and "the true workings of faith and repentance in his soule," or to give a conversion narrative, or relation. This narrative was usually first given before a "private assembly" consisting of "Elders, and ... divers of the Church, both men and women." Following the applicant's meeting with the private assembly, one of the ruling Elders, at a "publique assembly of the Church" would notify the congregation that a particular man or woman desired to "enter into Church-fellowship with them." If any within the church had doubts or "scruple" about the potential candidate, the applicant could not "proceed through" until such questions had been satisfied. Next the "party" would appear again "in the midst of the Assembly" where the Elder "propounded" the potential member to the congregation. If there were no objections, the party was once again asked to "make knowne to the congregation the work of grace upon his soule."

The work of grace, or conversion narrative, was typically followed by a "profession of

Press, 1968), Appendix B, 121-30. Unfortunately, only a small number of these churches have useful extant records for these early decades; The ultimate source on the deposition of church records is Harold Field Worthley, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts Gathered 1620-1805* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); For the text of the November 4, 1646, law requiring attendance at public meetings, including the Lord's days and fast and thanksgiving days, see Nathaniel B. Shurtleff ed., *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1642-1649* (Boston: From the Press of William White, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1854), 2:177-78.

faith,” or confession, in which the applicant demonstrated his or her understanding of Christian doctrine helped by “questions and answers, if the party be weake.” Following the narrative and profession of faith, testimony was offered on behalf of the potential member. Although evidence is sparse, women at some churches did participate in the process of testifying for potential new members such as at John Fiske’s Wenham and Chelmsford churches where, for example, Sister Barge and Jacob Parker’s wife testified for Sarah Fiske and Sister Batchelor testified for Mary Goldsmith. Only after this lengthy process was the applicant admitted unto membership.⁸

The gathering of the Dedham congregation on April 24 was therefore a solemn occasion since the decision about who was admitted into church membership was not taken lightly. In his account of the founding, the Reverend John Allin, who along with Ralph Wheelocke was appointed to announce, or “propound,” the names of the new applicants, described Kingsbury as being “a tender harted soule full of feares & temptations but truly breathing after Christ.” In contrast to Millicent Kingsbury, her husband, Joseph, was denied membership in the church because he was “too much addicted to the world” and remained “stiffe and unhumbled.” Joseph Kingsbury’s

⁸ Dedham, Mass., *The Early Records of the Town*, ed. Don Gleason Hill (Dedham, Massachusetts: Printed at the Office of the Dedham Transcript, 1886-99), 2:313-14, 6-7; Thomas Lechford, *Plain Dealing or News from New England ...* (London: W. E. and I. G. for Nath. Butter, 1642), 5-9; John Fiske, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske, 1644-1675*, ed. Robert Pope (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1974), 61, 106, 107, 186; For an interesting argument that many New England churches required only a confession of faith rather than a conversion narrative, or relation, *and* a confession of faith for church membership see Francis J. Bremer’s “Not Quite So Visible Saints” (Unpublished paper presented at the Massachusetts Historical Society Boston Early American History Seminar on September 16, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, however, the substance of what was said by the potential church member is less important than the fact that both the confession of faith and the conversion narrative were public statements and that one and/or the other was required from both men and women in the first decades of settlement. For the purpose of this chapter, the terms confession, conversion narrative, relation, and confession of faith all denote some sort of a statement, be it public or private, made by the applicant for membership.

rejection came despite the fact that he had donated the land upon which the new meeting house was to stand and that he was “good [and] hon[orable]...in the maine.” In rejecting Joseph Kingsbury the Dedham church was reinforcing a basic tenet of Congregationalism, that only the discernibly godly should be admitted into membership as opposed to the mixed congregations of England which were composed of both godly and ungodly alike. In the newly evolving society of Puritan Massachusetts, where nothing was more significant than the visible sainthood conferred upon new church members, Millicent Kingsbury became one of the elect prior to, and separate from, her husband who would not be fully admitted to church membership for two more years.⁹

Like Kingsbury, some wives preceded their husbands into church membership. In other instances, wives joined the church at the same time as their husbands, and sometimes husbands preceded their wives as members. Of those women who joined the Dedham church alongside Millicent Kingsbury, for example, all except for Kingsbury were following their husbands into membership as they gave their public confession. Margret Allin, the wife of John Allin, the Dedham minister, gave “a clere and plentiful testimony of the gracious dealings of the Lord with hir.” Prudence Frayry, wife of John Frayry, one of the church founders, gave “good satisfaction both in publike and private.” The wife of founder John Luson was “much humbled and constant in hir affections to the Lord Jesus” so that the church “tooke satisfaction in her and received hir.” Esther Hunting, married to John, another Dedham founder, “gave good satisfaction and was

⁹ Dedham, Mass., *The Early Records*, 13-14, 6-7. John Allin’s account of the founding is on pages 1-21.

received.” And lastly, the wife of Eleazar Lusher “appeared to the church much humbled” and was received with “great satisfaction.”¹⁰

Church membership for women such as Millicent Kingsbury and the other Dedham wives meant that an individual had experienced conversion, “the very essence of Puritanism,” that they were assured of God’s grace or forgiveness in their life, and that they had made a public statement before their ministers, elders, and fellow congregants: a conversion narrative.¹¹ Although the narrative often encompassed no more than an “anxious ‘quarter of an hour, shorter or longer,’” the process leading up to it involved intense individual soul-searching and introspection that often spanned years.¹² Given that the Puritans believed in predestination—the idea that before the foundation of the world God had already determined who would be saved and who would not—the process by which an individual became convinced that he or she was one of the elect or chosen, and therefore rescued from hell, was fraught with uncertainty. Believers prayed feverishly, read scripture, attended church, and counseled with their ministers and other professing Christians in order to determine if they were saved.

Scattered diary entries made by eighteen-year-old Mary Lynde of Salem in 1751 typify the angst endured by someone trying to ascertain whether she was or was not among the elect, one of those whom God had predestined for salvation. As Oliver writes on April 31, 1751, “prayed in the morning but not affected. I pray in the evening not affected. I prayed in the morning but cold and indiffing.” On May 5 Lynde again writes,

¹⁰ Dedham, Mass., *The Early Records*, 14-15.

¹¹ Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 2.

¹² Lechford, *Plain Dealing*, 20-22.

“I prayed in the morning I was not affected. I went to meeting but felled [failed] ... I pray well. I came home but not much affected. I went to meeting in the afternoon but not affected. I pray and read ... [and] examine myself so I was affected and I had my heart and w[o]n out to god in prayer. I spent the evening in reading and praying and was affected.” The following day she prays morning and evening and again, is not much affected. After her May 6 entry, the diary abruptly ends. Despite the brevity of these diary entries, they capture the urgency with which one young woman approached a most salient issue in her life and her desire for resolution.¹³

By giving a formal conversion narrative believers reaffirmed both to themselves and to the larger covenanted church community that God’s saving grace had come to them. Living a good life in and of itself was not evidence of salvation. Salvation was an act of faith, not works. The believer must manifest certain internal qualities, such as humility, that would then become externally visible to others via the conversion narrative. In a society which elevated the value of the spoken word and emphasized the power of the human tongue for good or evil, the very act of giving one’s confession of grace, therefore, reaffirmed the spiritual equality of the sexes within the “publick” sphere of the meetinghouse since all must declare their conversion in the same manner. It was initially a gender neutral process, but one which would become gendered in some Bay-area churches over time.¹⁴

¹³ Mary Lynde Oliver, “Mary Lynde Oliver Diary, 1751,” Oliver Family Papers, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

¹⁴ For an examination of how and why speech came to assume such prominence in New England and how “beliefs about the power of the spoken word in turn shaped the history of early New England,” see Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 5; Thomas Shepard, *Subjection to Christ in All His Ordinances and Appointments: the Best Means to Preserve our Liberty: Together with a Treatise of Ineffectual Hearing the Word ... : With Some Remarkable Passages of His Life* (London : Printed by S.G. for John Rothwell, 1657), 53.

Unlike the process of becoming a church member at the new Dedham church, the political and economic benefits attached to church membership were not gender neutral. Only male church members could vote or hold political office, and, as previously stated, only male church members were allowed to serve as deacons, ministers, and elders. Additionally, throughout early Massachusetts, those men who were visible saints tended to own the most land. Even so, the currency generated for women by church affiliation and its concomitant spiritual equality proved important. In a society where the most important thing was one's relationship with God, women church members gained "public distinction" when they counseled each other regarding spiritual concerns, when they advised and financially supported their ministers, and when they crafted reputations for themselves as biblical scholars and as wise, virtuous women.¹⁵ The informal social network created by the institutional structure of the church was an asset for women during seasons of duress and could act as a vehicle for organizing female power. As goodwives, mothers, friends, and parishioners, church membership and affiliation gave women a demonstrable influence with others that will be explored in subsequent chapters.¹⁶

¹⁵ With the exception of one instance recorded by mintmaster John Hull in which a group of seventy male non-church members were admitted to vote, prior to 1691, only male full church members could vote in civic elections. As a result of the new Massachusetts charter of 1691, all freemen could vote, not just full church members; Richard P. Gildrie, *Salem, Massachusetts: 1626-1683, A Covenant Community* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 64-65; On the exception recorded by John Hull see John Hull, "The Diaries of John Hull Mint-master and Treasurer Of The Colony of Massachusetts Bay," in *Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society* (Printed for the Society, 1857), 3:217; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 216.

¹⁶ Amanda Porterfield in *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) briefly acknowledges the "indirect authority" women exercised as wives and church members and the "direct authority" they exercised as mothers, but her analysis of that influence places women in a decidedly submissive role and does not account for the practical ways in which women exercised their influence or benefited from it (80). Porterfield also argues that "women exercised indirect authority over ministers through their attentiveness, affection, and

Even in death, godly women could continue to influence others through their written confessions and memorials. Sarah Fiske's *Confession of Faith* (1704), for example, was published posthumously so that "others may hence gather the Fragrant Flowers of Divine Knowledge." Jerusha Oliver's *Memorials of Early Piety* (1711) was likewise published for the "Service of Christianity; but Especially to Serve the Intentions of Early Religion," and the publisher of Susanna Bell's *The Legacy of a Dying Mother to Her Mourning Children* hoped that others would be drawn to "an imitation of what was praiseworthy in her [Bell]." Sarah Goodhue had a premonition that she would die suddenly, and on July 23, 1681, three days after delivering a set of twins, she did. After her death, her family discovered Sarah's "valedictory, and monitory writing" containing, as its title states, her "spiritual experiences, sage counsels, pious instructions, and serious exhortations." It was published shortly after her death that it might be, according to its publisher, "profitable to all who may happen to read" it.¹⁷

responsiveness to them, and especially through their investment in imaginatively erotic relationships with them" (93-94). Her conclusions are based on an interpretation of male sermon imagery, however, rather than on women's behavior, as will be seen. A different conception of the basis of female authority emerges when one considers the behavior and practices of female congregants rather than sermons authored by men.

¹⁷ Sarah Fiske, *A Confession of Faith: or, A Summary of Divinity: Drawn up by a Young Gentle-Woman, in the Twenty-Fifth Year of Her Age: And Now Published For the Benefit of All, but More Especially of Young Persons: That They May Attain to a Competent Knowledge, in Saving and Divine Truths* (Boston: Benjamin Eliot, 1704), 2. Sarah (Symmes) Fiske married the Reverend Moses Fiske of Braintree, Massachusetts in 1671. She bore fourteen children, six of whom died in infancy, prior to her death in 1692; Jerusha Oliver, *Memorials of Early Piety: Occurring in the Holy Life & Joyful Death of Mrs. Jerusha Oliver.: With Some Account of Her Christian Experiences, Extracted from Her Reserved Papers: and Published, for the Service of Christianity; but Especially to Serve the Intentions of Early Religion*, ed. Cotton Mather (Boston: Printed and sold by T. Green at his shop in Middle Street, 1711), title page. Jerusha Oliver, born April 16, 1684 in Boston, was the daughter of the Reverend Increase Mather, minister at Boston Second. She died in 1710 at age twenty-six shortly after giving birth to her first child, a daughter, who died a week after Jerusha; Susanna Bell, *The Legacy of a Dying Mother to her Mourning Children Being the Experiences of Susanna Bell who Died March 13, 1672 With an Epistle Dedicatory by Thomas Brooks* (London: Printed and are to be sold by John Hancock, Senior and Junior, 1673), 2-3. Bell was married to Thomas Bell. The couple immigrated to New England in the 1630s, where Susanna joined John Eliot's Roxbury church. The couple then returned to England sometime before 1654 where both Thomas and Susanna Bell died in 1672. On Thomas Bell see James Savage, ed., *A Genealogical Dictionary Of Thee First Settlers of New England, Showing Three Generations Of Those Who Came Before*

Compared with civil society, where women were able to petition the government and testify in court but were assumed to be under the legal, political, and familial authority of men, church membership and affiliation theoretically offered women spiritual equality of the sexes and a concomitant moral authority. As an example, men such as John Winthrop praised Deborah Moodye, a member of the Salem church, as a “wise and anciently religious woman” despite the fact that Moodye’s views on infant baptism resulted in her excommunication from the Salem congregation.¹⁸ This spiritual equality was inherent within Calvinistic Puritanism where salvation through Jesus Christ was no respecter of gender and was available to all. Gal. 3:26-28 in the New Testament, for example, states that “you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁹

In his 1641 letter to John Cotton, the Reverend Peter Bulkeley referred to the idea of spiritual equality between the sexes and quoted the Galatians passage when he asked Cotton if “a sister taking offence against a brother hath not the same liberty as a brother hath, to deale with the offending brother for his offence?” It made sense, as Bulkeley stated, that since “in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female” that women church

May, 1692, On The Basis of Farmer’s Register (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1965), 1:160; Sarah Goodhue, *The Copy of a Valedictory, and Monitory Writing, Left by Sarah Goodhue, Wife of Joseph Goodhue, of Ipswich, in New-England; and Found After Her Decease: Full of Spiritual Experiences, Sage Counsels, Pious Instructions, and Serious Exhortations: Directed to Her Husband, Children, With Other Near Relations and Friends, and Profitable to All Who May Happen to Read Them* (Cambridge: James Allen, 1681).

¹⁸ John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, ed., Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 462-63. Lady Moodye was opposed to infant baptism and to avoid trouble in Salem in 1643 she moved to the Dutch colony on Long Island where she aided Peter Stuyvesant, the Director General of the Colony of New Netherlands.

¹⁹ Gal. 3:26-28 NIV.

members would have the same rights as men to both accuse others of ungodly conduct and to defend themselves against false accusations. Yet even as Bulkeley's letter acknowledges the spiritual equality of the sexes, and the right of women to both accuse others and defend themselves, it also affirms the fact that Massachusetts was a patriarchal society where men were the public voice of political and legal discourse when he points out that "the calling of a brother in question is an act of power." Bulkeley wondered if it was appropriate to do anything which "take authority over the man." Bulkeley's concerns about issues of speech and authority reflected his understanding of gender relations within the marketplace where a woman questioning a man might be interpreted as "taking authority over the man."²⁰

But the meetinghouse was not the marketplace, and inside the meetinghouse a type of limited gender equality existed that did not translate into the marketplace. John Cotton answered Bulkeley's letter by stating that indeed, "a sister hath the like grounds of dealing with an offending brother as a brother hath to deal with a brother. . . . It does not usurpe authority over the brother whom she dealeth with in way of private admonition for his offence for though such an admonition be an act of power yet it is not power usurped by her but in part upon her as by the offender so by God"²¹ In other words, in a different

²⁰ Peter Bulkeley to John Cotton, February 1641, "Cotton Family Papers," Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. Bulkeley was the minister at Concord Congregational Church in Massachusetts from 1636 to 1659 and was one of the founders of Concord, Massachusetts.

²¹ John Cotton to Peter Bulkeley, February 1641, "Cotton Family Papers," Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. The use of the word "private" should not be interpreted to mean that women could *only* deal with men in private, rather it should be understood that some admonitions were done in private if the offense was considered a private offense. On the distinction between public and private offenses see Emil Oberholzer, Jr., *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). Additionally, the terms public and private could also be used to denote congregational composition. According to Lechford in *Plain Dealing*, "publique" referred to "all the Church, (strangers) [visitors] too in Boston, not so in other places" (12).

context outside of the church, a woman admonishing a man might be seen to be an “act of power.” Within the bonds created by church membership, however, men and women were more than neighbors; they were “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ, according to Cotton. They were not only in “covenant” with God, but with each other. This covenant carried with it the responsibility of mutual care and watchfulness and allowed for a context within which women’s voices might be heard without usurping authority over men. In this context, the nature of the power that men and women possessed was not intrinsic to them as individuals but put upon them by God.²²

Until the creation of The Cambridge Platform (1648)—a document containing agreed-upon principles of Congregational church government—most Massachusetts-Bay congregations required both men and women such as Millicent Kingsbury to publicly relate either a conversion narrative and/or a confession of faith in order to join the church, although the occasional allowance was made to permit “fearfull” souls, such as Brother Hinsdell’s wife, to speak her “Relation” in private. The Cambridge Platform did not alter this requirement for public relation but added a gender-neutral provision that allowed but did not advocate private confession to the church elders and/or minister “in case any through excessive fear, or other infirmity, *be unable* to make their personal *relation* of their spiritual estate in publick.” In other words, for those men and women who desired church membership but could not give their conversion narrative and/or confession of

²² *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts*, 4. The Salem church covenant is typical of the covenants signed at the gathering of a new church and by new members upon their admittance. These covenants not only contained duties and responsibilities that subscribers agreed to, they also contained the promise of mutual care and respect between church members. The signers of the Salem covenant, for example, “promise to walk with our brethren and sisters in the Congregation with all watchfulness, and tendernis avoyding all jelousies, suspitions, backbytings, conjurings, provoakings, secrete riseings of spirit against them, but in all offences to follow the rule of the Lord Jesus, and to beare and forbear, give and forgive as he hath taught us” (4).

faith in public, an exception was made whereby they might give their narrative in private. Thus both men and women could come into church membership via this alternate provision if need be. Prior to the creation of the Cambridge Platform, however, no such official provision existed, and most women gave public confessions and were subject to the same process of public questioning by the elders and the congregation as were men.²³

Including Dedham, at least six Bay-area churches required both men and women to give public conversion narratives and confessions of faith during the first decades of settlement. At Boston First, according to John Winthrop, both men and women made a public or “open confession” at the founding of the church in 1630, although that would begin to change with the installation of John Cotton as minister in 1633. At Dorchester in the 1630s and 40s, women such as Dorcas the blackmore and Elizabeth Duncan joined the church via public confession “by profession of faith and Repentance and [by] taking hould of the Covent before the Congregation.” John Fiske, minister at the Wenham Congregational church from 1640 to 1655, also required public confessions from women as well as men. As Fisk argued, “the whole church is to judge of their meetness which cannot so well be if she speak not herself.” The confessions recorded by Thomas Shepard, minister at Cambridge from 1636 to 1649, indicate that Shepard, like Fiske, also required a public confession from both men and women for church membership. Shepard’s *Confessions* contains the recorded confessions of fifty-one of Shepard’s congregants—twenty-two by women, twenty-eight by men, and one unknown—and permit a rare look at the spiritual struggles and thought processes of common Puritan men and women as they worked through the process of salvation. And at the Salem

²³ Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960), 223; Dedham, Mass., *The Early Records*, 13-14, 6-7.

meetinghouse, Thomas Lechford observed in 1642 that “the women speake themselves, for the most part.” Lechford’s understanding is confirmed by the Salem church records which state that Salem had “publick profession after private examination...agreed upon by the Church of Salem in their first beginning.”²⁴

An exception to the practice of public confessions for women as practiced at Boston First, Dedham, Dorchester, Wenham, Cambridge, and Salem in the early decades of settlement can be found at two churches: Thomas Welde’s Roxbury church, where Welde was the pastor from 1632-1641, and at Woburn where, according to layman Edward Johnson, “women speak not publikely at all.” In defending New England church practices from English criticism, Welde wrote in 1644 that

in the Churches where we have lived many years, we have seene such a tender respect had to the weaker sex (who are usually more fearfull and bashfull) that we commit their trial to the Elders and some few others in private, who upon their testimony are admitted into the Church, without any more adoe.

²⁴ Winthrop, *Journal*, 96; *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1891), 2, 5; Fiske, *Notebook*, 4; Thomas Shepard, *Thomas Shepard’s Confessions*, ed. George Selement & Bruce C. Woolley (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1981). Shepard’s *Confessions* are an important yet underutilized source as they contain the voices of otherwise unknown and unremarkable Puritan men and women, even if they are filtered through the pen of the recorder. In the introduction to Shepard’s *Confessions*, Selement and Woolley point out that Shepard never explicitly states that the fifty-one confessions he recorded were given in public. Two of the confessions, however, suggest that this was the case. In his confession Henry Dunster states, “Dear brethren and sisters in Christ I account it no small mercy that the Lord hath called me to give an account to [you] of that faith and love I bear to Christ and His church and people” (156). The brevity of Mrs. Greene’s confession and the statement by Shepard that “Testimonies carried it” suggests that Green was indeed speaking in public, and that she became fearful and was unable to continue (118); Lechford, *Plain Dealing*, 7-8; Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Salem*, 107. On the day the Salem church was gathered, however, four different methods of assenting to the covenant were apparently accepted according to Nathaniel Morton, *New-Englands Memorial; Or, A Brief Relation of the Most Memorable and Remarkable Passages of the Providence of God, Manifested to the Planters of New-England in America; With Special Reference to the first Colony thereof, Called New-Plimouth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Printed by S.G. and M.J. for John Usher of Boston, 1669), 103-4. As Morton states, “some were admitted by expressing their Consent to that written Confession of Faith and Covenant; others did answer to questions about the Principles of Religion that were publickly propounded to them; some did present their Confession in Writing, which was read for them; and some that were able and willing did make their Confession in their own words and way” (103-4).

Welde's statement was a response to criticism from Englishman William Rathband who asked why it was "that everyone that is admitted is brought before the whole Church (though never so many) to make their Declarations in publicke" and why "we [the New England churches] should be so harsh in our dealing, as not to betrust the Elders and some private men with their examination." Rathband's question to Welde also implies that public confessions were initially expected of both men and women in most Bay churches even though that situation would later change. In sum, differences existed regarding the expectation of public confession for women in the first decades of settlement, differences which are indicative of the geographical variations that existed in individual churches throughout the Massachusetts Bay. Individual ministers and congregations at Dedham, Dorchester, etc. did things differently from the congregations at Roxbury and Woburn²⁵

All the Rest Are Women: Gender Imbalance in Church Membership

Millicent Kingsbury's story also hints at a gender imbalance in Congregational church membership in Massachusetts that would grow more pronounced as the century advanced: only four men were accepted into membership in the Dedham church on that spring day in April compared to six women. At Dedham, as at other congregations, the preponderance of women either existed from the very start or occurred within the first two decades of church establishment. At the Salem meetinghouse, for example, women

²⁵ Thomas, Welde, *An Answer to W. R., His Narration of the Opinions and Practises of the Churches Lately Erected in New-England: Vindicating those Godly and Orthodoxall Churches from More than an Hundred Imputations Fathered on them and their Church Way by the said W.R. in his Booke : Wherein is Plainely Proved ...* (London : Printed by Tho. Paine for H. Overton ..., 1644), 18-19; Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628-1651*, Franklin Jameson, ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons., 1910), 217.

comprised 52% of new members in the 1630s, the first decade after the gathering of the church. By the 1690s, women totaled 76% of new entrants. At Boston First women were in a slight minority during the church's founding decade. In the 1630s, for example, women equaled 47% of new members. By the 1690s, however, women totaled 75% of new entrants at Boston First. At both Boston Second and Boston Third the percentage of women as new members declined slightly in the later decades of the seventeenth century; but despite this decline, women still dominated church rolls. At Boston Second during the first two decades after the church was gathered, for example, 72% of new members were women. During the 1690s women represented 68% of all new members at Boston Second. During the 1670s at Boston Third, the first decade of the church's existence, women totaled 79% of all new members. By the 1690s women were 64% of new entrants. At Charlestown, women's membership increased from 56% of the total in the 1630s to 70% in the 1690s. The trend continued with the gathering of the Brattle Street congregation where between 1699 and 1725 women comprised 59% of all new members.²⁶

Nor was the predominance of female church members confined to Anglo women. Women of African ancestry also outnumbered their male counterparts. At Boston First church between 1695 and 1710, fourteen enslaved and free Negroes joined as full members: ten women and four men. At Boston Third, or Old South church, between 1696 and 1756 thirteen enslaved and free Negro women joined as compared with six

²⁶ For statistics on church membership at Salem, Boston First, Charlestown, Dedham, Boston Third, and Charlestown see Gerald F. Moran, "Sisters' in Christ: Women and the Church in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Women in American Religion*, 48-49; For statistics on church membership in the Brattle Street church see The Church in Brattle Square (Boston, Mass.), *The Manifesto Church, Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, with Lists of Communicants, Baptisms, Marriages, and Funerals, 1699-1871* (Boston: The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, 1902), 95-107.

men. At Boston's Brattle Street church between 1721 and 1747 the gendered split was almost equal: ten men joined as compared with eleven women. Although small, these numbers reveal that the status of full church member was available, irrespective of race. No other corollary existed in civil society for women or men of African ancestry.²⁷

It seems unlikely that the significant increase in female membership can be attributed to the innovation of the halfway covenant of the mid-seventeenth century. Under the halfway covenant, individuals were allowed to apply for an abbreviated form of church membership as long as they had been baptized as infants or children. As halfway members they were still subject to church discipline, as were full members, but they were prohibited from taking the Lord's Supper and from voting in church affairs. Halfway members were not required to give a public confession of saving grace. Most significantly, by "owning" the covenant as halfway members, they were then entitled to have their own children baptized, thus increasing the likelihood that they or their offspring would eventually experience conversion and seek full church membership.²⁸

Membership records from Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, and Boston Third churches indicate that the halfway covenant memberships, rather than being responsible for an increase in female membership, tended to parallel preexisting gendered balances established in the first decades of the church through traditional conversion, even in the church whose *raison d'être* was the covenant: Boston Third. In the Third Church of

²⁷ Pierce, *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:94 – 103; *The Manifesto Church: Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, With Lists of Communicants, Baptisms, Marriages, and Funerals, 1699-1872* (Boston: Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, 1902); Hamilton Hill, ed., *1669-1882 An Historical Catalogue of the Old South (Third Church), Boston* (Boston: Printed for Private Distribution, 1833).

²⁸ Robert G. Pope, *The Halfway Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 7. According to Pope, the term halfway covenant was coined in the mid-eighteenth century, 8*n*.

Boston, for example, between 1669 and 1689, 63% of new members admitted owning the covenant were women, while 66 % of those admitted via the traditional regenerative experience of conversion were women. At Roxbury, 59% of those who joined between 1660 and 1689 as full church members were women, while 63 % of those who joined by way of the halfway covenant were women. At Charlestown, 67% of those who joined between 1669 and 1689 via a regenerative experience were women, while 71% of those who joined as halfway members were women. While at Dorchester, 55% of those who joined between 1660 and 1689 via a regenerative experience were women, while only 43 % of those who joined as halfway members were women. Thus at Dorchester, women sought full church membership more often than halfway status. In short, while the halfway covenant brought more men and women into the church, especially toward the end of the century, it did so at roughly the same gendered ratio as traditional admissions, thus reinforcing the view that women sought church affiliation in numbers equal to or greater than men, as they had from the beginning of Puritan settlement. Significantly, of the women at Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, and Boston Third who first entered the church through the halfway covenant, more than half eventually went on to experience conversion and full church membership, while only four in ten men did likewise, demonstrating the intrinsic value of full church membership to women in the early decades of settlement.²⁹

²⁹ See Pope, *The Halfway Covenant*, 279-86, for statistics on church membership at Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, and Boston Third.

An Ambivalent Culture: Debates about Women in the Church

Despite the abundance of female faces that filled the pews of the Bay-area's Congregational churches, Puritan society was an ambivalent one for women. Within the first decades of settlement debates arose about the appropriateness of public confessions for women and about whether or not women should sing in the meetinghouse, speak at fellowship meetings or wear veils. Concerns about women's place were brought into sharp focus by the spectacle of Anne Hutchinson's trial, excommunication, and banishment to Rhode Island in 1638 as a "woman not fit for our society." Yet one should not read Hutchinson's banishment as the beginning of questions about women's place since debates about particular issues concerning women existed almost from the inception of the Massachusetts Bay settlement.³⁰

One of the first indications of the unsettled nature of women's place within the church occurred just three years after the founding of Boston First church. In 1633 John Cotton, who had recently arrived from England, was asked to serve as pastor of the church along with John Wilson. Upon joining Boston First, Cotton made his own confession of faith in public and then requested that his wife "might not be put to make open confession" which he argued was "against the apostle's rule, and not fit for women's modesty." The church elders then asked Mrs. Cotton if she "did consent in the confession of faith made by her husband, and if she did desire to be admitted."

According to John Winthrop, who recorded the event in his journal, "she answered

³⁰ On the idea of cultural ambivalence see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred a. Knops, 1989) 3-4; David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy: 1636-1638, A Documentary History*, ed. with introduction and notes by David D. Hall (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 348; On Anne Hutchinson see Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850 The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-45.

affirmatively.” There is no evidence, however, that she actually gave her confession in private, or that she desired private confession, only that the elders asked her if she consented to the confession made by her husband. Both John and Sara Cotton were then admitted into membership. That Cotton specifically requested that his wife not be made to give “open confession” suggests that public confession was the norm for women, and that women, like men, had been giving their confessions of faith in public since the founding of Boston First in July of 1630.³¹

The following year, on March 7, 1634, while Cotton was giving a “Thursday” lecture in Boston, a question arose in the audience about whether or not women should wear veils. In Salem, for example, veils were worn “abundantly.” According to historian Joseph Felt, Cotton was of the opinion that where veils were a “sign of submission, they might be properly disused.” Thus while Cotton was opposed to public confessions of faith for women, he apparently found no basis in scripture that required women to wear veils. Deputy Governor Endicott and the Reverend Roger Williams of Salem, who were in the audience that day, disagreed with Cotton, and a three way public debate ensued. For his part, Deputy Governor Endicott argued for the wearing of veils basing his opinion on the teachings of St. Paul. Williams sided with his parishioner, Endicott. Governor Winthrop subsequently “perceiving it [the debate] to grow to some earnestness, interposed, and so it brake off” temporarily.³²

³¹ Winthrop, *Journal*, 96. Cotton’s statement that “open confession” for his wife was “against the apostle’s rule” was a reference to I Tim. 2:11 and I Cor. 14:34 which state that “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission” and “should remain silent in the churches.”

³² On Thursday lectures see Annie Haven Thwing, *Inhabitants and Estates of the Town of Boston, 1630-1800 and The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston, 1630-1822* (Boston, Mass.: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2001), 15. In Boston, Thursday lectures focused on doctrinal teachings and supplemented the Sabbath sermon’s more evangelical emphasis. People regularly traveled from town to town to hear other ministers’ lectures, the trip serving as a form of “recreation” throughout the seventeenth

Later that year, Cotton traveled to Salem to preach for the Reverend Samuel Skelton at Salem First. Cotton took veils as his topic for the morning sermon and as Felt states, “endeavored to prove that this was a custom not to be tolerated.” The consequence of Cotton’s sermon, according to Felt, was that “the ladies became converts to his [Cotton’s] faith in this particular, and, for a long time, left off an article of dress which indicated too great a degree of submission to the ‘lords of creation.’”³³ As this episode illustrates, questions about women’s speech, silence, and submission were intertwined. While Cotton objected to the custom of wearing veils, which required too much submission from women, he supported women’s submission through silence with respect to public confessions, thus illustrating the ambivalence of the era.

Several years after the veil controversy, questions also arose about women’s speech during weekly “private meetings” where eight or ten families would gather together in homes “for their mutual edification.” These private meetings were an extension of Sabbath services, and participants would “pray, and Sing, and repeat Sermons, and confer together about the things of God.” Edification of believers was not limited to ministers but was also the task of laymen and women and found its expression at these weekly meetings. As Thomas Shepard stated, “tis not only left in the hands of the Officers, but of the whole Church, and each Member in the Church; according to his

century, according to Thwing (Thwing, 15). See also Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 99; Joseph Barlow Felt, *The Annals of Salem: From Its First Settlement* (Salem: W. & S. B. Ives, 1827), 64. According to Felt, Deputy Governor Endicott argued for the wearing of veils as based on “the general argument of St. Paul,” a likely reference to I Cor. 11: 3-16 NIV; Winthrop, *Journal*, 111.

³³ Felt, *Annals*, 1:64. Felt places the phrase “lords of creation” in quotation marks but does not cite the source. Based on the context of the paragraph, in which Felt is describing John Cotton’s sermon, Felt implies that the term was Cotton’s, even though it seems unlikely that Cotton would use a phrase such as this.

place and ability, to edifie the whole.” The Saints had a duty “to exercise in Christian communion for men and women.” Yet at these meeting, as during worship services, women’s role needed clarification. In his 1641 letter to John Cotton, for example, Peter Bulkeley asked whether when families meet “together for their mutual edification by answering sundry questions propounded by some one” whether or not after the men have “spoken and finished” it was lawful for “one of the women to propound a question [in the] presence of the men?” Cotton answered in the negative stating that women should not “propound and argue cases before a great company of men.”³⁴

While women should remain silent in mixed company, according to Cotton, no such restrictions applied when women met together with other women for spiritual edification. In September of 1637, for example, in the midst of the Antinomian controversy involving Anne Hutchinson, Winthrop recorded in his diary that a group of church elders met in Boston and decreed:

that they [women] might some few gather together to pray and edify one another, yet such an assemblage as was then in practice in Boston, where sixty or more did meet every week, and one woman (in a prophetic way by resolving questions of doctrine and expounding scripture) took upon her the whole exercise, was agreed to be discreditable and without rule.³⁵

Thus it was agreed that women might continue to gather together for prayer and edification; however, the form—only women and fewer of them—and the function—for prayer and edification only, not for the resolution of doctrinal issues—were to be distinctly different from the kind of meetings conducted by Mistress Anne Hutchinson.

³⁴ Cotton Mather, *The Life and Death of the Renown'd Mr. John Eliot, Who Was the First Preacher of the Gospel to the Indians in America : With an Account of the Wonderful Success Which the Gospel Has Had Amongst the Heathen in that Part of the World, and of the Many Strange Customes of the Pagan Indians in New-England* (London : Printed for John Dunton, 1691), 23; Shepard, *Subjection to Christ*, 48; Bulkeley, “Letter from Peter Bulkeley to John Cotton 1641.”

³⁵ Winthrop, *Journal*, 234.

Implicit within the decree is the idea that women were not only the participants in these meetings but also the leaders. Perhaps the women themselves brought the issue to the elders' attentions. In any event, Winthrop records that the matter was "debated and resolved," and thus the decree constitutes an acknowledgement of women's right to continue to meet together, apart from the guidance and authority of men.³⁶

Even though the elders of Boston First agreed in 1637 that women should continue to meet in same-sex groups for their mutual edification, debates about women's place within the Congregational community continued into the second decade of settlement. In 1644, fourteen years after John Cotton asked that his wife not be put to open confession, John Fiske, minister at the Wenham church, recorded in his notebook that some "agitation...about women making their relations in public" had begun to surface. As Fiske stated, the "agitation" was "occasioned from the practice of some churches to the contrary where the officers (as was said) and four or five of the members appointed to the purpose were to hear the same and testify thereof to the church, the same being taken down in writing by the officers from her mouth and related to the church." In other words, Fiske reports that in several churches women had begun giving their testimony before a limited audience composed of church officers and four or five other members. The woman's testimony, in turn, would be recorded and read to the congregation by one of the elders. Fiske does not name the other churches where women were giving their confessions in private, but it is likely that because John Cotton requested private confession for his wife, private confession for women had become

³⁶ Winthrop, *Journal*, 234.

common practice at Cotton's Boston First church by 1644 and that practices at Boston First, in turn, began influencing surrounding congregations.³⁷

When the debate at Fiske's Wenham church arose, at least a decade had passed since John Cotton requested that his wife not be put to open confession at Boston First: enough time for innovation to become policy. Although the *Records of the First Church in Boston* are silent about whether or not private confession became the model for all women who wished to join the Boston church, Thomas Lechford, a resident of the Bay Colony from 1637 to 1641, observed that women in Boston usually gave their confessions in private. As Lechford states, "Thereupon the party, if it be a man, speaketh himselfe, but if it be a woman, her confession made before the Elders, in private, is most usually (in Boston Church) read by the Pastor." Based on Lechford's observation, the debate at Fiske's church about women's confessions could very well have been occasioned by the practices at Boston First.³⁸

Unlike John Cotton at Boston First, however, John Fiske argued that women should continue to "make their relations personally in public." How else, reasoned Fiske, could the whole church judge her fitness for membership if "she speak not herself." At a church meeting on November 1, 1644, for example, five women were "called forth" to give their "relation" including Fiske's wife, Anne. Fiske believed that while I Cor. 14: 34-35 instructed women to remain silent in church, the prohibition on speaking applied only to women who were speaking by way of teaching prophecy since "such a speaking

³⁷ Fiske, *Notebook*, 4.

³⁸ Lechford, *Plain Dealing*, 7-8. Since Boston First was the only Congregational church in Boston in 1642 when Lechford published *Plain Dealing*, he was speaking about Boston First church. Boston Second was not gathered until 1650.

argues power,” according to Fiske. Fiske was also in favor of allowing women to ask questions in church since “this kind of speaking is by submission where others are to judge etc. and to the glory of God, as [was the case with] Deborah, Mary, Elizabeth, Anne,” all biblical women of merit. In this context, according to Fiske, permitting women to ask questions, even though it “imparts power also,” did not impart excessive power to the sisters in Christ because others were able to judge the speaker. In sum, Fiske distinguished between women teaching prophecy, to which he was opposed, and women giving public confessions and asking questions in church, with which he was in agreement. For Fiske, the distinction among various kinds of speech lay in whether or not women’s speech was considered submissive; speech could be both submissive, because it was being judged by others and was glorifying to God, and powerful at the same time. Thus Fiske interprets scripture in such a way that does not strip women of all reference to authority but makes space for the recognition of female power in its proper context within the larger hierarchical church structure.³⁹

John Fiske remained in the pulpit at Wenham for the next ten years, and women such as Goodwife Shibly continued to be “received into covenant having made her relations.” In November of 1655, however, Fiske accepted an offer to pastor a new church at Chelmsford. Growth had eluded the town of Wenham, and along with the congregation, Fiske’s salary at Wenham had remained small. Chelmsford not only

³⁹ Fiske, *Notebook*, 4, 8. Sisters Fiske, Read, Batchelor, and Moulton gave their relations in public, were questioned, as was common practice, and then accepted into membership. Sister Geere gave a portion of her relation in private, then appeared in public where “after some objections [were] made, was accepted” (10); With respect to the women who Fiske mentions, Mary was the mother of Jesus while Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. Deborah, according to Judges 4 and 5, was a prophetess, a judge, a warrior, and a spiritual leader. According to Luke 2:36-38, Anne was a prophetess, a widow who “worshipped night and day at the temple, fasting and praying.” When Mary and Joseph present the infant Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, she approached them giving “thanks to God” and speaking “about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

offered Fiske a higher salary, they also offered to build him a house and give him 60 acres of land. A majority of the Wenham congregation, seven men and their families, followed Fiske to Chelmsford and joined with men and women from Woburn, Concord, and Cambridge in forming the new congregation. Just eight months after gathering the new Chelmsford church, however, Fiske abruptly records in his *Notebook* that “This day agreed by the church that the officer should repeat and declare the relation of the women of the church.” Henceforth the women who joined the Chelmsford congregation would give their relation in private while the men, presumably, continued to give it in public.⁴⁰

Fiske’s *Notebook* offers no explanation for the change in policy between Wenham and Chelmsford, nor does Fiske record if the congregation debated the issue. Given his previous insistence on public relations for both men and women while at Wenham, the most likely explanation is that Fiske eventually bowed to the desires of an increasingly vocal laity in agreeing to such a fundamental change in church admissions policy. Perhaps the congregation, like John Cotton at Boston First church, interpreted scripture in such a way that required women to give their conversion narrative and confession of faith in private, rather than before the entire congregation. The move from Wenham to Chelmsford meant that the composition of Fiske’s congregation had changed. By 1655 Fiske’s church included new members from the communities of Woburn, Concord, and Cambridge who also brought with them new ideas on church admissions.

Fiske’s *Notebook* entry makes sense in light of what historians agree was an “erosion of ministerial authority in local churches” that began with the second generation of settlement. As laymen became increasingly confident in their role within church

⁴⁰ Fiske, *Notebook*, 83, 106, xxviii.

government, as in administering discipline and voting on new admissions, for example, and as they became ever more familiar with Congregational policies as spelled out in the Cambridge Platform, their confidence in their role within the church governing structure grew accordingly. As one historian has stated, the ministers and laity existed in an “uneasy balance” of power from the mid-century forward. Fiske’s loss of authority and leadership on the matter of public confessions for both men and women makes sense in the context of this power struggle. It is also possible that Fiske was influenced by and following in the footsteps of Boston’s John Cotton and became convinced that private relations for women more closely aligned with scriptural teachings. Either way, the change in the way that women gave their conversion narrative represented a sea change for Fiske and for those Wenham members who followed Fiske to Chelmsford.⁴¹

In contrast to the congregation at Chelmsford, Increase Mather, minister at Boston Second from 1684 to 1723, advocated public narratives for both men and women even as he made allowance for private relations when necessary. In 1668, twenty years after the adoption of the Cambridge Platform, Mather was speaking to the congregation at Cambridge shortly after the death of its minister, Jonathan Mitchell. Mather had in his possession Mitchell’s handwritten manuscript containing Mitchell’s views on church membership requirements, which Mather agreed with. In his sermon to the Cambridge congregation Mather addressed Mitchell’s concern that some churches had been too

⁴¹ Cooper, Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 120; Hall in *The Faithful Shepherd* has observed that second generation ministers seemed to suffer from a “diminished charisma” compared to their first-generation predecessors (181). Although Fiske was technically a first-generation minister, he clearly suffered from a loss of authority within his congregation, not only pertaining to the issue of public confessions for women, but with respect to other debates as well. See Cooper Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 120-23. On the influence of John Cotton in helping to establishing Congregational orthodoxy see Cooper, Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 21-22. I agree with Cooper’s statement that Cotton was “particularly influential in bringing the churches together under the New England Way” (21).

severe by requiring an “oral declaration of *Faith and Repentance* before the *Whole Congregation*.” Mather, echoing Mitchell, recognized that “many an Humble Pious Soul has not been Gifted with such *Confidence*” to make an “oral declaration of *Faith and Repentance* before the *Whole Congregation*.” Mather also acknowledged that whether one declares their experiences “*Orally*, or in Writing, are *Prudentials*, which our Lord has left unto Churches to Determine.” Still echoing Mitchell’s beliefs, Mather went on to remind the congregation of the power of an oral narrative to edify believers and nonbelievers alike when he stated, “Have not *some* been *Converted* by hearing *others* give an Account of their Conversion! How *many* have been Comforted, and how many edified thereby!” Furthermore, the “whole church” is to judge whether or not to admit a potential member which is difficult to do without a public statement, according to Mather. In sum, Mather believed that individual churches should decide the form that the confession should take, yet he also elevated the importance of an oral confession for everyone who desired church membership but made allowance for private statements for those who lacked confidence, be they male or female.⁴² As with the Cambridge Platform, Mather’s language is gender neutral. Both men and women were permitted to make a private statement when necessary even though a public narrative was the better way because of the way that it might influence others for salvation. Women, as well as men,

⁴² Cotton Mather, *Ecclesiastes: the Life of the Reverend & Excellent Jonathan Mitchell, a Pastor of the Church, and a Glory of the College in Cambridge, New England* (Massachusetts: Printed by B. Green and J. Allen ..., 1697), 6, 8, 16-17. Since Thomas Shepard hand-picked Jonathan Mitchell to be his successor at the Cambridge church, and since Mitchell believed that those who could give a public confession of faith and repentance should do so, it seems likely that Shepard also required a public confession from both men and women but made allowance for those such as Mrs. Greene who became excessively fearful. It seems unlikely that Shepard would have picked someone to succeed him who did not share his views.

might play a role in the edification of nonbelievers through the giving of public testimony.

In keeping with Mather's assertion that it was the prerogative of individual churches to determine whether new members declared their experiences "*Orally, or in Writing,*" by the third decade of settlement in the Bay, some congregations were beginning to alter their position on public confessions for both men and women. At Boston First, as previously noted, John Cotton had introduced the innovation of private confessions for women in 1633 by requesting that his wife not be put to open confession. By 1679 the church also began offering men the option of private admission but at the discretion of the elders. As stated in the First church records, "A vote was passed wherein Liberty was granted the Elders in Case of admission of Men, to doe it by writing or speaking as the Elders thinke fitt." It can be assumed that most men still gave their confessions in public at Boston First. At Dorchester, both women and men gave public confessions in the 1630s, but by 1665, the church was permitting private confessions for both sexes. As recorded in the Dorchester church records, the congregation was asked if it "would be willing that men as well as women should be received into the Church by their private relation being taken in writing and publicly read before the Church." Charlestown waited until 1684, five years after Boston First made men's private relations optional, before Charlestown made men's private relations mandatory. The actions of the Charlestown congregation, which "voted and concurred" that "*mens relations*" would be "for the future *read*" (emphasis in the original), indicates that men's relations had been public up to this point. Furthermore, the vote strongly suggests that women's relations

were already being read by the elders after having been given in private rather than spoken publicly.⁴³

Later in the century, Boston Third or Old South church made changes in its admissions procedures that paralleled those at Dorchester—where private confessions were optional—and undoubtedly affected men and women alike. Like the language of the Cambridge Platform, the language used by Old South to describe these changes was gender neutral. In 1678, just prior to the ordination of its new minister, Samuel Willard, the church agreed that

at the discretion of the Eldership; in case any that desire fellowship with the Church, through scruple of Conscience shall be unwilling to consent that his Relation shall be read before the Church . . . that the relation of such person or persons given to the Elders, and by them attested to the church, shall be received as if it had been made before the Church, provided that in other cases our common and constant practice shall be attended.

The measure was “Consented to by the Church.”⁴⁴ In other words, even the thought of having their private relation read to the entire church was too intimidating for some to

⁴³ Richard D. Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* (Boston: The Society, 1961), 1: 75; Kamensky, in *Governing the Tongue*, argues that “by the 1640s, most New England congregations had decided that even women’s conversion narratives were best related in private” (94). Kamensky only provides evidence from two churches, Woburn and Boston First, however, to support her view for the whole of New England. I would argue that, at least in Massachusetts, the trend towards silencing women’s narrative voices was not a *fait accompli* by 1640 and varied from congregation to congregation. The records simply do not exist to substantiate a definitive date to mark a turn towards private confessions for *all* women, only the trend toward private confession by 1700 is verifiable; Without qualifying for gender, Stephen Foster in *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 239, also dates the turn toward written conversion narratives to the later decades of the seventeenth century; Westerkamp, in *Women and Religion*, 37-8, makes a similar claim as Kamensky but bases it on the evidence at just one church: Thomas Welde’s Woburn church where women gave private confessions from the inception of the church. While the women at Boston First and Woburn were likely giving their confessions in private by 1640, in 1640 women still gave public confessions at Wenham under John Fiske, at Salem, as per Thomas Lechford, at Dedham, under John Allin, and at Cambridge under Thomas Shepherd; Lechford, *Plaine Dealing*, 7-8; *Records of the First Church at Dorchester*, 63; *Records of the First Church in Charlestown 1632-1789*, J. F. Hunnewell, ed. (Boston, 1880), ix.

⁴⁴ Hamilton Andrews Hill, *History of the Old South Church Boston, 1669-1884* (Virginia: Houghton, Mifflin and company, 1889), 1:229.

bear. The church congregation, as an autonomous body, therefore modified existing procedure. Given the language of the measure, it appears that as of 1678, private confession, followed by public reading of the confession had become the norm for both men and women. The 1678 measure simply added yet another layer of privacy for those who were unwilling or unable to have their confession read before the whole church. Even after this concession was approved the statement makes it clear that it was on a case by case basis.

Not all churches were willing to make the types of concessions offered at Boston First, Boston Third, Dorchester, and Charlestown, however. Since John Allin insisted on public confessions for all applicants at Dedham's gathering in 1638, it is reasonable to assume in the absence of evidence to the contrary that women continued to give public confessions throughout Allin's tenure, which lasted until 1671. Likewise, at Cambridge, where Thomas Shepard was pastor, women likely gave their confessions in public at least until his death in 1649, possibly even until 1697 when they became optional for both men and women under the ministry of William Brattle. At Beverly First church—a second generation church founded in 1667 after the adoption of the halfway covenant and the Cambridge Platform—women gave public confessions. Mrs. Thorndick, for example, joined Beverly First in 1687 by “making profession publickly of her faith and repentance.” Even those who joined as halfway members at Beverly were required to “publickly lay hold of the covenant” after being examined privately. Beverly continued the practice of public confessions for women into the eighteenth century as, for example, with Deborah Knowlton who in 1717 “made a publick profession of faith and repentance [and] was baptized being received into full communion.” As late as 1727, women were

still giving public confessions of faith at Beverly. In short, the decision to either require men and women to give their confession in public or have it read to the congregation after giving it in private varied from congregation to congregation as befits a congregational system. Further accommodation existed for those individuals who wanted their private confession to remain private, as at Old South where permission could be granted by the elders.⁴⁵

The increased absence of men and women's public speaking voices in some churches needs to be seen within the context of the autonomy of the individual meetinghouse, the declining overall rate of church membership, and the larger conversation among ministers and their congregations about requirements for church membership rather than as an organized effort to silence women's voices. As the seventeenth century advanced, the rate of overall conversions had declined precipitously prompting Jonathan Mitchel, minister at Cambridge from 1650 to 1668, to remark that "the bigger half of the people in this Country will in a little Time be unbaptized." The halfway covenant represented one avenue by which more men and women might eventually come to into full church membership, but Congregational leaders also sought to increase church membership by easing the requirement for public confession. As the Reverend Cotton Mather put it, the requirement had become a deterrent to some and served "as a scarecrow to keep men out of the temple." Jonathan Fairebanke, for example, who finally joined the Dedham congregation in 1646, had apparently held off joining the church because of "some scruples about publike profession of faith and the

⁴⁵ William P. Upham, ed., *Records of the First Church in Beverly, Massachusetts, 1667-1772* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1905), 26, 11, 53.

covenant.” Fairebanke eventually summoned the courage to make a “declaration of his faith and conversion “to the “whole church” but only after other members had “divers loving conferences with him.” At Plymouth one Sabbath afternoon in 1688, the elders stayed after the worship service was over to hear the testimony of “divers men who offered themselves to church fellowship [but] were very bashfull & of low voices, & therefore not able to speake in publick to the edification of the congregation.” Thereafter the elders decided that “any man not capable thereof” might give his relation in private. Admission to membership, however, would still be “done before all in publick ... for the edification of others.” Thus some, though not all, congregations began to alter the requirement for public confession which might serve as a deterrent. Yet despite these accommodations, Mather endorsed the idea that those “persons [who] are of greater Abilities...should make their Relations and Confessions personally with their own mouth...A personal and publick Confession, and declaring of God’s manner of working upon the Soul, is both lawful, expedient, and useful.” In keeping with Mather’s statement, women in places such as Boston Second, Beverly, and Dedham continued to give their confessions in public despite accommodations being made for both men and women elsewhere.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ On changes to the requirements for full membership see Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*, 151-53; Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*, 199-205; Jonathan Mitchel to Increase Mather, *First Principles of New-England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Printed by Samuel Green, 1675), 5; Hall in *The Faithful Shepherd*, suggests that the preponderance of women as church members may be explained by men’s reluctance to give a public confession. Hall states that “Men found the experience more terrifying (or perhaps more humiliating) than women” (205); Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England, From its First Planting in the Year 162 Unto the Year of Our Lord* (London, 1702), 5:43; Dedham, Mass., *The Early Records*, 29; Plymouth, Mass. First Church, *Plymouth Church Records, 1620-1859* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 262-63.

The Debate Over Singing: An Introduction

Debate over the extent to which women's speaking voices should or should not be heard in the church was not the only debate concerning women's vocalizations to occur in the Bay colony. Thirteen years after his disagreement with Deputy Governor Endicott and Williams over whether or not women should wear veils, John Cotton again found himself addressing another debate that illustrates the ambiguity of church membership for women. In his 1647 pamphlet, *Singing of Psalmes A Gospel-Ordinance*, Cotton addressed what had become a spiritual battle within Massachusetts's Congregational churches over not only *how* singing was to be conducted but also over the question of *who* should sing during the worship service. Should only one individual sing? Should men alone sing? Should everyone sing: men and women? Cotton elevates the disagreement to the level of spiritual warfare when he states that "Satan hath mightily bestirred himself to breed a discord in the hearts of some." According to Cotton, some within the Congregational church concluded that "if there must be a singing, one alone must sing, not all, (or if all) the Men only, and not the Women," a position which Cotton rejected.⁴⁷

In Cotton's treatise he touched on four controversial "particulars" regarding the issue of singing in church including "the Duty it self"—should singing be part of the worship service; "the Matter to be Sung"—what kind of music should be sung; "the Singers"—who should sing: men, women, or both; and "the manner of Singing"—how should singing be conducted. As in all other areas of life, the Bible served as the ultimate

⁴⁷ John Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes A Gospel-Ordinance Or A Treatise, Wherein Are Handled these Particulars: 1. Touching the Duty itself. 2. Touching the Matter to be Sung. 3. Touching the Singers. 4. Touching the manner of Singing* By John Cotton, Teacher of the Church at Boston in New-England [Early English Books Online] (London: Printed for J. R. ...and H. A. ..., 1650), 42.

authority and guide for Cotton, and his argument in favor of female singers draws heavily on both biblical history and on his interpretation of I Timothy 2: 11, 12 and I Corinthians 14:35. In chapter eight of his treatise, for example, Cotton compares those Congregationalists who would prohibit women from singing to Egypt's Pharaoh "who though he was at first utterly unwilling that any of them [the Israelites] should go to sacrifice to the Lord in the Wilderness, yet Being at length convinced that they must goe, then he was content the men should goe, but not the Women." The harsh comparison made by Cotton between the Egyptian ruler who prohibited women from attending the sacrifice and the Congregationalists who were opposed to women singing would not have been lost on Cotton's readers. Cotton's audience would have been familiar with the biblical story of Exodus in which God smote Pharaoh with a series of plagues for his hardness of heart. For a people such as the Congregationalists whose founding vision was, in the words of John Winthrop, the creation of a "city upon a hill" that would honor and glorify God, the comparison with the hard-hearted Pharaoh was pointed.⁴⁸

Cotton next teases apart the "scope and context" within which women's voices may be heard in church. Drawing upon I Timothy and I Corinthians, Cotton states that "a woman is not permitted to speake in the Church...by way of Teaching" or "by way of propounding [asking] Questions." "Nevertheless...it is cleare a woman is allowed to speake in the Church...when shee is to give account of her offence...[and] in a way of singing forth the Praises of the Lord, together with the rest of the Congregation." In other words, women, according to Cotton, could not teach or ask questions in the meetinghouse

⁴⁸ Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, 42. In Exodus 7-14 God smote Pharaoh with a series of plagues that included blood, frogs, gnats, flies, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death. Pharaoh and his entire army were finally drowned in the Red Sea as they chased the fleeing Israelites; Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *Winthrop Papers*, 2:282-95.

but could speak in their own defense if charged with an offense. In contrast to Cotton, John Fiske argued that women could ask questions. Fiske may have been alone among Massachusetts's ministers, however, in holding this view, especially after Anne Hutchinson's banishment.⁴⁹

As based on his treatise, Cotton argues that women should also raise their voices in song. In the Old Testament, according to Cotton, Moses permitted "Miriam and the women that went out after her to sing forth the praises of the Lord, as well as the men, and to answer the men in their Song of thanksgiving." Cotton also makes it clear that, in addition to singing the psalms of David, there was no prohibition against singing additional "Spiritual Songs recorded in Scripture" whether they were the songs of men such as Moses, Solomon, Hezekiah, Habacuck, and Zachary or the songs of women such as "Hannah and Deborah, Mary and Elizabeth, and the like."⁵⁰ The Old Testament *Song of Deborah*, for example, appears in Judges 5:1-31 and celebrates the victory of Israel over the Canaanites. Thus Cotton reaffirms the spiritual equality of women and men with respect to psalm singing during the ordinance of public worship at the same time that he reminds his readers of women's duty to remain silent and submissive in other aspects of the church service.

Given the spiritual dimensions of the debate over singing, Cotton undoubtedly hoped that his 1647 pamphlet would be the last word on the subject. It would not be. By 1720 the controversy over whether or not women should sing had erupted again, this time more contentious than before. A flurry of ministerial essays, sermons, and instructional

⁴⁹ Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes* 42-43.

⁵⁰ Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes* 42-43.

books written in the early- eighteenth century indicates that women's singing voices in many congregations had gone quiet as an unintended consequence of the adoption of the *Bay Psalm Book*, as will be argued in chapter six. Equally contentious in 1720 was the move within Congregationalism to return to a method of singing known as "regular singing," the singing style favored by the first settlers, as opposed to the practice of "lining-out" which had taken hold over the course of the seventeenth century. The debates over "regular singing" versus "lining out" divided and congregations.⁵¹ Like the debate over whether or not women should sing, the debate over whether to sing in the "regular way" or by "lining-out" also contained implicit messages about the place of women within the Congregational church.

Conclusion

The Puritan men and women who took part in what became known as the Great Migration to the Massachusetts Bay beginning in 1630 brought with them ideas about the kind of Bible commonwealth that they wanted to create. Based on principles of *sola scriptura*, free consent, lay participation, and limited ministerial authority the immigrants set to work establishing communities in which the meetinghouse was the center of the town, figuratively and sometimes literally. In the early years of settlement the requisite test for church membership was the ability to provide public evidence of one's salvation, of God's work of Grace in one's soul. Yet the congregational system of church

⁵¹ In brief, "regular singing" meant singing from a psalm book containing printed words and musical notes, while "lining-out" meant that the congregation followed the lead of the Deacon who established the pitch for each song and then read each line of a song out loud whereupon it was repeated by the group; The *Bay Psalm Book* was a song book used in New England Congregational church services beginning in the mid-seventeenth century.

government established by the Puritans was one that had to be worked out in practice within each particular meetinghouse. That churches differed in their expectation of public confessions for women should not come as a surprise given the autonomous nature of each meetinghouse. While men such as John Cotton asked that his wife not be put to “open confession,” Anne Fiske, the wife of the Reverend John Fiske at Wenham, willingly came “forth to declare what God had done for her salvation in bringing her to Christ” and was “received into covenant in the presence of the congregation.” Based on his understanding of scripture, Cotton was likely the first to suggest that women should give their confessions in private. Other congregations soon followed suit. Yet over time, congregations began offering the option of private confessions to both men and women out of concern that public confessions were keeping otherwise acceptable souls from membership. The trend toward the absence of both men and women’s voices needs to be seen in light of these concerns.⁵²

We do not know how women felt about the move toward private confessions of faith in those congregations that adopted them. We do not know if they welcomed the change or not. Nor do we know how they felt about those individuals who asserted that women should not sing in the meetinghouse as illustrated by John Cotton in his *Singing of Psalms*. If women in the seventeenth century took the time to write about such issues, their diaries are no longer extant. We can, however, track women’s behavior through extant church membership records, and what we know for sure is that despite the ambiguous nature of Puritan religious culture for women, despite the continuing questions about whether or not women should wear veils, whether or not they should sing

⁵² Fiske, *Notebook*, 6, 9.

in church, whether or not they should give their confessions of faith in public, and under what circumstances they should speak in the meetinghouse and at private gatherings, women continued to join the Congregational church throughout the seventeenth century in numbers that exceeded their male brethren. Women continued to claim “public distinction” as church members and to build reputations for themselves as wise and virtuous women.⁵³ They continued to enjoy a demonstrable power of influence and to reap tangible benefits through their church affiliation. The basis of women’s influence within the church and the practical mechanisms by which these public distinctions, benefits, and influences manifested themselves will be the subject of the next chapter.

⁵³ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 216. Historians have argued that church membership offered “one of the few public distinctions available to women,” yet few historians have considered the practical mechanisms by which these public distinctions manifested themselves (Ulrich 216).

Chapter Two

Women's Spiritual Power: Its Basis and Manifestation

Joining the Congregational church in seventeenth-century Massachusetts meant covenanting with other believers. This covenant was both a physical document to which believers ascribed their consent when joining the church, and a relationship whereby individuals agreed to voluntarily unite themselves with Christ and each other as a “visible church.” The Cambridge Platform—a document containing agreed-upon principles of Congregational church government— likens this visible church to the human body where the “Hands, Eyes, Feet, and other members must be united, or else, remaining separate are not a body.” To properly constitute a church, believers must be “*Orderly knit together.*” The analogy of knitting believers together conveys the idea that within the church, individual members were joined together in such a way that each individual was integral to the whole in much the same way that an individual strand of yarn, when knit into a garment, adds to the integrity and usefulness of the piece of clothing. Furthermore, as a “body” of believers, individual members had fellowship with each other through their relationship with God. As the Platform states, believers “have fellowship with him, and in him one with another.”¹

This covenantal fellowship, this mystical uniting of the believer with Christ and with other believers, was also the basis of lay men and women’s power within the church and with each other. As the Reverend John Cotton observed, “in the Church, the

¹ Puritanism itself was based on the idea of covenantal theology. On covenantal theology see David Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005); John Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism 1620-1957* (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 84-92; Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960), 207, 209.

Covenant is the foundation of that relation and power we have over one another.” With the “Covenant” as the basis of power within the church, John Winthrop, in a letter to a friend in London, described the way that power was shared among individuals within the church when he stated that “Our Churches are governed by Pastors, Teachers ruling Elders and Deacons, yet the power lies in the wholl Congregation and not in the Presbitrye further then for order and precedencye.” Winthrop’s statement illustrates the importance of two founding principles of Congregationalism, namely that of lay participation and limited clerical authority.²

This chapter illustrates the kind of power that women possessed as part of the “wholl Congregation,” and also as part of the “Presbitrye” in their role as *de facto* widows. It touches briefly on the way that individual church covenants and other Congregational documents established and continually reinforced the idea of a covenanted community of believers with “power ... over one another.” It explores at length the way that women’s power, as part of a community of believers, worked in practice and argues that the power imparted through the church covenant, both literally and figuratively, was especially important to women for whom few avenues of power existed in civil society. For women, the power ascribed to them by the congregation via the church covenant was the basis of their spiritual authority and expressed itself in practice as a demonstrable influence that women had with each other, with their

² J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., “Conference of the Elders of Massachusetts with the Reverend Robert Lenthall, of Weymouth, Held at Dorchester, Feb. 10, 1639,” *Congregational Quarterly*, 19 (1877), 236-239; John Winthrop, “John Winthrop to Sir Nathaniel Rich,” *Winthrop Papers Volume III 1631-1637* (Boston, Mass.: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), 3:167; On Congregationalism see James F. Cooper, Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapters 1 and 2.

husbands, with their pastors, and within the larger Puritan community, both inside and outside the meetinghouse.³

Women: “Experienced Christians”

When men and women joined the church and united themselves in covenant with other believers they shared in the responsibilities and benefits of membership as spelled out in individual church covenants. These church covenants tended to be individual to each congregation, as befits a congregational system, yet they typically followed a formula which included an agreement to walk with and keep watch over each other according to the will of God as they understood it. The covenant for Salem First church, typical of many church covenants, emphasized the watch and care that believers owed each other. As stated in the Salem covenant, members vowed to,

Covenant with the Lord and one with an other, and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies... Wee promise to walk with our brethren and sisters in the Congregation with all watchfulness, and tendernis avoiding all jealousies, suspitions, backbyteings, conjurings, provoakings, secrete riseings of spirit against them, but in all offences to follow the rule of the Lord Jesus, and to beare and forbear, give and forgive as he hath taught us.⁴

Likewise members at Boston First promised to “walk with this church in mutual memberly love and succor, according to God” when they joined the church. The church

³ Winthrop, “John Winthrop to Sir Nathaniel Rich,” 3:167; Marilyn Westerkamp, “Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality,” *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) conceives of power within religious systems as involving “the exercise of influence or authority within a community. The source of such power is external to the self, [and is] ascribed to the individual by the group” (64); Similarly, Leslie J. Lindenauer’s analysis of three Protestant religious communities in *Piety and Power: Gender and Religious Culture in the American Colonies, 1630-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2002) grounds its argument about women’s place on notions of power inherent in the Reformation’s “fundamental belief in the equality of the Protestant soul” (vii).

⁴ Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts, 1629-1736* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1974), 3-4; Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* (Boston: The Society, 1961), 1:5; *Records of the First Church at Dorchester, in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1891), 1-2.

membership, in turn, promised to “walk towards you [the new member] in brotherly love and holy watchfulness to the building up each other in the Holy fellowship of Christ.”

The covenant for Dorchester first, gathered in 1636, was equally specific regarding the responsibilities that members owed to each other. Dorchester’s covenant reminded new members that all who joined the church sought the “spirituall good of each other” through “mutuall Instruction, reprehension, exhortacon, consolacon, and spiritual watchfulness.”

Thus all members, men and women alike, had a duty to instruct, reprove, exhort, console, and watch over the spiritual estate of each other.

Implicit within the idea of watchfulness was the discipline of the saints.

Watching over one another meant calling attention to sinful behavior which might separate believers from each other and, ultimately, from God. The Cambridge Platform was clear about how such sinful behavior was to be handled. If an offence was private, that is “one brother offending another” without the benefit of witnesses, the offence was to be dealt with in private. If the offender refused to repent, the offended party should take two or three witnesses and again confront the offender. If this tactic failed, the offended party should bring his or her complaint to the elders who would make it public before the congregation. Public offenses, including those of a more “heinous and criminall nature,” were dealt with more swiftly. Ministers’ diaries and church records illustrate that both men and women participated in the watchful process of disciplining the saints. Mothers brought charges against their daughters, wives brought charges against their husbands, and neighbors brought charges against neighbors.⁵

⁵ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 227; On early church discipline see Emil Oberholzer Jr., *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

Discipline of the saints could also extend to potential members as was the case at Lynn. As reported by Richard Sadler, a resident of Bay Area in the late 1630s and early 1640s, a female member of the Lynn congregation “withstood,” or opposed, the admission of another women because of an unresolved grievance from thirty or forty years previous when the two worked as maid servants together. The female member who opposed the admittance of her old acquaintance influenced other members of the church who became “unsatisfied” with the applicant. The potential member was eventually admitted but not without some “difficultie.”⁶ As participants of a system of discipline, watch, and care, women affirmed their quasi-political authority within a covenanted, patriarchal church system that made believers responsible for the spiritual and temporal welfare of their brothers and sisters in Christ. In short, the church covenant and all that it implied was the basis of women’s individual power.

Another facet of the system of watch and care which served to affirm women’s influence involved private conferences. John White’s manual for *Profitable Reading of the Scriptures*, in fact, instructed believers to seek out “much conference, especially with Ministers and other experienced Christians.” These conferences were essential to the processes of conversion, of restoration between estranged individuals, and of nurturing spiritual growth. One might assume, in a patriarchal society where the sexes were seated separately during worship services, that men would only seek the advice of other men, yet John Brock, a twenty-three-year old freshman at Harvard College in 1643, demonstrated that this was not so. Brock records in his diary that “My Tutor [Henry Dunster] very loving: I had experimental Conference with his Wife, and so by little and

⁶ Richard Sadler, “Richard Sadler’s Account of the Massachusetts Churches,” ed. Richard C. Simmons, *New England Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Sep., 1969): 411-425.

little I knew many Saints there.” Henry Dunster’s wife was Elizabeth (Harris) Glover Dunster, the wealthy widow of the Reverend Joseph Glover and the mother of five children, most probably associated with the Cambridge church. Elizabeth married Henry in 1641, and when she died in 1643, she left her property, including the colony’s first printing press, to Henry. In short, it is likely that the young John Brock viewed Elizabeth Dunster as an “experienced Christian” and as someone who could provide godly counsel.⁷

In the same way that women such as Elizabeth Dunster counseled men, they also conferenced with and counseled other women. Women found strength and comfort in their religious conversations with other women, and while they regularly turned to their ministers for spiritual guidance, they also turned to each other, and in the process, they reinforced the right of women to possess spiritual authority. The conversion narrative of Martha Collins, who joined Cambridge First around 1640, for example, demonstrates the important role that women played in each other’s spiritual development and is typical of the women’s narratives in Thomas Shepard’s *Confessions*. Martha began to “seek the Lord in private” at the tender age of nineteen, more from the example of other Christians around her than from any internal compulsion. After marriage, her husband witnessed to her. She attended the religious lectures of John Shaw and counseled with the Reverend Thomas Shepard of Cambridge, all the while believing that it was too late for her to

⁷ John White, *A Way to the Tree of Life: Discovered in Sundry Directions for the Profitable Reading of the Scriptures...* (London, 1647), A6-7; John Brock, “The Autobiographical Memoranda of John Brock, 1636-1659,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* vol. 53 (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1943), 99; For more on private conferences see Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 150-55; Elizabeth Dunster’s first husband, Joseph/Josse/Jose Glover was the rector at Sutton in Surry. He died on the passage from England to New England. Church records which would substantiate Elizabeth’s membership at Cambridge are not extant although Henry Dunster joined the Cambridge church in 1640; On church seating practices see Robert J. Dinkin, “Seating the Meeting House in Early Massachusetts,” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Sep., 1970), 450-64.

receive salvation: “that surely now [the] gate is shut for me.” It was not until Martha met with a female friend who told her “tis not in man to direct His ways” that Martha overcame her feelings of unworthiness and was able to receive salvation.⁸

As with Martha Collins, Susanna Bell’s conversation with her female neighbor proved instrumental in moving Bell further along the path towards salvation even if her first attempt to join the Roxbury church met with failure. During the question and answer phase of the admissions process Bell’s answers to the congregation’s questions did not satisfy the church. After being told to wait until she had “some particular promise made home in power upon me,” Bell waited to see “what God would further do for my pour soul.” As she waited for further revelation from God, Bell continued to attend church services, sometimes traveling to hear John Cotton preach in Boston and at other times attending the services of Thomas Shepard at Cambridge. Employing imagery from Shepard’s sermon *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Bell relates that she did not “experimentally know what it was to have oyle in my lamp, grace in my heart, nor what it was to have union with Christ.” Her angst over her unsaved condition was palpable and evident to others. A female neighbor, for example, noticed Bell’s “distressed condition” and told her that “the Lord had more glory in the salvation than in the damnation of sinners.” As Bell states, the words of her neighbor helped “draw out” or make tender

⁸ Thomas Shepard, *Thomas Shepard’s Confessions*, ed. George Selement and Bruce C. Woolley (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1981), 130-32. Shepard’s underutilized *Confessions* contains the public confessions of fifty-one of Shepard’s congregants—twenty-two by women, twenty-eight by men, and one unknown. They permit a rare look at the spiritual struggles and thought processes of common Puritan men and women as they worked through the process of salvation and constitute the most comprehensive source of first-generation narratives available. Shepard served the flock at the Congregational church in Cambridge from 1636 until his death in 1649.

Susannah Bell's heart towards God. Shortly after the conversation with her neighbor, Bell was accepted into membership at John Eliot's Roxbury church.⁹

Mary Angier, who came from England to Cambridge sometime before 1636, also found hope in the words of a neighbor. In Angier's narrative she relates that on the journey from England to the colonies every sermon she heard on shipboard just "made her [feel] worse." Angier thought that "God had left her to a hard heart." She had not experienced the spiritual stirrings in her own soul that she recognized in others, and "began to neglect [the] Lord in private." A conversation with one of her female neighbors turned Angier's thinking around. Angier found commonality and reassurance in the words of the neighbor who advised her to "leave the Lord to His own ways." The neighbor reminded Angier that she was "God's clay" and challenged her to seek God in private. Eventually Angier came to know that "the Lord [had] called her to Himself" and was admitted into membership at Cambridge First sometime around 1639.¹⁰

Jane Holmes, also of the Cambridge church, grew up in England in a home with a step-mother who "was an affliction" to her. Ironically, her unhappy home life caused Holmes to seek God. As she states, "I would do what I could to walk in His way because they that did should be happy." A female friend later told Holmes "of a new birth...and that all righteousness out of Christ was nothing," and so she set her mind to "enquire after that way." In contrast to Jane Holmes, Mary Griswold was able to turn to her own

⁹ Susanna Bell, *The Legacy of a Dying Mother to Her Mourning Children: Being the Experiences of Mrs. Susanna Bell, Who Died March 13, 1672* (London: Printed and to be sold by John Hancock, 1673), 48, 50. Bell was married to Thomas Bell. The couple went back to England sometime before 1654 where both Thomas and Susanna Bell died in 1672. On Thomas Bell see James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England Showing Three Generations of Those Who Came Before May, 1692, on the Basis of Farmer's Register* (Baltimore, Genealogical Publishing Company, 1965), 1:160.

¹⁰ Shepard, *Confessions*, 65-69.

mother for spiritual guidance. Griswald's mother shared with her that she "must be born again" and quoted John 3:3 and 1 Peter 1:23 to her daughter.¹¹

Katherine, the maid of John and Elizabeth Russell, states in her conversion narrative that she grew up in ignorance and spiritual darkness so she "went to an aunt" who possessed "the means of light." The "aunt" prayed with Katherine and the other women who had gathered together to study the word and to "pray and edify one another," as John Winthrop states was the appropriate role for women's private meetings. It was on account of this aunt's words that Katherine came to see her own sinful nature and wondered "whether the Lord would pardon" her. She eventually found the assurance she sought and joined the Cambridge church sometime around 1640.¹²

Sarah Goodhue's *Valedictory, and Monitory Writing*, a type of last will and testament/farewell address, hints at the important role that such private meetings or "private societ[ies]" played in women's lives and is evidence of one way that women continued to influence and speak to each other even after death. On July 14, 1681, Goodhue put pen to paper to record "a few words I would declare ... of my mind, lest I should afterwards have no opportunity." Sarah had a premonition of her impending death, or a "strong persuasion upon my mind," as she phrased it, and just three days after giving birth to twins, on July 23, 1681, she died, leaving ten children and a grieving husband to survive her. Her thoughts on July 14 as she composed her *Valedictory* were with her children, husband, and parents, lest she not survive her impending travail, but

¹¹ Shepard, *Confessions*, 77-80, 187-189; John 3:3 states, "In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'" (NIV). 1 Peter 1:23 states, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (NIV).

¹² Shepard, *Confessions*, 99-101.

she also had a few words for the “Brothers and Sisters” of her church and for the “private society” which she belonged to. Perhaps thinking of the impact that her death would have on the small group with which she enjoyed private fellowship, Sarah urged that should death visit the members of her “private society,” to “break” them and decrease their number, they should

be not discouraged, but be strong in repenting . . . pray each for another and with one another; that so in these threatening times of storms and troubles, you may be found more precious than gold tried in the fire.

Sarah’s message to her church family, her “Brothers and Sisters all,” focused on the brevity of life and the certainty of death, that “swift and sudden messenger.” She urged them to prepare themselves for death so that none “may be found without a wedding garment; a part and portion in Jesus Christ,” biblical symbolism for true saving faith. Fearing that she should “be surprised, either at my travail, or soon after it,” by “sudden death,” Sarah Goodhue took one last opportunity to speak to her family, friends, and neighbors about the spiritual values she held most dear and hoped they would emulate.¹³

Conversion narratives and valedictories such as those by Martha Collins, Mary Angier, Jane Holmes, Katherine, Susannah Bell, and Sarah Goodhue illustrate the degree to which women turned to each other on their journey of spiritual maturation. Church membership and religious affiliation afforded women a platform from which to influence

¹³ Sarah Goodhue, *The Copy of a Valedictory, and Monitory Writing, Left by Sarah Goodhue, Wife of Joseph Goodhue, of Ipswich, in New-England; and Found After Her Decease: Full of Spiritual Experiences, Sage Counsels, Pious Instructions, and Serious Exhortations: Directed to Her Husband, Children, With Other Near Relations and Friends, and Profitable to All Who May Happen to Read Them* (Cambridge, Mass.: James Allen, 1681). Sarah Goodhue (1641-1681) married Joseph Goodhue, a deacon at the Ipswich First church, on July 13, 1661. Ipswich church records which would definitively substantiate Sarah’s church membership are not extant, yet her *Valedictory* leaves little doubt that she was a church member. Her father was an elder of the Ipswich church and as such, would have had her baptized. On Joseph and Sarah Goodhue see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:272-3; Jonathan E. Goodhue, *History and Genealogy of the Goodhue Family in England and America to the Year 1890* (New York: E. R. Andrews, 1891), 11-12. Goodhue describes Sarah as a “woman of rare intelligence and devoted piety” (11); Sarah’s reference to a “wedding garment” can be found in Matthew 22: 1-10.

their community without appearing to step outside the bounds of acceptable behavior. Counseling a neighbor regarding spiritual concerns, for example, was unlikely to earn the charge of behaving “above your gifts and sex;” an accusation that Thomas Parker, minister of Newbury, Massachusetts leveled at his sister, Elizabeth Avery of England, upon the publication of her book.¹⁴

Even though women found comfort in and were spiritually and intellectually challenged by their minister’s sermons, they could also be “stirred” by the “speech of a sister,” as was Elizabeth Olbon. When a supposedly godly minister proved to be of “little benefit” or even worse, “an opposer of the truth,” a woman could turn to her godly “aunt” or her sisters in Christ for prayer, instruction, and support. Like Anne Fiske, who was known as “the Concordance” for her accumulated knowledge of scripture, the authority that Katherine’s aunt possessed was not based on what one scholar has recently termed “male potency and female submission.” Far from it; Katherine’s “aunt” was a leader in her community and attracted women such as Katherine who were anxious to obtain the kind of spiritual “light” that this “aunt” possessed. Her authority was not based on her submission to “potent” men in authority over her but on her status as a church member; she “possessed the means of light” that others recognized in her and sought for themselves.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Parker, *The Copy of a Letter Written by Mr. Thomas Parker, Pastor of the Church of Newbury in New-England, to His Sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Avery, 1649* (London: Printed by John Field for Edmund Paxton, 1650), 17.

¹⁵ Shepard, *Confessions*, 119, 76; Joseph Barlow Felt, *The Annals of Salem From Its First Settlement* (Salem, Massachusetts: W. & S.B. Ives, 1827), 157; Amanda Porterfield in *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) has argued that “Puritan women celebrated male potency and female submission not only because of the indirect authority they often enjoyed as exemplars of female piety, but also because of the seductiveness of Puritan theology and Puritan ministers . . . Puritan theology offered women imaginary experiences of erotic satisfaction and emotional security. Images of God as omnipotent Father and Christ as ravishing

Widows and “Gentlewomen” Healers

As stated earlier, the Congregational church was composed of the “wholl Congregation,” both members and non-members, and the “Presbitrye,” or ministers, elders, and deacons. Theoretically, the Presbitrye was not an exclusively male space either in Old or New England. In Old England, for example, the church creed of the early London separatists, The Confession of 1589, stated that while men held positions as pastors, teachers, deacons, and “governours” women served as “most loving and sober Releevvers,” or widows. Releevvers, according to The Confession,

must be women of 60 years of age at the least, for avoiding of inconveniences: they must be well reported of for good works, such as have nourished their children, such as have bin harberous to straungers: diligent and serviceable to the Saints, compassionate and helpful to them in adversitie, given to everie good worke, continuing in supplications and prayers night and day.¹⁶

Thus in Old England women were part of the governing structure of the church, albeit peripherally since they did not vote in the selection of officers.

In New England, John Cotton, pastor at Boston First, affirmed the role of widows as those “chosen into their number, who are therefore called the Deacons or servants of the Church” whose task it was to “shew mercy with cheerfulness.” According to Cotton, those widows whom God “allowed to be taken into this number” were “Ancient women, well reported of for good workes” who would “serve as fit Assistants to the

Bridegroom created imaginary objects of desire that answered women’s desires for powerful love objects, channeled those desires into emotional and behavioral patterns essential to the stability of Puritan society, and established the basis of women’s indirect influence and authority” (90). While I agree with Porterfield that women possessed authority, her conclusions are based on her interpretation of male sermon imagery rather than on women’s behavior. A different conception of the basis of female authority emerges when one considers the behavior and practices of female congregants rather than sermons authored by men.

¹⁶ Winthrop, “John Winthrop to Sir Nathaniel Rich,” *Winthrop Papers*, 3:167; Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 34, 36; The qualifications for Releevvers were based on 1 Timothy 5: 9-10 which states “Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband; and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, show hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.”

Deacons in ministering to the sick poore Brethren in sundry needful services, which are not so fit for men to put their hands unto.” Cotton’s statement, that care of the sick was “not so fit for men to put their hands unto,” does not imply that the Deacons were above such work, only that it would have been unusual for an ordinary man, even a male doctor or surgeon, for example, to care for women during pregnancy or childbirth. As with widows, deacons also “put their hands” to the service of their brothers and sisters in Christ, although in a different capacity. Deacons were “elected and ordained to take up” the “serving of Tables” including “the Lord’s Table, the Tables of Ministers (or Elders) of the church, and the tables of the poore brethren, whether of their own body or strangers.” The Cambridge Platform’s (1648) statement that “the Lord hath appointed *ancient widows*, (where they may be had) to minister in the church, in giving attendance to the sick, & to give succour unto them, & others in the like necessities,” points to a wider consensus on the role of these older women within the church and echoes the sentiment expressed by Cotton.¹⁷

In New England, as in Old, widows were therefore considered part of a governing structure where, although hierarchical in practice, unity and parity among church officers was the ideal. All officers were “bound to edifie one another, exhort, reprove, and comfort one another lovingly as to their owne members, faithfully as in the eyes of God.”

¹⁷ John Cotton, *The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church, Proved by Scripture: Wherein is Briefly Demonstrated by Questions and Answers What Officers, Worship, and Government Christ Hath Ordained in His Church. By That Reverend and Learned Divine, Mr. John Cotton, B.D. and Pastor of Boston in New England* (London: Printed for Samuel Satterthwaite, at the Signe of the Black Bull in Budge Rowe, Neare to Saint Antholines Church, 1642), 4; John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England ...* (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons in Aldersgate-Streete, 1645), 38-39; On women’s role in early New England medicine see Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002). Tannenbaum argues that “a few practices traditionally were performed by only one sex. Women dominated midwifery and the care of pregnant women. Men were rarely, if ever, called to cases of childbirth in the seventeenth century...” (8).

Theoretically, no office was elevated above another for each officer served a different function within the church body. Furthermore, when one office was absent, the entire church body suffered. As stated in The Confession,

These Officers, though they be divers and severall, yet are they not severed, least there should be a division in the body, but they are as members of the bodie, having the same case [care] one of another, jointlie doing their severall dueties to the service of the Sainctes, and to the edificaion of the Bodie of Christ...neither can any of these Offices be wanting, without grievous lameness, and apparnt deformitie of the bodie, yea violent injurie to the Head Christ Jesus.¹⁸

In theory, therefore, ancient widows were an integral part of church governance, broadly defined. In practice, however, the average seventeenth-century Massachusetts woman did not survive past the age of sixty-two, and finding widows who met the strict criteria as spelled out in scripture proved challenging. As John Cotton states, “wee finde it somewhat rare to finde a woman of so great an age (as the Apostle describith, to wit, of threescore years), and withal, to be so hearty, and healthy, and strong, as to be fit to undertake such a service.”¹⁹

In the absence of enough legitimate widows to care for the sick, female church members who were not actual widows nonetheless stepped in to fill the role as *de facto* widows, or what the Reverend Cotton Mather refers to as “gentlewomen.” In his medical treatise, *The Angel of Bethesda*—completed in 1724—Cotton Mather writes that caring for the sick was a “Laudable Thing for our Gentlewomen,” those women married to the “Countrey-Minister,” for example; although the position was not limited to minister’s wives. The wife of a humble carpenter, such as Elizabeth Weeden, might also be a midwife and care for the sick, thus high status was not a qualifying factor to serve in this

¹⁸ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 34, 38.

¹⁹ John Cotton, *The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church*, 4.

position. The wife of a country minister, however, can be assumed to be a full church member as well as a woman of “good birth or breeding,” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “gentlewoman.” For religious leaders such as John Cotton and Cotton Mather, the close association between religious affiliation and the art of “physick” was clear. Church membership empowered women and gave them legitimacy in the role of caring for the sick since female church members were assumed to be “virtuous.” Significantly, caring for the sick involved the necessary task of tending to the earthly body, but more importantly, it provided an opportunity for women full church members to minister to the patient’s eternal soul.²⁰

Like Katherine’s “aunt” a century earlier, Experience Wight Richardson, a full member of the Sudbury, Massachusetts Congregational church, was also a spiritual mentor and a gentlewoman providing medical care to those in her family and community, regardless of their status. In August of 1754, for example, she records in her diary—one of the earliest extant colonial women’s diaries—that she visited a “sick person who was poor.” As stated earlier, the task of tending to the earthly body was a necessary one, but

²⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, ed. Gordon W. Jones (Barre, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1972), 288-89; In *The Healer’s Calling* Tannenbaum argues that Anne Hutchinson, who both led women’s Bible studies and practiced medicine, used her “leadership role in the women’s networks that grew out of travails and illness to recruit converts and establish spiritual authority.” While I do not disagree with Tannenbaum that Hutchinson played a leadership role in these women’s networks and took full advantage of the venue they afforded to witness, she did not require or need these networks to “establish spiritual authority.” Rather, I argue that she approached the sickbed or a woman in travail *from* a position of spiritual authority. As John Cotton states, Hutchinson “was well respected and esteemed of me” not only because she came to New England for “conscience sake: but chiefly for that I heard, shee did much good in our Town, in womans meeting at Childbirth-Travells, wherein shee was not onely skillful and helpful, but readily fell into good discourse with the women about their spiritual estates.” In other words, Hutchinson provided a practical service in caring for the sick and women in labor, but, more significantly, she served as a co-laborer with Cotton in concerning herself with the spiritual estate of her patients; On the expectation that female church members would seek to live virtuous lives see Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion: A Facsimile Reproduction with an Introduction by Pattie Cowell* (1691; New York: Scholar’s Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978; reprint of the 3d ed., Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741).

more significantly, it provided an opportunity for women to minister to the patient's eternal soul. In August of 1755, Richardson, aged fifty, spent two weeks with her sister who was "near her end," and recorded in her diary the miraculous way that God had used her to minister to her dying sister. As Richardson wrote, "I can't but take notice how I was enabled to bring texts of scripture to comfort her. I seemed to be at no loss for a text for almost every complaint, which seems strange to me for after I came away, I was [strained] for expressions again."²¹

Richardson also visited the sick and elderly in her community where she discussed issues pertaining to salvation and assurance. She reports being disappointed when a particular visit with friends produced "not so much religious discourse as we used to have." Throughout her diary she prays for the spiritual divisions within her own church and for "converting grace" for her husband, children, grandchildren, servants, and "for my poor kinswoman who lies at the point of death, Mrs. Haminway." She carried a spiritual burden for the welfare of others, and found strength and comfort in prayer, in scriptural study, through her minister's sermons, and from the "good counsel" she received from her own mother: counsel that sustained Richardson throughout her life, long after her mother's death in 1745. As Richardson states, "I pray God to bless the good counsel she has given to many persons for there everlasting good." Like her daughter, Richardson's mother lived a life of influence. Had Richardson been older when she nursed her dying sister she would have satisfied the age requirement for an

²¹ Experience Wight Richardson, "Diary of Experience Wight Richardson, 1728-1782," Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts, 29, 33, 62, 117, 99. Experience Wight was born on March 10, 1705, to Benjamin and Elisabeth Wight of Sudbury. She married Josiah Richardson of Chelmsford on October 23, 1728. Josiah died in 1770 and Experience died in 1786 at age eighty-one.

ancient widow. Richardson, however, was just fifty years of age when her sister passed away, thus she functioned more in the capacity of a *de facto* widow than an actual one. By the time that Richardson's husband passed away in 1770 she was sixty-five years of age, old enough to be considered a legitimate ancient widow, but her diary entries indicate a shift away from the physical care of the sick to a more sedentary ministry of prayer.²²

The connection between the practice of medicine by gentlewomen and church membership is further illustrated by the life of midwife Mrs. Elizabeth Weeden who became a full member of Boston First church on April 21, 1666. It appears that Weeden, like thousands of other women, joined the church alone. Weeden's husband Edward does not appear in church membership rolls or records. Tellingly, when the five Weeden children were presented for baptism, they were presented by "our sister Elizabeth Weeden," indicating that Edward was not a member or else he would have presented the children.²³

Although she left no written records, the importance of the life of Elizabeth Weeden is preserved in the diary of Samuel Sewall. Weeden served as the midwife for Sewall's wife Hannah, delivering ten of her fourteen children. Hannah Sewall's tenth child was delivered by Weeden just two years prior to Weeden's own death at age seventy-two in 1696. Three incidents, in particular, are indicative of the esteem in which Elizabeth Weeden was held and of her status within the community. The first incident

²² Richardson, "Diary," 33, 62, 117, 99.

²³ *The Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868*, 1:343. On the 10th day of the fourth month of 1666, "Elizabeth, Sara, Mary, Ann, and Edward the children of our sister Elizabeth Weeden" were presented for baptism at Boston First.

concerns the baptism of Sewall's first child, John, in 1677. Sewall records in his diary that his wife's "weakness" from giving birth continued to linger, so "Eliz. Weeden, the Midwife, brought the Infant to the third Church when Sermon was about half done in the afternoon" so that the child might be baptized. It was a joyful occasion to be sure and one in which Goodwife Weeden stood in place of Hannah Sewall in bringing the child for baptism. Ten years later, on January 30, 1687, Weeden again took the place of Hannah Sewall in carrying Sewall's newborn son, Stephen, to the church for baptism.²⁴

The third incident illustrating Weeden's status took place on a much more somber note. On December 22, 1685, Sewall's fifth child, Henry, died just two weeks after his birth. Two days later, Sewall records in his diary that

We follow Little Henry to his Grave: Governour and Magistrates of the County here, 8 in all, beside my Self, Eight Ministers, and Several Persons of note. Mr. Phillips of Rowley here. I led Sam., then Cous. Savage led Mother, and Cousin Dummer led Cous. Quinsey's wife, he not well. Midwife Weeden and Nurse Hill carried the Corps by turns, and so by Men in its Chestnut Coffin 'twas set into a Grave (The Tomb full of water) between 4 and 5.²⁵

Entrusting Elizabeth Weeden and Nurse Hill with carrying Henry's body to the burial site must have conveyed a tangible message to the rest of the elite mourners not only about the place that both women held in the Sewall's affections but also about the esteem in which such women were held. Yet Weeden's status was not due to her husband's position within the colony. Edward Weeden was a humble carpenter. Rather, Elizabeth

²⁴ Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall 1674-1729* ed., M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 1:41-42.

²⁵ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:89-90.

Weeden's status derived from two factors: her full church membership and her service as a midwife.²⁶

Unlike Elizabeth Weeden, midwife and healer Joanna Rosseter Cotton was married to a high status man, but one whose reputation was sullied repeatedly by alleged sexual infidelity, church excommunication, and conflict even as Joanna's reputation remained untarnished. Joanna Rosseter Cotton, the daughter of Dr. Bryan Rosseter, was born in 1642 and married the Reverend John Cotton Jr. in 1660. The couple raised children together and Joanna dutifully followed her husband to three different pulpits over the years, declining to follow him to his last post at Charlestown, South Carolina in November of 1698. It is likely that Joanna learned to "practice physick" from her physician father since she was already recognized as a medical practitioner at age twenty-two; in 1664 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England allotted £10 a year to Joanna in exchange for her medical care of the Natives at Great Harbor, Massachusetts, now Edgartown, where John Jr. was the minister of a small congregation from 1664 to 1667.²⁷

²⁶ Although beyond the geographical scope of this dissertation, female church members in other locations such as Connecticut also functioned as *de facto* widows. Elizabeth Davenport, for example, was a member of the New Haven, Connecticut meetinghouse and the wife of the Reverend John Davenport, minister at New Haven. She practiced medicine and through her husband's letters she consulted with John Winthrop about various medical concerns and treatments. For more on Elizabeth Davenport see Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*. For Davenport's assigned seat in the meetinghouse see Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *Ancient Town Records*, Vol. 1 (New Haven, CT.: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1917).

²⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, 288; John Cotton Jr., *The Correspondence of John Cotton Junior*, eds., Sheila McIntyre, Len Travers (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2009), 21; Per *Correspondence*, in May of 1664 John Cotton Jr. was excommunicated from Boston First church for "lascivious unclean practices with three women and his horrid lying to hide his sinne." He later made a "penitential acknowledgement openly confessing his sinnes" and was reinstated to church membership but his reputation was irreparably damaged (20).

Joanna Rosseter Cotton fit perfectly Cotton Mather's conception of the virtuous "Gentlewoman" married to the "Countrey-Minister" who possessed the knowledge and skill to "Help of their poor Neighbours" as described in Mather's *The Angel of Bethesda*. Cotton Mather may even have modeled this woman on Joanna since Joanna was Mather's aunt and they knew each other well. As with Experience Wight Richardson and Elizabeth Weeden, physical ailments were spiritual concerns for Joanna Cotton. Treating the body meant treating the soul. In a 1692 letter to her son, Josiah, for example, Joanna mixed spiritual and physical metaphors in hopes that Josiah would "Remember what God hath done for you, how often he hath saved your Body from Death, O Give him no Rest Night nor Day till he hath Saved your Soul from Hell." She admonished Josiah to "Pray continually morning and night before you sleep" and to "Read the Word of God every Day. Yet Joanna's own religious beliefs were not so rigid that she refused to care for patients on the Sabbath. She was "fecht to Hannah Morton" on a Sabbath morning, for example, and lingered at Morton's home till late into the evening, missing both Sabbath services.²⁸

Letters written by both John and Joanna Cotton provide details about Joanna's medical practice and illustrate the authority she possessed within the larger religious community. During a measles epidemic in Taunton in February of 1678, Joanna offered "Advice & Directions" to the Reverend Samuel Danforth—minister at Taunton from 1687 to 1727—and was praised by Danforth in a letter to John Cotton Jr. for "her g[rea]t kindness to me." She collected and exchanged medicinal herbs with other female gentlewomen healers such as Ruth Sargent Winslow Bourne, the widow of the Reverend

²⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, 288-89. John Cotton Jr., *Correspondence*, 413-415, 498.

Richard Bourne—minister to the Indians at Mashpee from 1670 to 1685. During one roughly two-week period from February 16 to March 6, 1698, Joanna made seven house calls, including one overnight stay, to treat sick neighbors and expectant mothers. She saw Rob Bartlett’s family through the death of their four-day-old son. She safely delivered Goodwives Warren and Harlow. She provided medical care for one-year-old Hannah Ring and attended to Mercy Wood twice in the days before Wood’s death. This flurry of activity led John Jr. to write to his son, Rowland, that Joanna was “tired with serving” and that he hoped the “Lord strengthen her.” Yet despite her fatigue, John Jr. reports that Joanna was “never more willing to doe & run as now.”²⁹

In one particularly troubling case, a fellow church member, “Brother [John] thatcher,” consulted Joanna about his sister’s mental instabilities. Bethyah Howland, according to Joanna, “holds that thear is no man X [Christ] Jesus in heven & saith she [Howland] is the vergin mary.” Joanna feared that “our dear frind Bethyah Howland...will murder herself.” Bethyah Howland had been advised by her minister to “Confes her fault,” according to Joanna, but being “pretty proud,” reconciliation never occurred. Joanna apparently declined to treat Bethyah, telling John Thacher, “I cant go to her.” Despite her reluctance to treat Howland, Joanna’s position within the community was clear: fellow church members such as John Thacher turned to Joanna to treat his sister and ministers such as the Reverend Samuel Danforth praised her medical knowledge and skill.³⁰

²⁹ John Cotton Jr., *Correspondence*, 353, 549; Ruth Sargent Winslow married Richard Bourne in 1677 and more than likely accompanied him in his ministry to the Indians at the Mashpee Indian Congregational Church from 1670 to 1685. Perhaps Ruth Bourne provided medical care to the Natives at Mashpee as Joanna Cotton had done for the Natives at Great Harbor, Massachusetts in the 1660s. On Bourne see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:218-19.

³⁰ John Cotton Jr., *Correspondence*, 587.

Women such as Joanna Rossiter Cotton, Elizabeth Weeden, Ruth Sargent Winslow Bourne, and Experience Wight Richardson were held in high esteem in their respective communities, both for their medical knowledge and for their spiritual wisdom. Indeed, Elizabeth Saltonstall's letter to her daughter, Elizabeth Cotton, illustrates the way that medicine and faith were intertwined during this era in the person of a female healer. In her letter, Saltonstall describes Joanna Cotton as "under God the instrumentall means of preserving your life," indicating that women of faith were therefore uniquely qualified to practice medicine.³¹

Importantly, the authority of these women was not dependent solely upon their husband's social status. Weeden's husband was a carpenter, and while Joanna Cotton's husband held a prominent, public position and came from one of the first families of Boston, his repeated personal problems could have reflected poorly upon Joanna's medical practice. In 1698, during the wake of her husband's second alleged infidelity scandal, however, Joanna's medical practice was as busy as ever. Women such as Joanna Rossiter Cotton, Elizabeth Weeden, and Experience Wight Richardson are challenging to locate in the historical record—only bits and piece of their stories remain—yet they existed. Their reputation in the community as instruments of God for physical and spiritual healing, or as gentlewomen, was theirs alone to make.

³¹ Robert Earle Moody, ed., *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607-1815. Selected and Edited and With Biographies of Ten Members of the Saltonstall Family in Six Generations* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1972), 219; Elizabeth Cotton was married to Rowland Cotton and was Joanna Rossiter Cotton's daughter-in-law.

“He That Would Thrive Must Ask His Wife.”

As expressed in the prescriptive literature of the Reverend Cotton Mather, a godly Puritan goodwife such as Joanna Rossiter Cotton owed her husband love, reverence, admiration, fidelity, and honor. She should also embrace peace, industry, thrift, and kindness and shun discord, anger, bitterness, clamour, and evil speech. Despite this idealistic construction of Puritan womanhood, a certain amount of latitude existed for Christian wives within Mather’s conception of godly subjection. Female agency was not wholly inconsistent with his views. Although a wife must ultimately submit her will to that of her husband, when a difference of opinion arose, for example, it was perfectly lawful for her to try and “convince him of inexpediencies” with “calm reasons,” according to Mather.³²

Conversely, the wise husband understood that “he that would thrive must ask his wife.” The Reverend Peter Thacher was by all accounts the kind of husband who sought advice from his wife, and his diary records a seemingly trivial instance in which he acquiesced to his wife’s persuasion. Thacher, a member of the Old South Church in Boston, had graduated from Harvard College in 1671 expecting to quickly launch his ministerial career, yet eight years after his graduation, he was still awaiting his own pastorate. In the meantime, Thacher supported himself with guest preaching at various Bay-area churches. On the night of Saturday, October 10, 1679, for example, Thacher was in his study preparing for a visit to the Charlestown church the next morning when he records in his diary, “I had thoughts to have gone over to charlestowne in the morning but my dear used soe many arguments with me to stay sacraments [at] South church that

³² Cotton Mather, *Ornaments*, 86-99.

she prevailed and blessed be the lord that she did.” Thus it would appear that Thacher worshipped at Old South the next day instead of Charlestown. Although he does not record why worshipping at Old South turned out to be a blessing, he leaves no doubt about the ability of his wife, Theodora, to convince him of his “inexpediences.”³³

Similarly, in 1689 the Reverend Increase Mather refused to move from Boston to Cambridge without the consent of his wife. Mather was the minister at Boston Second church, but he was also the acting president of Harvard College, which was located across the Charles River from Boston in Cambridge. For the sake of expediency, the college council wanted Mather to move to Cambridge where he would be closer to the university. In response to their request, Mather records in his diary that “I told them that if the church [Boston Second] and my wife would consent to my removing to Cambridge I would go.” At the time, the congregation at Boston Second was approximately sixty-seven percent female, thus the approval and support of his wife and his mostly female parishioners were key to Mather’s willingness to appease the council.³⁴

In contrast to Increase Mather, who was cognizant of the value of his wife’s opinion, the Reverend John Wilson of Boston First faced questions from several “grave and godly men” in the congregation because he went to England “above twelve months together” leaving both his wife, “without her consent,” and the congregation, “without their consent.” In response to the men’s questioning, Wilson “gave a satisfactory

³³ “Legacy of a Dying Father Bequeathed to His Beloved Children: Or Sundry Directions in Order Unto a Well Regulated Conversation, 1693-1694” Manuscript, Congregational Library, Boston, Massachusetts, 112; Peter Thacher, “Peter Thacher Diaries, 1679-1958,” Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts; Cotton Mather, *Ornaments*, 89.

³⁴ Increase Mather, “Increase Mather Diary and Autobiography [Typescript], 1659-1721” Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. Although the autobiography has been published by the American Antiquarian Society, (Second Series, vol. 71, pt. 2, 1962) pp. 271-360, the complete diary has not been. Only that portion from 1675-1676 has been printed in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (ser. 2, v. 8).

answer” for his behavior, thus avoiding suspension from the ministry. Although Wilson’s actions did not rise to the level of “scandalous” behavior that could have resulted in excommunication—it had been rumored in England that Wilson was in fact excommunicated for his behavior—the point was made that the Boston First minister had been wrong to leave his wife without her agreement.³⁵

If men were urged to heed the advice and council of their wives, a godly wife had a moral obligation to witness to her husband if he was unsaved. Of all her duties and responsibilities, her “solicitude for the eternal Salvation of her Husband” was paramount, according to Cotton Mather in *Ornaments*. Despite the fact that she was to remain quiet during the church service, at home Mather encouraged women “to repeat unto her husband...what the minister spoke in the church” if it was “pertinent to his condition.” An unsaved or backsliding husband was a mission field. Furthermore, Mather assured women that God had equipped them with the power to do his will. As Mather states, “An Esther, a witty Esther, what can’t she do with the most haughty Husband in the World?” As the biblical Esther persuaded her husband, King Xerxes, to halt his planned execution of the Jews, women must be persistent, according to Mather. Even if she was married to “a carnal, prayerless, graceless man” she should “not leave off her ingenious persuasions till it may be said of him, Behold he prays!”³⁶ In short, Mather, as influential minister at Boston’s Second church, emphasized the importance of women’s role in teaching and persuading their husbands for Christ and acknowledged their power to do so. In civil

³⁵ John Cotton, *A Copy of a Letter of Mr. Cotton of Boston, in New England* (London: 1641), 3.

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments*, 86-99. Mather’s biblical Esther was married to King Xerxes. Esther, who kept her Jewish ancestry concealed, persuaded the King during a series of banquets she held for him to halt his planned extermination of the Jews. See the book of Esther in the Bible, especially chapters 5-7.

society, in contrast, no corollary existed where women had a duty to teach or persuade their husbands on any topic or concern.

Sometime before 1658, for example, Hannah Gold came home from the Charlestown Congregational church, where Hannah and her husband, Thomas, were members, and related the pastor's teachings on the subject of infant baptism to Thomas. In 1641 the couple had presented their infant daughter, Hannah, for baptism. Fourteen years later, however, in 1655, Thomas Gold's views on infant baptism had changed, and he refused to have a second child baptized. In 1658, three years after refusing to present his second child for baptism, Gold was "called forth by the elders to give an account of his long withdrawings from the public ordinances amongst us, on the Lords day." Gold responded to the elders' admonishment by stating that he had not turned away from attending church but had simply decided to "attend the worde in other places."³⁷

Gold was not just worshiping someplace else, however. While Hannah Gold remained a member in good standing at Charlestown, Thomas Gold had been fellowshipping with a small group of other dissidents who had "fallen into the briers of antipedobaptism," and was therefore absenting himself from worship at Charlestown, which practiced infant baptism. By absenting himself from church the elders pointed out to Gold that he had missed the minister's sermons on baptism and had missed an opportunity to educate himself on the topic and have his objections answered. In his defense, Gold "confessed his wife told him" about the pastor's sermons on infant baptism. Gold also stated that his wife explained how he could "in faith partake of the

³⁷ James Frothington Hunnewell ed., *The Records of the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts 1632-1789* (Boston, Massachusetts: The New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1998), i.

Lord's Supper.” Clearly, Hannah was attempting to convince her husband to return to the Charlestown church and trying to negotiate a theological middle ground that would answer her husband's objections to infant baptism.³⁸

In the short term, Hannah Gold's efforts to keep her husband at Charlestown were successful. For a period of time after Thomas Gold refused to present his second child for baptism, possibly as long as two years, he continued to attend the Charlestown church. Initially, he dealt with his opposition to infant baptism by simply removing himself from church during the baptism or “sprinkling of children.” Later, after his views had become more well-known, Gold saw that he could “remain in my seat when they were at prayer and administering that service to infants.”³⁹ By 1658, however, it is clear that Gold was regularly absenting himself from the Charlestown services, choosing instead to meet with others who shared his views on infant baptism. Seven years later, on July 30, 1665, after one last attempt by the church deacons to convince Gold that his principles of Anabaptism were in error, the Charlestown congregation formerly excommunicated Thomas Gold.⁴⁰

What makes Thomas Gold's story of interest is that sometime between 1658, when Thomas Gold was called to account for his absence at Charlestown First, and 1668, three years after his excommunication, Hannah Gold died. With Hannah gone, the

³⁸ Nathan Eusebius Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston: 1665-1899* (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 28; Hunnewell ed., *The Records of the First Church in Charlestown*, i.

³⁹ Thomas Gold qtd. in David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Printed by Lincoln and Edmands for the Author, 1813), 1:388.

⁴⁰ Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston: 1665-1899*, 68.

tenuous link that held Thomas Gold to the Charlestown congregation no longer existed. It is impossible to say when Hannah Gold died or whether she continued to relate Charlestown First's teachings on baptism to her husband until the time of her death. She may have died as early as 1659 or as late as 1667. By 1665 Thomas Gold is listed in the records of the First Baptist Church of Charlestown as a founding member, and by 1668, Gold was remarried to a woman named Mary (possibly Mary Newell, another founding member of the First Baptist Church of Charlestown) who shared his Anabaptist sentiments. Regardless of when she died, one thing is certain; Hannah Gold's attempts to influence her husband's theology were consistent with Cotton Mather's later admonition that a wife had a duty to "to repeat unto her husband...what the minister spoke in the church," especially if the husband had been absenting himself from services. Even before Mather's *Ornaments* was published, women full church members such as Hannah Gold were taking responsibility for the spiritual condition of their families, including their husbands.⁴¹

In the same way that Hannah Gold was ultimately unsuccessful in preventing her husband from embracing antipedobaptism, Dorothy Upshall could not stop her husband, Nicholas Upshall, from becoming a Quaker. Her status as a full member in good standing at Boston First church and her reputation within the larger Boston community did, however, prevent the transfer of Nicholas from the Boston jail, where he was imprisoned for his Quaker beliefs, to isolation on Castle Island where he would have

⁴¹ On the Gold/Gould family see Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:286; Cotton Mather, *Ornaments*, 86-99.

been cut off from all contact with the community, save for that of his family.⁴² Nicholas Upshall had not always embraced Quakerism. At one point in time both Nicholas and Dorothy had been members in good standing at Boston First, having joined the church together in 1644. By 1651, however, Nicholas was called before the church to answer the charge that he had absented himself from the “lords table.” Offering no defense, Nicholas was admonished. Four months later, still refusing to explain his behavior or participate in communion, Nicholas was excommunicated from membership in the church. In and out of jail over the course of the next ten years, Nicholas was finally ordered by the court in 1661 to be sent to Castle Island where he would be prevented from “drawing many Quakers & others affected to that sect thither.” If not for Dorothy’s petition to the court requesting instead that he be removed to the home of family friend John Capen in Dorchester, Nicholas would have likely served the remainder of his life in isolation. He died in 1666. Although guilty of embracing Quakerism, Nicholas lived his remaining years in relative comfort, thanks to the influence of his wife, her reputation in the larger community, and her efforts on his behalf.⁴³

That women’s influence on and in behalf of their husbands extended beyond theology, salvation, and godly conduct is evident in the case of Philippa Harding, wife of Robert Harding, both of whom followed Anne Hutchinson to Aquidneck following Hutchinson’s banishment for heresy in 1638. Although not married to each other when

⁴² I owe Jonathan Moseley Chu, “Madmen and Friends: Quakers and the Puritan Adjustment to Religious Heterodoxy in Massachusetts Bay During the Seventeenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1978), 74, for the observation that Nicholas Upshall was not sent to Castle Island because his wife interceded and because of her status within the community.

⁴³ On Nicholas Upshall’s church membership, admonition, and excommunication see Pierce ed., *Records of the First Church of Boston*, 1:42, 53-54; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1661-1674* (Boston: William White, 1853), 4 (pt. 2): 21, 27; Castle Island is no longer an island but is part of Boston Harbor, joined to the mainland by a narrow strip of land. In 1661 the island contained a fortification.

they immigrated to the Bay-area in 1630 with the Winthrop fleet—Philippa was widowed and Robert was single—both Philippa and Robert became founding members of Boston First Congregational church and later married on May 18, 1631.

As one of ten key men who managed the town's affairs, Robert Harding was a respected member of the Massachusetts Bay community, a wealthy land owner, a selectman, and a captain with the artillery company. In 1637, however, Harding was also one of fifty-eight men in Boston who were ordered by the colonial court to surrender their arms and ammunition or face penalties for their support of the Reverend John Wheelwright and his sister-in-law Anne Hutchinson, who were charged with heresy and banished from the colony, ostensibly for their theological views, in what became known as the Antinomian Controversy. Harding was among those who had signed a petition affirming Wheelwright's innocence, declaring that the "court had condemned the truth of Christ" in its banishment of Wheelwright. Like his wife, Robert Harding opposed the treatment of Wheelwright and Mistress Hutchinson of Boston. Perhaps Harding and his wife were among the dozens who attended Hutchinson's twice weekly lectures where she reinterpreted ministerial sermons and taught mixed audiences of men and women.⁴⁴

While Robert Harding was forced to surrender his arms and his position as a member of the artillery company for his support of Wheelwright, he was not

⁴⁴ On Robert Harding see Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:354; Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town 1630-1649* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 74; On the disarming of Boston see Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay Company in New England, 1628-1641*, 1:211-212; John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, ed., Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 241-42; On Hutchinson see Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order," *Church History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1990), pp. 482-496; On the Antinomian Controversy see David D. Hall, ed. *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).

excommunicated from the church. At a court-ordered meeting with Mr. Wilson, minister at Boston First, Harding acknowledged the error of his ways and submitted his will to that of the court, which in turn dismissed the charges against him. Robert Harding was free to remain in Boston; he was free to continue attending Boston First church, and he may have done so if not for his wife.

Philippa Harding, in contrast to her husband, was not contrite, and on September 1, 1639, she was excommunicated from Boston First “for speaking evill of authority both in Church and Common Weale: For having said in open court that Mrs. Hutchinson neyther deserved the censure which was putt upon her in the church, nor in the Common Weale.” Philippa Harding had made a point of voicing her opposition to the banishment of Wheelwright and Hutchinson “both in her shop and other meetings.” In other words, Philippa Hammond was disturbing the peace. Her point of view was well-known, and although she had not been banished from the settlement, she apparently found it expedient to leave and followed Anne Hutchinson to Aquidneck in Rhode Island.⁴⁵

Philippa Harding was one of a sizeable group of exiles from Boston who followed Hutchinson to Rhode Island. Whether Robert accompanied his wife to Aquidneck or followed her at a later date, by 1641 he was serving as an “assistant” in the Rhode Island artillery, indicating that he had made Aquidneck Island his new home. Until 1645 the couple lived in Aquidneck, but Philippa’s death sometime before 1645 meant that Robert no longer had a reason to stay. Harding had always “kept up his kindness” for Boston and decided to return to the town that had been his home.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Pierce ed., *Records of the First Church of Boston*, 1:25.

⁴⁶ Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:354.

That Philippa and Robert Harding both shared a common disdain for the treatment of Wheelwright and Hutchinson by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities is evident in the documents that record their protests. What is less visible in the extant records is the degree to which Robert's marriage covenant with his wife superseded his covenant with Boston First church. No civil ruling required their removal from Boston to Rhode Island. As someone who retained his good standing with the Boston First church, Robert could have remained in town, hopeful that his wife would repent and seek restored fellowship with the church as Harding himself had done. Indeed, a committee dispatched from Boston First in 1640 to check on the Rhode Island exiles reported that Mrs. Harding "desiar communion with us still." Despite the finding of the committee, repentance and restored communion between Philippa Harding and Boston First church was not to be. Instead, Robert Harding chose to follow his strong-willed wife out of Boston, and returned only after her death.⁴⁷

Sisters and "Pious Women"

In the same way that women might seek the advice and counsel of other godly women, and wise husbands listen to the advice of their wives, a minister might also turn to a pious sister in Christ to know her thoughts on a particular matter. Only men served as pillars when a new church was covenanted and only men became elders and deacons, but this does not mean that women's opinions were absent from important decisions that needed to be made. The Reverend Peter Thacher, who served as the minister at Milton First Congregational Church from 1681 to 1727, not only advised his female parishioners,

⁴⁷ Hall, ed. *The Antinomian Controversy*, 393.

he also sought their advice and prayer support concerning important decisions in his personal life.

In 1680, for example, Thacher was trying to decide whether to accept a position as pastor at Barnstable, Massachusetts where he had been preaching on a trial basis. He was living in Boston at the time, a member of Boston's Old South Church, when he recorded in his diary for May 12, 1680, that Mrs. Allen, possibly Sarah Allen, stopped by his home. Thacher's wife, Theodora, was due to deliver the couple's second child any day, and Mrs. Allen not only attended the birth on May 16th but spent time with Theodora afterward. On May 12th when Mrs. Allen stopped by, Thacher was getting ready to leave for Yarmouth but decided instead to stay home and speak with Allen. The two had known each other since 1673, having joined Old South church within several months of each other. As Thacher records in his diary, "I was just going to Yarmouth but Mrs. Allen came in and soe I laid it by ... I had much discourse with Mrs. Allen." Thacher makes no mention of what the two discussed during their May visit, but three week later, on June 2, 1680, Thacher leaves no doubt as to the topic of conversation between himself and Mrs. Allen. As Thacher records, "this day I was to see mrs. Allen and spake freely to her about Barnstable affairs then returned home to my study."⁴⁸

Thacher was struggling with what he termed the "Barnstable affair" because one of Barnstable's parishioners, Mr. Hinckley, had accused Thacher of preaching false doctrine. Thacher was loath to accept a ministerial position birthed in controversy, and less than two weeks after his meeting with Mrs. Allen, Thacher met with two deacons from Barnstable and rejected their offer. Barnstable, however, continued to pressure

⁴⁸ Thacher, "Diaries," 130, 142.

Thacher to accept the pastorate, and on June 24, 1680 he consulted with “Mr. Willard,” probably Samuel Willard, and Cotton Mather who advised him to “remove from Barnstable.” The following week, on July 31, 1680, Thacher notes in his diary that “diverse brethren and sisters meet this day and spent some hours in prayer at old [] man Hamblins for me, God was pleased to hear.” Shortly afterward Thacher turned down the Barnstable position and instead accepted a position at Milton. The following year, in 1681, Thacher resettled his family in Milton where he served as the pastor of the Milton First Congregational church until his death in 1727.⁴⁹

While Thacher consulted leading Puritan divines such as Samuel Willard and Cotton Mather, he also consulted women such as Mrs. Allen concerning what was a significant decision regarding his professional career. He welcomed the prayer support of brethren and sisters such as the group that met at Hamblin’s house. Thacher’s decision to consult Mrs. Allen about his professional future suggests friendship and respect for the opinions and judgment of this particular woman. In conferring with Allen, Thacher validated the spiritual power of someone who might be considered an “average” Puritan woman. Equally significant, Thacher’s action demonstrates that even within the patriarchal social structure that dominated New England, women retained power to exert influence within the community. A woman, a sister in Christ, whose wisdom was based on a biblical “fear of the Lord,” could exert influence over others by being a sounding board even though she lacked the formal institutional power of, for example, a deacon or a church elder.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Thacher, “Diaries,” 150, 162.

⁵⁰ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments*, 37.

A Puritan minister might also choose to act on the suggestion of one his female parishioners, especially when her recommendation appeared to be divinely inspired. In 1724 Samuel Dexter was the newly installed minister at the Dedham church when a “pious woman” of his congregation moved for a day of fasting and prayer. The suggestion was so meaningful to Dexter that he records in his diary that “there is an occurrence of providence that has happened unto me which I think demands a place in this memoir.” Dexter subsequently proposed the suggestion for a day of fasting and prayer to the “Boston Association,” a professional society of local ministers, who agreed that the meeting should take place in Dedham. Dexter was new to the position in Dedham, and his hiring had not been without controversy. A local day of fasting and prayer held at Dedham would lend legitimacy to Dexter’s ministry and probably also meant that Dexter would give the fast day sermon.⁵¹ As with Mrs. Allen, the “pious woman” of Dexter’s congregation lacked the means to act in any kind of official capacity to bring her ideas to fruition. She did not lack, however, the power of spiritual influence which was acknowledged both in Dexter’s diary and in the occurrence of the day of fasting and prayer which transpired.

As the wife of a minister, Theodora Thacher also functioned in a way that indicates she was an influential member of her church community. In between running her household, pregnancy, birth, and the loss of several children, Theodora Thacher counseled women in her home, both alone and with her husband present, and visited her

⁵¹ Samuel Dexter, “Samuel Dexter Diary, 1726-1727,” Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts, 289; On the “Boston Association” see David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 220; On Samuel Dexter’s hiring at Dedham see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 109.

husband's parishioners. On April 8, 1681, for example, a very pregnant Theodora accompanied her husband on a visit to Patience Blacke who desired membership in the Milton church. Over the next six months, Blacke visited the Thacher home, several times spending the night on at least two occasions and counseling with Theodora. On October 17, 1681, for example, Peter Thacher records in his diary that "goody blacke was here and my wife spake that which trouble her."⁵²

What troubled Patience Blacke was her difficulty in obtaining a dismissal from the Dorchester church—a requirement when one left one church for another— which would have freed her to join the congregation at Milton. Edward Blacke, Patience's husband, was a prosperous cooper who moved his family to Milton from Dorchester in 1678. Patience Blacke, however, had left behind fractured relationships with her brothers and sisters in Christ in Dorchester. In her short time in Milton, she also managed to offend her neighbors, and thus the Milton church was unwilling to admit Blacke until she had acknowledged her faults and made amends with both the congregation in Dorchester and the congregation in Milton.⁵³

Peter Thacher, as minister at Milton, was the key player in the process to bring restoration between Patience Blacke and those whom she had offended, but Thacher's wife was also an integral part of the process. On April 24, 1682 a meeting was held in the Thacher home between Blacke and several of those whom she had offended. On October 16, 1682 Blacke again visited the Thacher home and "gave a more full discover of hers before my wife and Lydia [and] myself in many particulars which they are able to

⁵² Thacher, "Diaries," 235.

⁵³ On Edward Blacke see Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:192.

“speak unto.” Both Thacher’s wife and Lydia could serve as witnesses to Blacke’s statement, if need be. It is unclear if Theodora and Lydia were ever called upon to give testimony on Patience Blacke’s behalf, but on November 19, 1683 at another meeting in the Thacher home, Patience Blacke “made a confession which was to be read at both churches and so those that were offended with and were present at this meeting forgave her.” Given that Theodora counseled with Patience Blacke and hosted the aggrieved parties in her home on numerous occasions, it seems that Theodora, as much as her husband, had a hand in restoring fellowship between the various individuals, and in the process secured a recognized position of trust and influence within her community.⁵⁴

Like Theodora Thacher, Elizabeth Wilson, the wife of the Reverend John Wilson of Boston First, also participated in a conference between her husband and some of his parishioners. As recorded by John Cotton, John and Elizabeth Wilson met with supporters of Anne Hutchinson at some point during the Antinomian controversy. As Cotton stated, John Wilson “thought well of them” and was for “a long time full of much forbearance towards them.” John Wilson’s opinion of the women, however, changed after their meeting. As Cotton reported, “in some private conference, which one or more of them had with him, [Wilson] and (our beloved Sister) his Wife, he [Wilson] discerned some more rottenness in them, and their way, then he suspected before.” Historian Mary Beth Norton has speculated that the Hutchinson supporters may have used Mistress Wilson to reach her husband and that Elizabeth Wilson may have even initiated the meeting herself since “clerics’ wives did not commonly observe their husbands’ private conferences with parishioners.” It seems unlikely, however, that the Hutchinson supporters would need to use Elizabeth Wilson’s connection to obtain a conference with

⁵⁴ Thacher, “Diaries”, 32, 69.

her husband when he already “thought well of them.” Rather, Elizabeth Wilson’s presence at the conference suggests that her husband valued her judgment and opinion, especially on matters pertaining to other women.⁵⁵

Given the examples of Theodora Thacher and Elizabeth Wilson, perhaps women’s participation in ministerial conferences was more common than previously recognized by historians. In a telling example, in June of 1699, Sarah Colman wrote her brother, the Reverend Benjamin Colman, that she was “overcome with joy” at the thought of his return to Boston to assume the pastorate of the Brattle Street church, and she offered to “remain in a single state” if it would prove beneficial to him. Both Colman and his sister Sarah were single at the time of her letter, the inference being that she was making herself available to him in the service of the church, perhaps in conferencing with female parishioners. Benjamin Colman married a year later, on the 8th of June, 1700, but his sister’s offer is telling.

In New England, as in Old, women also financially supported the work of their ministers. In the early decades of the Wenham church, for example, the women held spinning bees with the profits going to help supply the pastor. When Samuel Cooper accepted the pastorate at the Brattle Street Church in Boston in 1746, seven women and 104 men made voluntary contributions to the new minister to help defray the costs associated with “going to house keeping.” Full church member Hannah Davis gave Cooper £8. Hannah Jones, who had only recently joined the church, contributed £10 20s.

⁵⁵ John Cotton, *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared in two Treatises: in the former, from the historical aspersions of Mr. Robert Baylie, in his book called, A disswasive from the errors of the time, in the latter, from some contradictions of Vindicæ Clavium, and from some mis-constructions of learned Mr. Rutherford, in his book intituled, The due right of presbyteries* (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons, for John Bellamie ..., 1648), 58; Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 366-7.

Halfway member Sarah Boylston gave £3 and Margaret Payne gave £2. The widow Sarah Dennie added £10 to the collection for Cooper, and the widow Stoddard gave £11. Someone listed simply as “a woman” gave £3. Although Cooper was amply provided for by the community—they allotted him £80 a year for rent and paid him a salary of £10 a week—the custom of providing the new minister with a financial gift to ease the settlement in his new home and make it “more comfortable” included monetary contributions from women as well as from men.⁵⁶

Hannah Davis, Hannah Jones, Sarah Boylston, Margaret Payne, and the unnamed “women” likely acted on their own behalf in donating funds to Cooper, and may not all of had spouses who were also church members. In instances where both husband and wife were members, any donation made to Cooper would have been recorded in the husband’s name. The widows Dennie and Stoddard were obviously acting on their own behalf as necessity dictated. For women such as Hannah Davis, who was probably married or she would have been listed as a widow, donating funds in their names illustrates a type of financial independence not usually associated with Puritan families where men were expected to represent the family to the outside world. Whether or not

⁵⁶ On the church patronage of Puritan women in England see R.C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 134-38; See also Richard L. Greaves, “The Role of Women in Early English Nonconformity,” *Church History* 52, no. 3 (Sep., 1983): 299-311; The First Church in Wenham Congregational, *The First Meeting House, 350th Anniversary, 1644-1994*, Commemorative Pamphlet, Congregational Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts; Samuel Cooper, “Samuel Cooper Diaries 1764-1776,” Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts; *Colonial Collegians: Biographies of Those Who Attended American Colleges before the War for Independence* (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society & New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2005), 4818.

these women had the support and approval of their husbands in donating money to Cooper and his wife is impossible to say.⁵⁷

In return for their financial support, a pastor was one who “bends himself, especially to apply the Word to the hearts of his Hearers, according to their several occasions and necessities,” in the words of Sarah Fiske. Given that the majority of the faces in the pews on any given Sabbath were female, Fiske makes a direct claim on the duty of the minister to support and nurture the women in the congregation. Implicit within her statement is the idea that women’s concerns were peculiar to their sex and that male ministers had a responsibility to understand and address those interests. Perhaps Fiske’s statement, contained in her confession of faith, was also a claim on the affections of her husband, Moses Fiske, who was the minister at Quincy First Congregational church from 1672 to 1708. Either way, her statement reveals the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the “visible particular church” and the work of the pastor. When women financially supported their clergy, they expected that their ministers would take into account the needs of their largely female church community.⁵⁸

Even death need not end a woman’s influence upon her community. According to the Reverend Thomas Brooks, minister in England, the late Susanna Bell’s life, for example, was worthy of emulation. Bell died in 1672 and although she and her husband, Thomas, returned to England sometime around 1654, she spent approximately twenty-

⁵⁷ On the role of women in Northern New England see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives, Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁵⁸ Sarah Fiske, *A Confession of Faith: or, A Summary of Divinity: Drawn up by a Young Gentle-Woman, in the Twenty-Fifth Year of Her Age: And Now Published For the Benefit of All, but More Especially of Young Persons: That They May Attain to a Competent Knowledge, in Saving and Divine Truths* (Boston: Benjamin Eliot, 1704), 7.

five years in Massachusetts and was a member of John Eliot's Roxbury church. Brooks was instrumental in securing the publication of Bell's conversion narrative posthumously and wrote a lengthy introduction to the text in which he urged readers to imitate what was "praiseworthy" in Bell. The impetus to publish the narrative, however, originated with Susanna Bell and not Brooks; Brooks and Bell's children were simply carrying out her request. As Brooks writes, "it was your mother's mind ... that her experiences should be printed."⁵⁹

Bell's document not only provided a guide for her contemporaries on living a godly life, it also provides clues that help explain the attraction of Puritanism and church membership for women during this era. Faith helped women such as Bell make sense of a world where disease, fire, earthquake, separation from loved ones, and death were ever present realities. During an incident when Bell was confined to bed from illness, for example, a "dreadful fire" broke out in her neighborhood. As Bell writes, "it pleased my God to support and strengthen my spirit with that scripture Is. 43: 2 *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest throu the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*" Bell was comforted by these words of scripture and desired that her experiences be shared with others.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Whether providing for the financial needs of a new clergyman, counseling a neighbor about the state of her soul, advising a minister about professional decisions,

⁵⁹ Bell, *Legacy*, 2, 39.

⁶⁰ Bell, *Legacy*, 60-61.

praying for a wayward husband, functioning as a *de facto* widow, or protesting the mistreatment of a sister in Christ, women exercised the power of influence within their families and their larger church communities, even with figures in authority over them such as their ministers. Women's power and influence becomes evident when examining their behavior in addition to what they wrote and what men wrote about them. While literature such as Cotton Mather's *Ornaments* prescribed the boundaries that such expressions of power could take, a woman such as Philippa Harding could step outside the boundaries of appropriate behavior in one area of her life, as when she protested the banishment of Anne Hutchinson and was excommunicated from the church, without losing influence in another area, as with her husband, who followed her to Rhode Island.

While Puritan Massachusetts was a patriarchal community, male power was not absolute. For female church members, the church covenant served as the basis of their authority since believers were expected to exert watch and care over each other, male and female alike. As part of a body of believers "orderly knit together," women possessed status that was unavailable to them in civil society and that was not entirely dependent upon their husband's place in the social hierarchy. Women's influence not only affected their immediate family, it impacted the larger community. While this chapter illustrates the way that women's spiritual power and authority were experienced as a demonstrable influence that women had with each other, with their husbands, with their pastors, and within the larger Puritan society, the next chapter explores those instances when women were at their most powerless and vulnerable, whether in their personal lives, as in times

of domestic discord, poverty, or enslavement, or in civil society, such as during the Salem Witchcraft Trials.⁶¹

⁶¹ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 207, 209.

Chapter Three

Church Membership and Association: Its Benefits for Women

When women such as Elizabeth Raynsford, a full member of Boston Third, joined a church or began attending one on a regular basis, they gained a congregational support system that included men and women. Central to that support was the conviction that believers should both exercise watch over each other's behavior— something that one historian has termed “zeal for the morality of others”— and demonstrate care, or “Love ... and succor,” to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Watch of one's fellow congregants was necessary lest Satan gain a foothold in individual lives and by extension in the church at large. Domestic concerns were community concerns. The care that believers owed each other was made explicit in church covenants, such as that of the Boston First church, wherein members pledged “brotherly Love ... to the mutuall buldinge up of one another in the Fellowship of the Lord Jesus.” Watchfulness of one's neighbor was therefore tempered by a spirit of love and the promise to help, aid, and assist one another. Both covenantal promises, but especially the promise to demonstrate love and succor, proved invaluable to women.¹

While chapter two illustrates the way that women's spiritual power and authority were experienced as a demonstrable influence that women had with each other, with their

¹ Edmond S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & row, Publishers, 1966), 10; Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* (Boston: The Society, 1961), 1:5; The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines succor/succour as “help, aid, assistance.”; On church discipline see James F. Cooper, *Tenacious of Their Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36-39; Emil Oberholzer Jr., *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

husbands, with their pastors, and within the larger Puritan community, this chapter explores those instances when women were at their most powerless and vulnerable, whether in their personal lives, as in times of domestic discord, poverty, or enslavement, or in civil society, such as during the Salem Witchcraft Trials. It argues that the love, help, aid, and assistance that women received during these times, not just from their sisters but also from their brothers in Christ, proved crucial to them. Such help took a variety of forms and included everything from compelling right behavior from a negligent spouse or providing shelter from an abusive husband to signing petitions and testifying in court on a woman's behalf. That women both sought and accepted the help of members in their church congregation during times of duress implies a certain type of closeness between such members that did not exist in other social relationships. While individual women were not powerless in civil society—women petitioned the courts and obtained redress in all manner of grievances including divorce, property settlements, and censures—the aid and assistance of one's congregational brothers and sisters often proved essential in accomplishing something that was more difficult, if not impossible, for women to do on their own.²

The Case of “Dorcas the Blackmore” and the Dorchester First Church

The case of “Dorcas the blackmore” provides an example of someone who received aid and assistance from her congregational brothers and sisters at Dorchester First church in accomplishing something that was impossible for her to do on her own:

² On women and the law in Early America see Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

secure her freedom from enslavement.³ According to the Dorchester First Church records, Dorcas was both a full church member and an enslaved African woman. At a time when only a handful of Africans lived in New England, Dorcas was one of the first African slaves brought to the Massachusetts Bay colony. She may have come to Boston as early as 1632 with her owner Israel Stoughton, wealthy colonial representative to the General Court, but it is more likely that she came in 1638 aboard the Salem ship *Desire* as part of its cargo of “cotton, and tobacco, and negroes.” Either way, she had been in the Bay Colony for at least three years when on April 13, 1641, she was received into membership at the Dorchester Congregational church along with two men and five other women.⁴

³ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston, Massachusetts: George H. Ellis, 1891), 5, 7.

⁴ On population statistics for Africans in seventeenth-century Massachusetts see Robert C. Twombly and Robert H. Moore, “Black Puritan: The Negro in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Apr., 1967), pp. 224-42. Twombly and Moore estimate that there were between 100 and 200 “Negroes” in Massachusetts by 1680 and 550 by 1708 (225); See also William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 166-69; On African Americans in seventeenth-century New England see: Lorenzo Johnson Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). Although nearly seventy years old, Greene’s book is the most recently published full-length work to focus exclusively on African Americans in seventeenth-century colonial New England. With respect to Dorcas, Green mentions the conversion of “a Negro woman” in 1641 but misquotes John Winthrop’s journal and identifies the woman who was converted as belonging to the “Rev. Stoughton of Dorchester” rather than Mr. Stoughton, as he is identified in Winthrop’s journal (Greene, 257). Green also misquotes Winthrop again and refers to the woman as a “Negro woman” rather than as a “negro maid,” as Winthrop identifies her (Greene, 257). Greene dates the beginning of slavery in New England to Samuel Maverick, who arrived in Massachusetts in 1624 and owned three slaves; A more recent work on African Americans in seventeenth-century New England, Wendy Anne Warren’s *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Seventeenth-Century North America*, is forthcoming. The work is based on her prize-winning article, “The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England,” *Journal of American History* (2007) 93 (4): 1031-49; For the earliest evidence of African-American slaves being brought to New England see John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, ed. Richard Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 246. On February 26, 1638, Winthrop notes in his *Journal* the return of the ship *Desire* from a seven month voyage to the West Indies with its cargo of “negroes”; On Israel Stoughton see James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England Showing Three Generations of Those Who Came Before May, 1692 On the Basis of Farmer’s Register* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1965), 4:213; *Records of the First Church at Dorchester*, 2, 5; To my knowledge, no study exists which focuses exclusively on Negroes in

Even before joining the church, Dorcas's reputation as a godly woman preceded her. When she joined the church in 1641, for example, John Winthrop commented in his journal on the ease with which she was accepted into membership as based on her knowledge of scripture and her godly character. As Winthrop notes, "A negro maid, servant to Mr. Stoughton of Dorchester, being well approved by divers years' experience, for sound knowledge and true godliness, was received into the church and baptized." Like many other Congregational churches, Dorchester had a predominantly female congregation; between 1630 when the church was gathered and 1641 when Dorcas joined, only seventy-four men had joined the church as compared with 122 women. Ironically, Dorcas joined the Dorchester congregation in the same year that Massachusetts became the first colony in British North America to legalize the ownership of Africans and Indians in its "Body of Liberties."⁵

That Dorcas was a valued member of the Dorchester church, deserving of the congregation's financial aid and assistance, is evident by a vote that was taken twelve years after she joined. At a December 19, 1653, meeting attended by seventeen of Dorchester's brethren, a vote was taken on "whether they were all willing that Dorcas

seventeenth-century Massachusetts Congregational churches although Pierson in *Black Yankees* has a short chapter on Christianizing slaves in the eighteenth century titled "A Christianity for Slaves."

⁵ Winthrop, *Journal*, 347. There is a three day difference in dates between Winthrop's journal and the Dorchester church records as to the date that Dorcas joined the congregation. While Winthrop records the date that a "negro maid" joined the church as April 13, 1641, the Dorchester church records give April 16, 1641, as the date that Dorcas and several others were received into membership. The discrepancy in dates could be accounted for by a mistake in transcription of the original Dorchester church records; On Dorchester's membership statistics see *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734*; For a copy of the Bay Colony's "Body of Liberties" see *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. VIII of the Third Series (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1843), 216- 237. Liberty 91 in the "Body," which legalized slavery, reads: "There shall never be any bond slaverie, villinage or Captivitie amongst us unles it be lawful Captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of god established in Israell concerning such persons doeth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be Judged thereto by Authoritie" (231).

was to be Redeemed.” If yes, Ensigne Foster and two of the church’s deacons would go to Boston and inquire of the magistrate what might be done to secure her freedom. For good measure, they decided that they would take an ox and a cow with them as partial payment for her release. In addition, if more funds were required, the men assembled that day agreed that they would “laye down for the present” whatever sum of money was required until it could be raised “from the whole church by Contribution or otherways.” It is impossible to know whether Dorcas brought the matter of her freedom to the attention of the brethren or whether the issue was raised by one of the men. Perhaps some of the sisters in the church approached the brethren, who as freemen held positions of power in civil society that were denied to the women, and requested they take action. Either way, the vote in support of attempting to redeem Dorcas was “affirmative.”⁶

It is also impossible to know with certainty why the brethren waited until 1653, twelve years after she joined the church, to try to emancipate Dorcas, but several factors may help explain the timing. First, Dorcas’s owner died in 1645, and it is reasonable to assume that while he was alive, Israel Stoughton would have opposed any attempt by the brethren to emancipate his property. After Stoughton’s death, Dorcas’s ownership could

⁶ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester*, 7. Church records do not indicate who the men thought they might have to pay for Dorcas’s release, only that they took livestock with them. Dorcas likely represents one of the first enslaved persons manumitted in colonial New England. In *The Negro in Colonial New England 1620-1776*, Greene states that the “earliest mention of free negroes in New England” was for John Wham and his wife (290). The Whams were slaves of Theophilus Eaton, governor of the New Haven Colony. In 1646 Eaton resettled Wham and his wife on a farm in New Haven. After the death of his wife, John Wham left New Haven for New York, but Greene provides no evidence that Wham was actually manumitted, and by the time Wham left New Haven, Eaton had died. On race relations in Colonial America see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: Norton, 1977), 66-68; On the social benefits accorded male full church members, Richard P. Gildrie in *Salem, Massachusetts: 1626-1683, A Covenant Community* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 64-65, demonstrates that in Salem around 1650, of those landowners who owned more than 100 acres, eighty-three percent were full church members, while only thirty-five percent of those who had smaller tracts—between one-half and nine acres—were church members.

have passed to Elizabeth Stoughton whose attitude toward the enslavement of one of her sisters in Christ might have been different from that of her husband. Israel and Elizabeth Stoughton were both members of the Dorchester church, having joined shortly after the church's founding in July of 1630. Second, church records reveal that by 1652 Dorcas had come of age. Her status had changed from that of a "negro maid" to that of mother. In September of 1652, for example, Dorcas's son, Mathew, was baptized at Dorchester First church. Since the baptism was recorded in the *Records of the First Church of Boston*, it is possible that she was living in nearby Boston with the boy's father, Matthew, was attending the Boston church, and was known to the Boston congregation. As stated in the Boston First church records, "Mathew a Negro sonne to Dorcas a Negro a sister of the Church of Dorchester was baptized into the fellowship of that Church on the 12th day of the 7th moneth 1652." A second child, a baby girl named Martha, died in 1654.⁷

Dorcas next appears in the Dorchester church records in August of 1676 in an entry that states, "Dorcas the negar being formerly a member of this church was dismissed to joyn to the first church at Boston." Eleven months later, on July 29, 1677, "Dorcas a nigro from Dorchester" was admitted by letter of dismission to Boston First Church. In the same way that it is impossible to know why the men of Dorchester waited for twelve years before they voted to secure Dorcas's freedom, it is also impossible to know whether or not they were successful. The extant records offer no clues. Were the cow and the ox that they voted to take with them to Boston sufficient payment for the

⁷ An abstract of Israel Stoughton's will is available in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*/ published quarterly under the direction of the *New England Historic, Genealogical Society*, vol. IV (Boston: S.G. Drake, 1847-1852), 51-52. Although Stoughton's wife inherited one third of his "movable goods," no specific mention is made of Dorcas or of any other slaves (51); On the baptism of Dorcas's son Mathew into Dorchester First see Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church of Boston*, 1:323. On the death of Dorcas's daughter see *Boston Births, Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths, 1630-1699* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1883), 47.

freedom of their sister in Christ? Did the men find it necessary to return to the congregation and ask for additional funds to assist Dorcas? While Dorcas's name is almost always linked in church and state records with a racial descriptor such as blackmore, Negro, negar, or nigro, she is also identified in church records as a "sister of the Church of Dorchester." Her designation as a "sister" in Christ is significant in that it gave her a community of support that she otherwise lacked. For Dorcas, being part of a church congregation did not guarantee that prejudice did not exist or that equality was the norm, either in her status as a woman or as an African slave. In this instance, however, the church records clearly substantiate that her standing as a visible saint, as a full church member, and as a sister gave her powerful allies in the attempt to break the bonds of her enslavement.⁸

Marital Strife and the Church: "No Man Shall Strike His Wife"

Although Dorcas's situation is unusual (her race and her status as a slave engendered the offer to secure her freedom by the Dorchester congregation), other women also found that church affiliation offered a ready-made community whose support was essential to their psychological and even physical well-being, especially during times of marital strife and discord. Although the Massachusetts Bay Colony prohibited spousal abuse in some of its earliest laws, court records indicate that abuse of wives by husbands, and occasionally *vice versa*, still occurred. The Bay Colony's first law codes, its 1641 "Body of Liberties," outlawed the abuse of wives by proclaiming that "Everie married woeman shall be free from bodilie correction or stripes by her husband, unlesse it be in

⁸ *The Records of the First Church in Dorchester*, 12; Pierce, *The Records of the First Church of Boston 1630-1868*, 1:74.

his owne defence upon her assault. If there be any just cause of correction complaint shall be made to Authoritie assembled in some Court, from which onely she shall receive it.”

Nine years later, in 1650, the General Court expanded the law prohibiting wife abuse by making it applicable to women who abused their husbands as well as men who abused their wives. As the court stated, “no man shall strike his wife, nor any woman her husband, on penalty of such fine not exceeding tenn pounds for one offence.” Laws prohibiting bodily harm to one’s spouse may not have prevented men from abusing their wives, but they offered women an avenue of escape through the courts, especially when the abuse was corroborated by a community of one’s brothers and sisters in Christ.⁹

The Case of Joane Halsall

While undergoing an acrimonious divorce, George Halsall recognized the importance of the church community to his estranged wife, Joane, and tried to prevent her from attending public meetings, according to the court records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, although his motives are unclear. In May of 1656 the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony reviewed the divorce petitions of both George and Joane Halsall but refused to render a “final determinacon,” instead

⁹ *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. VIII of the Third Series, 3:229-30; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660* (Boston: From the Press of William White, 1854), 4 (pt. 1): 26; On divorce in colonial Massachusetts see George Elliott Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions Chiefly in England and the United States with an Introductory Analysis of the Literature and the Theories of Primitive Marriage and the Family* vol. II part III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904), 2:330-48; On seventeenth-century Massachusetts social conditions and their influence on the formation of American divorce law see K. Kelly Weisberg, “‘Under Greet Temptations Heer’ Women and Divorce in Puritan Massachusetts,” *Feminist Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2/3 (1975), pp. 183-93; On divorce in eighteenth-century Massachusetts see Nancy F. Cott, “Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct, 1976): 586-614; for a useful chart on Petitions for Divorce in New England, 1620-99 see Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power the “Weaker Sex” in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), Appendix 1.

referring the case to the Court of Assistants to whom, according to the Governor, “it doth properly belong.” Before sending it on to the Court of Assistants, however, the Governor added the following caveat. As the record states, the Halsall case would be forward to the Court of Assistants

provided; and it is heereby ordered, that the sajd Joanne Halsey shall haue libertje to goe to the publicke meetings on the Lords & lecture dajes, or at other times, on hir occasions, without interruption or disturbance from George Halsey, or any on his behalfe; and if the sajd Halsey shall goe about to seaze on hir, vex, molest, or any way disturbe hir in the streets, or otherwise, till the cawse be issued, on complaint thereof to the Gouvernor or Deputy Gouvernor, he shall be committed to prison till he give bond for his good behaviour; and it shall be lawfull for any inhabitant, on sight of any disturbance or vjolenc offered the sajd Joanne by the sajd George, to rescue hir out of his hands, & to convent him before authoritje.¹⁰

In other words, the General Court not only recognized Joane’s right to attend public lectures and meetings as she saw fit, it backed her right to travel to the public meeting unmolested and utilized the larger community to enforce its directive. Significantly, the Court did not cite a 1646 law which made absence from public assembly punishable by a fine of five shillings as a rationale for its directive; rather the Court noted that Joane had the “libertje,” or freedom, to attend such meetings. Based on the court’s statement, one can imagine Joane walking to the Sabbath meeting at Boston First accompanied by fellow church members for security lest her husband try and block her path.¹¹

¹⁰ Shurtleff ed., *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1):, 272, 380, 401; On George Halsall see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:341; Divorce petitions in the colonial period (1629-1692) could be filed in either the General Court, the Court of Assistants, or with the county courts. Massachusetts State Archives, <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcgen/genidx.htm>.

¹¹ For the text of the November 4, 1646 law requiring attendance at public meetings, including the Lord’s days and fast and thanksgiving days, see Shurtleff ed., *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1642-1649*, 2:177-78.

George was not always so antagonistic toward the church, however, or to his wife's participation in the congregation. At various points in his life, George was a member in good standing of two different congregations. When George and his first wife, Elizabeth, moved from Dorchester to Boston, for example, they received a dismissal from the Dorchester congregation, where they were full members, to join Boston First church in March of 1644. Despite his middling rank as a blacksmith, George's status as a full church member, both at Dorchester and at Boston First, entitled him to voting privileges as a freeman and to membership in the artillery company. After Elizabeth died around 1647, George married Joane. In 1652 the Halsalls welcomed a son, Benjamin, who was presented for baptism at Boston First on September 19. Church records fail to substantiate whether or not Joane was a full church member of Boston First where her son was baptized, but the court records confirm her attendance at public meetings and lecture days and her desire to participate in the life of the congregation.¹²

By 1655 George's marriage to Joane appears to have unraveled. In June of 1655, George was excommunicated from Boston First church for "adultery with his mayd servant." One year later, Joane filed for divorce amidst harassment from George over her freedom to attend public meetings. In her divorce petition she complained of George's "frequent abusing himself with Hester Lug" and that his propensity to spend money on "mulled sack" was financially burdensome. Joane expressed her fervent desire to be "dismissed from her intolerable burden—an uncleane yoake-fellow," a reference to II Corinthians 6:14 which admonishes believers not to be "yoked together with

¹² *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:40, 323; In marrying George, Joane gained an instant family that included George's three children from his first marriage, the eldest of whom was about ten years old.

unbelievers.” As the scripture states, “what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness.” In 1656 the Court of Assistants sided with Joane and her divorce request was granted.¹³

Historian George Elliott Howard argues that the Halsell case is “noteworthy; for seemingly this marriage was dissolved solely for the man’s adultery.” According to Howard, the Halsall case represents the only divorce granted to a wife up until 1776 on the grounds of her husband’s adultery. Of the forty known cases of divorce granted prior to 1690 in Massachusetts, for example, desertion, bigamy, failure to provide, and cruelty were sufficient grounds for wives to seek the dissolution of their marriage, but adultery *alone* on the part of the husband was not sufficient cause for divorce. Adultery by the husband combined with cruelty or desertion were sufficient grounds for divorce. Husbands could, however, divorce their wives solely on grounds of adultery, indicating the gendered double standard that existed with respect to sexual behavior within marriage.¹⁴

If one considers the General Court’s statement of May, 1656 supporting Joane’s “libertje to goe to the publicke meetings,” however, the Halsell divorce appears less “noteworthy.” The court, for example, did not stipulate that George cease his adulterous relationship with Hester Lug, only that he not interfere with Joane’s “libertje” to attend public meetings. What one historian has labeled as “noteworthy,” a seventeenth-century

¹³ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:56; *MSS Early Court Files of Suffolk*, No. 257, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts qtd. in Howard, *Matrimonial Institutions*, 334; II Cor. 6:14 NIV.

¹⁴ Howard, *Matrimonial Institutions*, 334; For a list of the divorces granted in Massachusetts prior to 1690 and between 1739 and 1760 see Howard, *Matrimonial Institutions*, 333, 341. For the period 1739 to 1760, eleven cases of divorce are recorded in court files. For 1760 to 1786, ninety-six cases have been recorded.

divorce granted on grounds of male adultery, is less unique if male adultery in combination with the denial of his wife's religious liberty were the reasons the divorce was granted. In the same way that male adultery coupled with cruelty was grounds for a woman to obtain a divorce in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Massachusetts, so too was male adultery when accompanied by the husband's efforts to deny his wife her religious freedom as based on the Halsall case.¹⁵

In a surprising turn of events, three years after the divorce was granted, George appealed the Court of Assistant's decision to the General Court. In November of 1659, after "duly considering of all the evidences by both partjes produced in the case," the General Court declared the decision granting the divorce "voyd," and stated that "the sajd George Halsall shall haue and enjoy the sajd Joane Halsal, his wife, againe." What accounts for this change? Did George end his relationship with Lug? Did he begin accompanying Joane to public meetings again, this time as a partner rather than as an adversary? Except for the General Court's ruling dissolving the divorce, the records are silent. It stands to reason, however, that George must have redeemed himself since it is unlikely that the General Court would otherwise have contradicted its earlier ruling affirming Joane's religious liberty. Based on the General Court's ruling that Joane Halsall had the liberty to attend public meetings and lectures as she saw fit, the case

¹⁵ Shurtleff ed., *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1): 272, 380, 401; *MSS Early Court Files of Suffolk*, No. 257, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts qtd. in Howard, *Matrimonial Institutions*, 334; Howard in *Matrimonial Institutions* is correct when he states that "the reason for Halsall's petition [requesting that the divorce be overturned] is not stated." But when he speculates that it was perhaps overturned because "'male adultery' was not a sufficient ground of divorce," he is failing to consider that the divorce may have been granted on the strength of male adultery combined with the denial of religious liberty on the part of one spouse toward another (334). If, therefore, both conditions were resolved to the satisfaction of the aggrieved spouse during the period of divorce, the court may have had grounds and seen fit to restore the marriage.

illustrates the importance of church association to women, especially during challenging periods of their life, and highlights the court's support of religious affiliation.¹⁶

The Case of Mary Harris

In 1673 Mary Harris had not yet filed for a divorce from her abusive spouse, as Joane Halsall had done. Instead, a turning point in Harris's marriage was seemingly precipitated by one of her sisters in the church. As stated in the Essex County court records, when Mary Woodbery, aged forty-six, "heard" a rumor that Samuel Harris "sometimes ... beat his wife," Woodbery invited the younger woman to her home, inquiring if it was true. According to the court records, Harris told Woodbery "yes and pulled up her sleeve and showed her arm which was black and blue, saying that her husband did it with a great stick that he had used when he was lame." Harris also stated that "her back was a great deal worse." After their conversation, Mary Harris apparently sought shelter with Woodbery at her home because two days later, Samuel came looking for his wife complaining about her "running abroad so much." In response to her husband's complaint, Mary stated that "she had little encouragement to stay at home because he beat her so," to which Samuel replied "Well, what if I doe, If I doe she shall have more of it." On June 24, 1673, several days after Samuel Harris inquired after his spouse at Mary Woodbery's home, he was presented at court for "beating and abusing" his wife. Woodbery, according to the court records, had taken her concerns about the Harris marriage directly to two men who later served on the jury which tried the Harris

¹⁶ Shurtleff ed., *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1): 401.

case: Exercise Connant and William Fisk. Only Mary Woodbery and her daughter, Sara, served as witnesses in the case.¹⁷

As based on the covenantal commitment that church members made to each other, Mary Woodbery's actions were entirely consistent with the watch and care that women, as sisters in Christ, owed to each other. Both Woodbery and Mary Harris were members of Salem First church: Woodbery was a full member having joined in 1662 while Sister Harris, as church records refer to her, was either a full or a half way member, having had both her sons baptized at the church—William in 1672 and Hezekiah in 1678. Mary's daughter, Sara Woodbery, had been presented for baptism as an infant by her father in 1654. Samuell Harris, however, was not part of the Salem congregation. Although the disposition of the trial is not extant, it would appear that Mary and Samuell Harris stayed together, given that a second child was born to the couple five years after Samuell was presented in court for abusing his wife. For her part, Mary Woodbery fulfilled her vow to “walk” with her church sister in “all watchfulness, and tendernis,” as stated in the Salem church covenant.¹⁸

The Case of Sarah Fiske

In addition to providing “Brotherly Love . . . and succor” to women such as Mary Harris, women such as Sarah Fiske discovered that the disciplinary structure that characterized Congregational churches could be used to their advantage in compelling

¹⁷ George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1916), 5:221, 363; On Samuel Harris see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:363.

¹⁸ For church membership records pertaining to both Mary and Sara Woodbery and the Harris children see Richard D. Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts 1629-1736* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1974), 3-4, 24, 30, 32, 93.

right behavior from a husband whose treatment of his wife was less solicitous than desired. Fiske, who in January of 1645 was “propounded as desiring church fellowship” with the Wenham congregation, had a reputation for complaining openly about the way that her husband treated her. Fiske, for example, was known for “exclaiming against him [her husband] commonly.” Specifically, Fiske had stated that her husband, Phineas, was “an enemy,” and that “he loved another woman better than his wife.” She also accused him of “not praying with her and for her and not sympathizing with her condition,” with “want of love” towards her, and with “sending a false report of his wife” to another. Although Phineas Fiske was, by all accounts, a respected member of the Wenham congregation, often accompanying Minister John Fiske on congregational business, John Fiske noted in his diary that, with respect to Phineas and Sarah Fiske, “where there is so much smoke there is some fire,” suggesting that at least some of Sarah’s complaints were valid.¹⁹

Sarah Fiske’s complaints about her husband, who was already a full member of the Wenham church, were also known to others in the congregation and initially proved to be a stumbling block to her own church membership. During a meeting to evaluate Fiske’s worthiness for potential membership, for example, it was suggested by someone in the congregation that in making her complaints publicly known, Fiske’s “carriage towards her husband” may have been evidence that she was not fit for church fellowship.

¹⁹ John Fiske, *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Volume XLVII Collections, The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske, 1644-1675*, ed. Robert G. Pope (Boston: Published by the Society, 1974), 21, 22, 28, 26, 27 (hereafter cited as *Notebook*); For biographical information on Sarah (Francis) Fiske and Phineas Fiske see *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* Vol. 88 (Boston: New England Historic and Genealogical Society, 1934), 88:271. Phineas and Sarah Fiske, along with their children, emigrated from England to Salem on or before 1641. The couple were married in 1617 and had at least four children born in England. They relocated from Salem to Wenham in 1644. One year after Sarah’s death, Phineas married Elizabeth Eastwick. Phineas Fiske died on April 7, 1673.

In keeping with congregational discipline practices, perhaps Fiske should have first taken her complaints about her husband to an elder who could have dealt with Phineas in private; there is no evidence that she did. During the meeting to evaluate her fitness for membership, someone pointed out that Fiske had also spoken out of turn when she “challenge[d] sister White for a debt” on the Lord’s Day, a “miscarriage” that further called into question her suitability for membership and painted a picture of a woman who had trouble knowing when to hold her tongue.²⁰

At Wenham, as at other Congregational churches, after an individual had been “propounded” or applied for membership, the church set aside a period of time during which comment on the suitability of said applicant could be received by church elders. This process allowed the congregation to evaluate who was and was not “meet for church fellowship.” If anyone had a grievance against the potential member or was aware of sinful behavior which needed to be addressed, this was the time for the applicant to make amends, usually through public acknowledgement and apology so that the church received “satisfaction” regarding the applicant’s repentance. Only after repentance was assured could applicants give their testimony of saving grace and public confession of faith and be received into full church membership. Those who were found to be “yet uncalled and in the state of nature” were rejected from fellowship for the time being.²¹

Sarah Fiske’s complaints about her husband’s behavior, however, not only resulted in questions regarding her suitability for membership, they also set in motion a

²⁰ Fiske, *Notebook*, 22; On distinctions between private and public offenses see Oberholzer, Jr., *Delinquent Saints*, 30-31.

²¹ Fiske, *Notebook*, 21-22; On the procedure for church admission see Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 88-89.

series of church meetings intended to determine whether her husband was innocent or guilty of the charges that she had levied against him. If Brother Fiske was found guilty, it was the responsibility of the church “to convince him and bring him to repentance,” according to Wenham’s minister, John Fiske. The result of a series of meetings and testimony by others in the congregation was that both Phineas and Sarah Fiske were asked to confess their “failings” towards each other. Phineas stated that he “did not act so tender toward her [Sarah] as he might have done and was sorry for it.” Sara acknowledged that “she should have kept secret” some of her complaints about her husband as was “the duty of a wife.” During the meetings to establish his guilt or innocence, Phineas defended himself against particular charges but, as befits someone who was already operating from a position of strength, did not make any counter accusations against his wife. The disciplinary process, which sought acknowledgement of sin, repentance, and the restoration of peaceful fellowship between all church members, therefore, ultimately worked in Sarah Fiske’s favor as she received both an apology from her husband and the church membership which she desired.²²

Had Sarah Fiske complained of desertion or adultery, the courts would have been the appropriate venue in which to seek justice, often with church members serving as witness to the wife’s grievance, as previously illustrated. When a husband was not living up to his responsibilities as spelled out in scripture and reinforced in weekly sermons, however, the nature of the disciplinary structure of the church and the covenantal belief that members were called to live in harmony with each other—to the “mutuall buldinge up of one another in the Fellowship of the Lord jesus”—benefited women such as Sarah

²² Fiske, *Notebook*, 25-26.

Fiske. On December 5, 1645, “the covenant was administered to the wife of our Brother Phineas Fiske” and Sarah Fiske became a member of the Wenham church. One can only assume that the couple managed to cohabit peacefully until Sarah’s death in 1659 since the pair is not mentioned in Minister John Fiske’s *Notebook* again.²³

The Case of Ann Leonard

When newlywed Ann Leonard found herself trapped in an abusive marriage, she discovered that the support of men and women from several Boston Congregational churches was essential to her very survival. When Ann Henden married Henry Leonard on December 2, 1741 in Newbury, Massachusetts she probably never imagined she would find herself in court barely two years later petitioning for divorce. Even though Ann and Henry were both residents of Boston, their wedding took place at Newbury’s Queen Anne’s Chapel, an Episcopal church. The choice of Queen Anne’s indicates at least a nominal affiliation with Anglicanism, likely on Henry’s part given the later turn of events. Perhaps problems arose for the young couple when they returned to Boston and Ann started attending one of several local Congregational churches. Perhaps Henry would have preferred that Anne attend Boston’s Anglican King’s Chapel. One of the reasons that Ann gave for requesting a divorce from Henry was that he kept her from attending church, according to court documents. Whether it was Ann’s choice of a church, Congregational versus Anglican, or simply the fact that she attended church which raised Henry’s ire is impossible to know. Whatever Henry’s rationale was for keeping Ann from public worship, he was unable to prevent her Congregational brethren

²³ Fiske, *Notebook*, 1, 40.

and sisters from coming to her aid and testifying in court on her behalf when the marriage turned violent.²⁴

Ann and Henry had been married for less than two years when their names begin appearing in the court records. On September 16, 1743, John Milliken told the court about Henry Leonard's cruelty towards his wife, Ann. Milliken then added that Leonard turned his anger on him [Milliken] when Milliken confronted Leonard about rumors that Ann had been tricked into boarding a vessel bound for Newfoundland, and was sold into slavery. John's wife Rebecca also testified that Henry locked Ann out of the house one night and sent her to Newfoundland.²⁵

Two months after John and Rebecca Milliken's testimony on behalf of Ann, Henry's abusive behavior was corroborated by the additional testimony of five female witnesses. On November 25, 1743, Mary Timberlake told the court that she gave Ann Leonard shelter in her home after Ann attempted suicide because of Henry's cruel behavior. Ann Cushing also took Ann Leonard into her home after Henry locked his wife out of the house one stormy night following a physical altercation that left Ann bruised. Lydia Worthylake told the court that her neighbor, Henry Leonard, drank and kept company with "bad women" and kept Ann from public worship. Isanner Hichborn reported that Ann told her that she feared Henry would kill her if she returned to her [Ann's] home. The following day, on November 26, Dammarus Dorrington testified that she too took her neighbor, Ann Leonard, into her home after Henry Leonard locked Ann

²⁴ *Vital Records of Newbury Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849* Vol. II Marriages and Deaths (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1911), 2:227; Massachusetts Archives Collection (1629-1799) vol. 009:268.

²⁵ Massachusetts Archives Collection (1629-1799) vol. 009:278, 280.

out of his. Ann's own petition to the General Court stated that she was seeking a divorce from Henry on grounds of physical abuse, that he prevented her from attending church, that he kept company with other women, and that he tried to sell her into slavery.²⁶

Despite Henry Leonard's denial in court of any and all charges against him, on January 3, 1744, the judicial council saw fit to grant Ann a divorce from Henry on grounds of cruelty and ordered that Henry financially provide for and maintain a separate residence for Ann or risk arrest. Based on the court's statement, that it was granting Ann a divorce because of Henry's cruel treatment of her, it is possible that Ann's case against Henry could have gone the other way if not for the evidentiary support offered by Ann's Congregational sisters and brother.²⁷

By the time that Ann finally obtained her divorce, she had endured two years of emotional and physical abuse, and as illustrated by court records, had turned for help to individuals who were connected either through full or half way membership or baptism to one of several Boston Congregational churches: Brattle Street, New North, New Brick, and Old South. John and Rebecca Milliken were married by William Cooper, minister at the Brattle Street Church, and John was a full member of the Brattle Street congregation. George and Judeth Colesworthy, who took Ann into their home after she filed for divorce from Henry, were married by Peter Thacher of the New North Congregational Church and likely attended there. Mary Timberlake was a full member of the Brattle Street congregation, having joined in 1717. Lydia Worthylake was baptized at Brattle Street in 1745. Isanner Hichborn became a half way member at the New Brick Church in 1742

²⁶ Massachusetts Archives Collection (1629-1799) vol. 009:283, 284, 286, 287, 288, 268.

²⁷ Massachusetts Archives Collection (1629-1799) vol. 009:274, 292.

while Dammarus Dorrington had four of her children baptized at the Old South Church, indicating that she was either a full or a half way member. The only person for whom church affiliation can not be conclusively established is Ann Cushing, yet church records are notoriously incomplete, and just because evidence of membership can not be substantiated does not mean that Cushing did not attend public meetings.²⁸

Ann Leonard's own church membership can not be confirmed even though it is clear, based on Ann's court testimony and that of Lydia Worthylake, that Ann both attended, and was prevented from attending, public meetings. When Ann stated in her petition for divorce that Henry kept her from public worship she did not say which church she attended, and unfortunately, none of the extant records for Brattle Street, Old South, New North, King's Chapel, or New Brick Church lists Ann as a member. Perhaps between Sabbath meetings and Thursday lectures Ann attended several churches. She may have even been in the process of contemplating church membership, complicated as it might have been by Henry's resistance to church attendance. Yet Ann did attend church, and since Lydia Worthylake was baptized at Brattle Street and testified that Henry sometimes kept Ann from public meetings, it is possible that the two women attended Brattle Street together along with Mary Timberlake and John and Rebecca

²⁸ In the early decades of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, marriage was a civil and not an ecclesiastical contract and was performed by a magistrate rather than a minister. By the later decades of the seventeenth-century, however, ministers were performing marriages. Carl Holliday, *Women's Life in Colonial Days* (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922), 258; On John Milliken/Milleken see *The Manifesto Church*, 98; *Boston, MA: Marriages, 1700-1809*. (Online database: *AmericanAncestors.org*, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2006), 145, Originally published as: *Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Containing the Boston Marriages from 1700 to 1751* (Vol. 28), Boston, Municipal Printing office, 1898; On George and Judeth Colesworthy see *Boston, MA: Marriages*, 131; On Mary Timberlake see *The Manifesto Church*, 105; On Lydia Worthylake see *The Manifesto Church*, 168; On Isanner Hichborn see "Boston Church Records" The Records of the Churches of Boston. CD_ROM. Boston, Mass.: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002. (Online database. *AmericanAncestors.org*. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2008) *Records of the New Brick Church Boston, Baptisms Owned, Covenants, New Brick Church 1722-1776*, 39; On Dammarus Dorrington see "Boston Church Records" The Records of the Churches of Boston, *Records of the Second Church, Boston*, 58.

Milliken. Regardless of which meetinghouse she attended, of the nine individuals—seven women and two men—who stood by Ann’s side during this troubling period in her life, eight had direct connections with one of Boston’s Congregational churches, thus demonstrating that one’s brothers and sisters in Christ could be a valuable source of support during some of the most vulnerable times of a woman’s life. Unlike other women in Puritan society — such as Judith Hull, wife of John Hull, Mintmaster and Treasurer for the colony — who married men of higher status and wealth, Ann Leonard had little in the way of worldly resources to recommend her as someone worthy of assistance. She did, however, have the support of men and women who all shared a common faith, and that proved to be enough for Ann Leonard.

Witchcraft Trials and the Church

The covenantal relationships that women such as Joane Halsall, Ann Leonard, Mary Harris, Mary Woodbery, and Sarah Fiske shared with their sisters and brethren not only meant that they received help during times of marital duress, the high status that full church members enjoyed within society and the aid and assistance that believers provided each other also made the difference between life and death, as during the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692. Petitions and statements of support offered to the court and signed by one’s fellow church members, minister(s), and church deacon(s) played a key role in helping at least eight women full church members—Mary Bradbury, Elizabeth Proctor, Sarah Buckley, Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson Sr., and Abigail Barker—and one non church member, Dorcas Hoar, either avoid execution and/or gain release from prison during the Witchcraft Trials. Petitions or statements

signed by one's minister and/or deacon proved especially influential. These petitions, such as the one offered on January 3, 1693 for Osgood, Frye, Dane, Wilson Sr., and Barker—signed by fifty-three individuals, including two ministers and a deacon from North Andover church—also had the effect of chastising the court and argued that when “persons of known integrity and piety were accused of so horrid a crime” that a “misrepresentation of the truth” had indeed transpired.²⁹

To be clear, being a full church member did not prevent one from being accused, indicted, or convicted of witchcraft or from being executed on charges of signing the Devil's book, as the cases of Rebecca Nurse, Martha Corey, Mary Esty, and Sarah Wilds illustrate. Of the fourteen women hanged for witchcraft, only four—Nurse, Corey, Esty, and Wilds—were full church members. Of these four women, petitions and statements of support were drawn up for only two: Nurse and Esty. Although each defendant had the right to present evidence favorable to her case at trial, few accused apparently did so. Significantly, none of the petitions and statements for Nurse and Esty was signed by a minister or deacon, nor was a petition for Nurse, which was signed by thirty-nine persons from Salem Village and church, apparently ever used at trial. Additionally, the content of the extant petitions for Nurse and Esty also differs from other petitions offered on behalf of those who avoided execution and was as likely to be detrimental as it was to be helpful. One petition for Nurse, for example, stated that she was “a woman of An unruly turbulent Spirit.” In contrast, the petitions offered for the other nine women tended to

²⁹ Dudley Bradstreet et al, “Petition for Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson Sr., & Abigail Barker,” in *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*, ed. Bernard Rosenthal (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 738-40 (hereafter cited as *RSWH*). In his General Introduction, Rosenthal makes a point similar to mine, that “people in powerful positions . . . found ways to escape” (22). Rosenthal does not, however, specify what constituted a “powerful position” or “high-status,” while I argue that for many women, their high-status was due to their role as full church members and the social connections that such membership engendered as much as it was due to status and connections via marriage or birth.

emphasize their Godly characteristics such as the extent to which these women were faithful and diligent in their church attendance, among other attributes.³⁰

Statements offered by family and friends on behalf of those women who were not full church members and were hanged also carried little weight. As based on the outcome, these statements, such as the one given for Elizabeth How by three neighbors, attesting that “hur wordes & actions wer always such as well become a good Christian,” simply did not carry the same weight as a petition or statement presented on behalf of the accused by their minister, church deacon, and fellow church members. In How’s case, Elizabeth How was not a full church member and had, in fact, been rejected from membership in the Ipswich church because of prior charges of witchcraft. Despite the statement of support offered by How’s neighbors, How was hanged on July 19, 1692 for the crime of witchcraft.³¹

Since the punishment for those convicted of witchcraft was death—“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” Exodus 22:18—only two strategies typically proved effective

³⁰ Nurse and Wilds were hanged on July 19, 1692, while Corey was hanged several months later on September 22, 1692; Rebecca Nurse was a full member of the First Church in Salem joining in 1672 and was one of the first to be executed for witchcraft. Just two weeks before her execution, on July 3, 1692, the Salem church excommunicated her. In 1712, however, the church “Rased and blotted out” her excommunication “that it may no longer be a Reproach to her Memory, and an Occasion of grieffe to her Children.” Pierce, ed., *Records of the First Church Salem*, 127, 219; Martha Corey was a member of the Church at the Village of Danvers joining in 1690. Her husband, Giles Corey, was a member of the First Church in Salem which also excommunicated him after he was found guilty of witchcraft. Like Rebecca Nurse, Giles Corey’s excommunication was later overturned. For biographical data on the Corey’s see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*. 1:460, Pierce, ed., *Records of the First Church Salem*, 170, 173, 219; Sarah Wilds was a member of the Topsfield church; Petitions and statements of support for Nurse and Esty appear in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 162, 349, 380, 432-435, 589, 624. For a useful list containing the names of all those accused in the 1692 Salem outbreak see Koehler, *Search for Power*, 480-90; On the right of the accused to present evidence favorable to their case see *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 52,53;

³¹ “Statement of Daniel Warner, John Warner, & Sarah Warner for Elizabeth How,” in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 398-99. For biographical data on Elizabeth How see Enders A. Robinson, *The Devil Discovered: Salem Witchcraft 1692* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991), 301-5; *The Devil Discovered* contains biographical sketches on the first seventy-five individuals accused of witchcraft in Salem in 1692. Robinson’s book, however, is short on footnotes that would support his work.

in escaping the gallows in 1692: confession by the accused, and the presentation of persuasive statements or petitions on behalf of the defendant to the court by “persons of good report.” Mary Towne Esty, who had been convicted of practicing witchcraft but steadfastly maintained her innocence, had hoped to provide the court with just such a statement. Along with Sarah Cloyce, Esty, a full member of the Topsfield church and the sister of Rebecca Nurse and Cloyce, petitioned the court on September 9, 1692 requesting that

Those who haue had the Longest and best knowledge of us, being persons of good report, may be suffered to Testifie upon oath what they know concerning each of us, viz Mr. Capen the Pastour and those of the Towne & Church of Topsfield, who are ready to say something which we hope may be looked upon, as very considerable in this matter.³²

In other words, on the same day that her trial was held, September 9, 1692, Mary Esty asked the court to allow her pastor, fellow church members, and neighbors to be character witnesses for both herself and Cloyce.

Whether Esty’s request asking the court to allow the testimony of her pastor and fellow church members was successful or not is unknown, given that no actual trial records survive for June, August, and September of 1692. Since the request was made as a “petition to allow sworn testimony on behalf of both women” rather than as a “formal

³² For works which discuss the connection between confession and survival see Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 126, ch. 4; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 214-16; Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42-43, 151-58; Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 155-59; Richard Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion: Religion and Magic in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 204-11; David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 192-3; Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 39, 148; Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, 223; Sarah Cloyce and Mary Esty, “Petition of Sarah Cloyce & Mary Esty” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 620; For records of Mary and Isaak Estie’s church membership see John H. Gould ed., *Early Records of the Church in Topsfield*, Essex Institute Historical Collection XXIV (1887), 5.

plea,” the admission of such testimony seems unlikely. It seems unlikely because contemporary legal practices forbade individuals from swearing an oath, either on their own or someone else’s behalf. Oaths, it was believed, would endanger one’s soul, while unsworn testimony was permitted, and was sometimes given at the Salem trials. Those who stood ready to testify on Esty’s behalf apparently did not commit their statements to writing. Had they done so, Esty could have presented them in court herself as physical evidence. Regardless, Esty’s “hope” and belief that testimony by influential church members would have a “considerable” and positive effect on the outcome of her case illustrates the importance of such support by high-status individuals to those convicted of witchcraft. Statements from jailers John and Mary Arnold in Boston describing Esty’s behavior in custody as “Sabere [sober] and ciuell [civil]” are extant and were likely used at trial, but had no impact on the outcome of Esty’s case. Just thirteen days after making her plea, Esty was hanged. Had Pastor Joseph Capen and the members of the Topsfield First Congregational Church been allowed to testify or even submitted their statements about Esty’s Christian character in writing, the results for Mary Esty might have been different, as they were for four other women full church members convicted of witchcraft.³³

³³ *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 620. For information on seventeenth-century trials and legal practices such as swearing oaths see *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 21, 53; Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil’s Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 156-57. According to Hoffer, trials during this period were brief affairs, often over in an hour or two; Mary Beth Norton in *In the Devil’s Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) states that “she [Esty] also called as character witnesses her children, her pastor, and various members of the Topsfield church,” however, no evidence exists to confirm that these witnesses were actually called, only that Esty wanted to call them and that they were ready to testify (Norton, 271); John Arnold and Mary Arnold, “Statements of John Arnold & Mary Arnold for Mary Esty & Sarah Cloyce,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 624. In his notes, Rosenthal states that the statement of the Arnolds was “possibly used at trial” (624).

Like Esty, four other women full church members had also steadfastly maintained their innocence throughout the proceedings, and although they were also convicted of witchcraft, all four women avoided execution, a remarkable feat given that from July to September, the court had shown a propensity to execute those who denied the charges against them, while sparing those who confessed. The one thing that all four women had in common was that their minister(s), deacon(s), and church members submitted petitions or testimony on their behalf. Mary Bradbury, for example, had both a petition and testimony offered in her defense. On July 22, 1692, 112 individuals offered what would be the largest petition of its kind in support of an accused witch during the Salem trials. Those whose names were ascribed to the petition agreed that

Wee the Subscribers doe testifie: that it was such as became the gospel shee was a louer of the ministrie in all appearance & a diligent attender vpon gods holy ordinances, being of a curteous, & peacable disposition & cariag: neither did any of vs (some of whom haue lived in the town with her aboue fifty yeare ever heare or know that shee ever had any difference or flaling oute with any of her neighbors man woman or childe but was always readie & willing to doe for them what laye in her power night & day ...

Seventy-seven year old Mary Bradbury was a full member of the First Church in Salisbury, and among those whose names appeared on the July petition, forty-two individuals had verifiable connections to the Salisbury church as either full or half-way members. Both deacons at Salisbury First, William Buswell and Henry Brown, also signed the petition.³⁴

On September 7, 1692, two days before Bradbury's trial began, James Allin, her minister at the First Church in Salisbury, gave a sworn oath in which he stated that

³⁴ On the court's practice of executing those who denied the charges against them see *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 85; "Petition in Support of Mary Bradbury," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 483-84; For a brief biographical sketch of Bradbury see Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, 333-35.

to my best notice & observation of Mrs. Bradbury she hath lived according to the rules of the gospel, amongst us. was a constant attender upon the ministry of the word; & all the ordinances of the gospel; full of works of charity & mercy to the sick & poor neither have I seen or heard any thing of her unbecoming the proffession of the gospel.

Robert Pike, another full member of the Salisbury church and someone who had known Bradbury for “vpward of fifty years,” recorded Allin’s oath in writing, and Pike’s son, John, who was the minister at the Dover, New Hampshire First Congregational Church, witnessed and affirmed it. Given that no trial records are extant, as with Esty, it is impossible to know with certainty whether Allin’s written testimony was permitted at trial. Bernard Rosenthal, editor of the *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*, states that Allin may have given “unsworn testimony at the trial.” Perhaps Bradbury presented the written statement from Allin herself. Regardless, with the testimony by James Allin, Bradbury not only had the publicly acknowledged support of the deacons and members of Salisbury First, she had the unquestioned support of its minister who praised her faithful attendance at public meetings and her works of charity in caring for those less fortunate than herself.³⁵

Two days after Allin’s testimony, on September 9, 1692, Mary Bradbury’s trial was held, and Bradbury, along with Martha Corey, Mary Esty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, and Dorcas Hoar, was found guilty and condemned to die. On September 22, Corey, Esty, Parker, and Pudeator were hanged. Bradbury, however, was not, nor was Dorcas Hoar, who received a stay of execution after a petition was offered on her behalf

³⁵ “Testimony of James Allen, Robert Pike, & John Pike for Mary Bradbury,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 603-4. According to Rosenthal, Allen’s sworn testimony would probably not have been accepted at her trial, “although one may speculate that he might have given unsworn testimony at the trial” (604).

by three ministers. Mary Bradbury, according to an October 8, 1692 letter drafted by contemporary Thomas Brattle, although condemned, was not hanged due to “the intercession of some friends.” Not only was Bradbury not hanged, but sometime between October 8, 1692, when Brattle wrote his letter, and December 1692, Bradbury “made her escape” from the jail. The Essex County authorities, according to Brattle, simply chose not to pursue the recapture of those, such as Bradbury, who had escaped.³⁶

That the authorities allowed Bradbury to remain in prison while those who had been condemned alongside her were removed and hanged, and that they did not pursue her recapture after she had escaped, speaks to the high esteem with which she was regarded. Although Brattle’s letter does not name those who were responsible for Bradbury’s reprieve or those who abetted her escape, it is not altogether unreasonable to assume that help came from the ranks of her fellow Salisbury church members, given that these were the individuals who submitted petitions on her behalf. Did Robert Pike, Salisbury church member, petition recorder, and assistant to the Governor, have anything to do with aiding the seventy-seven year old Bradbury in her escape? While Bradbury’s eminence in society was due, no doubt, in part to her husband’s position as a militia captain, the petitions submitted on her behalf made no mention of her husband or his position in society as the basis for their high esteem of her. Instead both petitions offered

³⁶ Thomas Brattle, “Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692,” in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1914), 185, 178; Others who escaped from prison yet were not recaptured included: Mrs. Nathaniel Cary, of Charlestown, Mr. and Mrs. Philip English of Salem, and John Alden of Boston (Brattle, 178); “Petition of Jane True & Henry True for Restitution for Mary Bradbury,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 858; Regarding the date of Bradbury’s escape, in the 1710 “Petition of Jane True & Henry True for Restitution for Mary Bradbury” in which Bradbury’s children request restitution for the expenses of their mother’s imprisonment, Jane and Henry True state they believe that “She Indured aboute Six months Imprisonment” (Rosenthal, 857). Since Bradbury was not imprisoned until June 29, 1692 and served about six months in jail, she made her escape sometime around December, 1692; On Bradbury’s date of imprisonment see “Account for Payment Submitted by William Baker, Constable [?],” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 830-31.

in Bradbury's defense praised her faithful attendance at public meetings, her works of charity, her peace loving disposition, and her support of the ministry. In short, it was her status as a full member of the Salisbury church, her reputation as an ideal Puritan woman, and the aid and assistance of her fellow believers that saved her from the gallows.

Full church member Sarah Buckley and her husband, William, originally of Ipswich, were living in Salem when Sarah, like Mary Bradbury, found herself arrested and jailed for "high Suspicion of Sundry acts of Witchcraft." About a month after she was arrested, Buckley's former minister at Ipswich, the Reverend William Hubbard who had known Buckley for almost fifty years, submitted a petition on her behalf testifying about Buckley's Christian character and expressing his surprise that she had even been accused of such a crime. As Hubbard states,

These are to certyfye whom it may or shall concerne that I haue known Sarah the wife of William Buckley of Salem Uillage more or less ever since she was brought out of England which is above fifty yeares agoe and during all the time I neuer knew nor heard of any euill in her carriage or conuersation unbicomming a christian: likewise she was bred up by christian parents all the time she liued here att Ipswich [.] I further Satisfye that the said Sarah was admitted as a member into the church of Ipswich aboue forty yeares since: and that I neuer heard from others or obserued by my selfe any thing of her that was inconsistent with her profession or unsuitable to christianity either in word deed or conuersation and am straingly surprised that any person should speake or thinke of her as one worthy to be Suspected of any such crime that she is now charged with in testimony hereof I haue here sett my hand this 20th of June 1692.³⁷

As with Mary Bradbury, Sarah Buckley also maintained her innocence in the face of testimony against her. During her May 18, 1692 examination, for example, even though she was "pressed to confess," Buckley insisted that "she was Innocent." While both Bradbury and Buckley pled innocent to the charges against them, they came from different economic situations, making Buckley's reputation as a Christian goodwife even

³⁷ "Testimony of William Hubbard for Sarah Buckley," in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 396-97.

more crucial to her defense. Unlike Bradbury, Buckley was poor and lacked the social connections that Bradbury had with someone such as Robert Pike. Buckley's husband, William, was a shoemaker, and by all accounts, the couple had struggled financially in the years leading up to their move to Salem. While Mary Bradbury's support during the witch trials was largely due to her status as a full church member, it was also to her advantage that her husband held a prominent position in society as a militia captain. In contrast to Bradbury, Buckley's husband occupied a humble position in society. Sarah Buckley's support during the witchcraft trials was entirely due to her position as a full church member, as the petitions on her behalf demonstrate.³⁸

The timing of Buckley's trial also proved key to her survival. As previously stated, while Bradbury had escaped from prison sometime during December of 1692, Buckley was still incarcerated and awaiting trial on January 1, 1693. Buckley was part of a group of accused who had appeared before the Grand Jury of the Court of Oyer and Terminer between September 14 and 16, yet unlike the other accused, Buckley was not brought to trial in September. Margaret Scott, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker, on the other hand, had all faced the Grand Jury during the same three day period as Buckley, and all three were tried and then hanged on September 22, 1692. Circumstances suggest that Hubbard's June petition on behalf of Buckley may have played a role in delaying her trial, which did not take place until January 1693 under the new Superior Court of Judicature. Nothing else in the extant record suggests a possible motive for delaying Buckley's trial except the existence of Hubbard's petition.

³⁸ "Examination of Sarah Buckley," in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 283-84; For biographical information on Buckley see Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, 355-57.

When Buckley's trial date finally came on January 4, 1693, petitions by two additional ministers were offered in her defense. At the behest of Buckley's husband, on January 2, 1693, the Reverend John Higginson, Sr. of Salem First and the Reverend Samuel Cheever of Marblehead First stepped forward to provide written testimony on her behalf. No doubt fearing for his wife's life, William Buckley turned to two men who knew his wife well enough, via her church membership, and who carried the kind of social standing that might help her escape the gallows. As Higginson stated in his petition,

during the time of her living in Salem for many years in communion with this Church having occasionally frequent converse & discourse with her, I haue neuer observed myself nor heard from any other any thing that was vnsuitable to a Conversation becoming the Gospel; & haue always looked vpon her as a serious Godly woman.

Cheever offered a similar testimonial when he wrote that

having had the like opportunity by her residence many years att Marblehead, I can do no less then give the alike testimony for her pious conversation; during her abode in this place and communion with us.

Two days after Higginson and Cheever gave their written testimony, Sarah Buckley was tried, "made her Defence," which likely included the testimony by Higginson and Cheever, and was found "not Guilty of the ffelony by witchcraft." Buckley was then ordered discharged after paying court fees. By the end of the month, Sarah Buckley was back home, poorer for the costs of being incarcerated, but free thanks in no small part to testimony about her Godly character and her pious conversation and lifestyle.³⁹

³⁹ "Testimony of John Higginson Sr. & Samuel Cheever for Sarah Buckley," in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 735; "Court Record of the Trial of Sarah Buckley," in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 745. Also tried and found not guilty on January 4, 1693 were Margaret Jacobs, who had pled guilty, and Mary Whittredge, who was Buckley's grown daughter; In 1710 Sarah Buckley's son, William, petitioned the court for financial restitution of costs that the family was "forced to pay" to obtain his mother and sister's release from prison per "Petition of William Buckley for Restitution for Sarah Buckley & Mary Whittredge," in *RSWH*, ed. Rosenthal, 863.

Like Mary Bradbury, Dorcas Hoar was also convicted and sentenced to be hanged for the crime of witchcraft. Given Hoar's past—it was rumored she was a “fortune teller” and had been charged in court with receiving stolen goods belonging to the Reverend John Hale—it was not surprising that Dorcas Hoar was accused of witchcraft. What was surprising was that Hale, who was called to testify against Hoar on September 6, 1692, would later petition the court for a stay of execution on her behalf.⁴⁰

Although she was not a member of John Hale's Beverly First Congregational church, Dorcas Hoar had known Hale for at least two decades at the time she was charged with witchcraft. Hoar's father, John Gally, was a founding member of the Beverly church in 1667 and Hale was its first minister. Having been raised in the Salem church as a child, Hoar likely attended the Beverly church as an adult. In 1678 Hoar's husband William and her son Samuel were “admonished” by the court for “neglecting the public ordinances,” suggesting that Hoar had been attending public worship or she too would have been admonished. Thus Hale had been acquainted with Hoar for many years when, upon hearing that she had been committed to the Boston prison, he went to see her in May of 1692 to “speak with her of many things that I had known & heard of her.” During his visit he questioned her directly about her recent activities, asking her whether she had been “seeing the devil” or practicing fortunetelling. Her answers must have satisfied Hale because when he was later called to testify against Hoar at her September

⁴⁰ For John Hale's court testimony regarding the theft charge against Hoar see “Testimony of John Hale v. Dorcas Hoar,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 593-94; For court records of the 1678 theft case in which “William Hoar and his wife, Goody Harris and Goody Johnson, being under great suspicion of receiving stolen goods of Margaret Lord, Mr. Hale's maid . . . and having stolen goods found in some of their houses, were to pay costs” see *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* vol. II, 42-55. For a paper on the “connections between deprivation, theft, and witchcraft accusations in the case of Dorcas Hoar” see Barbara Ritter Dailey, “Where Thieves Break Through and Steal’: John Hale versus Dorcas Hoar, 1672-1692,” in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 128 (October, 1992): 255-69.

1692 trial, he portrayed her in a positive light, recalling how in 1670 she had “manifested to me great repentance for the sins of her former life.”⁴¹

Hale’s testimony notwithstanding, enough other Beverly residents testified against Hoar that she was found guilty and sentenced to hang on September 22, 1692. At the last minute, however, Dorcas Hoar confessed to the charges against her, making her, according to Samuel Sewall, “the first condemned person who has confess’d.” Hoar either confessed to Hale or Hale got word about Hoar’s confession because Hale, along with Nicholas Noyes, minister at Salem First, Daniel Epes, a prominent member of Salem First, and John Emerson, Jr. also a minister, quickly submitted a petition on September 21, 1692, the day before Hoar’s scheduled execution, requesting that she be granted “a little longer time of life to realie & perfect her repentance for the salvation of her soule.” The men asked for “one months time, or more to prepare for death and eternity.” The plea by these four influential men was granted. Not only was Hoar not executed the following day, she survived in prison five more months before she was released, probably in February of 1693.⁴²

⁴¹ For background on Dorcas Hoar’s father see Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem, Mass., 1926), 2:173, 407, 416, 417; *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* (Salem, Mass., 1911-21, 1975), 7:81, 181-82; “Testimony of John Hale v. Dorcas Hoar,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 593-94.

⁴² Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall 1674-1729 Newly Edited From the Manuscript At the Massachusetts Historical Society by M. Halsey Thomas* vol. I 1674-1708, ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 1:296; “Petition of John Hale, Nicholas Noyes, Daniel Epps Jr., & John Emerson, Jr. for Dorcas Hoar,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 673-74; In “Where Thieves Break Through and Steal’: John Hale versus Dorcas Hoar, 1672-1692,” Dailey mistakenly states that the witchcraft trials ended before Dorcas Hoar’s execution could be rescheduled and that she had saved her life by “confessing allegiance to the Devil (268). In fact, the trials resumed in January 1693 under the new Superior Court of Judicature which, according to Norton in *Devil’s Snare*, “acquired the responsibility for dealing with the many suspected witches who were either still jailed or had recently been released on bond to await their trials” (290). In late January, Dorcas Hoar, along with five other women, remained in jail, convicted but not yet executed. In late February, Governor Phips reprieved the women. See Norton, *Devil’s Snare*, 292, 407 n. 58.

Enough controversy surrounded Dorcas Hoar's family, especially her husband William, who had been charged in court in 1678 with using "threatening speeches to Mr. Hale," that Hoar was probably not esteemed as the model of Christian virtue by her peers, as were Mary Bradbury and Sarah Buckley, for example. Women's reputations and fortunes, for good or ill during this era, were tied to those of their husbands. Yet something about Hoar made her worthy of Hale's time and attention. If not for the petition by Hale, Noyes, Epes, and Emerson, which was a direct result of Hoar's long-standing relationship with the Hale, Dorcas Hoar surely would have been put to death on September 22.⁴³

At Elizabeth Proctor's examination for witchcraft on April 11, 1692, Proctor, like Bradbury, Buckley, and Hoar, also insisted that she was innocent. When asked to respond to charges that she had choked, bit, pinched, brought the Devil's book, and stopped the breath of her victims, Goody Proctor answered, "I take God in heaven to be my witness, that I know nothing of it, no more than the child unborn": a colloquial phrase also used by other accused that would have been understood by Proctor's contemporaries to mean that she was innocent. On August 5, 1692, Elizabeth Proctor, along with her husband, John Proctor, and another man, George Burroughs, went to trial, were found guilty, and were sentenced to be executed. Two weeks later, on August 19, 1692, Burroughs and John Proctor were hanged along with several others. As Samuel Sewall records in his diary, "Dolefull! Witchcraft George Burrough, John Willard, John Procter, Martha Carrier and George Jacobs were executed at Salem, a very great number of

⁴³ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*, 7:181.

Spectators being present.” Although she was sentenced to die, Elizabeth was not executed but remained in prison.⁴⁴

Elizabeth Proctor was not executed on August 19, 1692, because she “pleaded Pregnancy,” according to contemporary Robert Calef, a pregnancy that would later prove to be “pretend” in the words of another contemporary, Thomas Brattle. Proctor’s claim to be pregnant, however, bought her just enough time for the tide of public opinion regarding the trials to turn—which it began to do by mid-October—and for petitions and testimony by Salem First and Essex First church members, deacons, and ministers offered on her behalf to raise doubts about her guilt. When Governor Phips returned to Boston in mid-October he wrote that “I found many persons in a strange ferment of dissatisfaction” regarding the court’s proceedings. Twenty people had been convicted and nineteen executed. At least some of these persons were “doubtless innocent,” according to Phips. Thus in mid-October when Phips ordered that those who had already been committed should be sheltered from any further action against them if there was the “least suspicion” that they were “Innocent,” six petitions used in evidence during the Proctors’ August trial likely assumed greater importance than they had just nine weeks earlier. Although the petitions had no impact on the August verdict in which both John and Elizabeth were sentenced to be hanged, as time passed and the veracity of the trials themselves began to

⁴⁴ “Examination of Sarah Cloyce & Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 173-74; For others accused of witchcraft who made similar remarks see “Examination of George Jacobs Sr.,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 251-53. On May 10, 1692, George Jacobs stated, “I am as innocent as the child born to night.”; “Examination of Rebecca Nurse,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 157-59. On March 24, 1692, Rebecca Nurse said, “I am as clear as the child unborn.”; Sewall, *Diary*, 1:294.

be called into question, petitions such as those on behalf of the Proctors must have added weight to suspicions that were beginning to be cast upon the entire proceedings.⁴⁵

As with Mary Bradbury, while John and Elizabeth Proctor were imprisoned fellow church members and neighbors had come forward to offer their support. In total six petitions were presented at trial: two for both John and Elizabeth and four for Elizabeth alone. The first petition used in evidence contains the names of twenty different individuals, thirteen men and seven women, the majority of whom were either full or halfway church members at the Salem First Church where the Proctors attended. To those who knew the Proctors, it was inconceivable that they could be found “guilty of the crime now charged upon them.” Based on their personal knowledge and observations, those who signed the petition viewed the Proctors as a couple who “lived [a] Christian life in their family and were ever ready to helpe such as stood in need of their helpe.”⁴⁶

A second petition in support of both John and Elizabeth contains the names of thirty-one men, including John Wise, minister of the Essex First Congregational Church,

⁴⁵ Robert Calef, “More Wonders of the Invisible World,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 360. Calef was a contemporary of Proctor but did not witness the trials. His book was published seven years after the trials had ended; In contrast to Abigail Faulkner, another accused who stated that she would have been put to death had she not “been with child,” there is no extant court document recording Proctor pleading pregnancy or confirming her pregnancy, but historians assume her plea was made shortly before her scheduled execution in August (“Petition of Abigail Faulkner Sr. for a Pardon,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 704-5); Brattle, “Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 185. Brattle, like Calef, was also a contemporary of Proctor. In his October 8, 1692, letter he wrote that two women were “reprieved, because they pretend their being with child.” Historians have concluded that one of these women was Elizabeth Proctor. If Brattle was correct and Proctor lied in August as a strategy to avoid execution, by October, it would have been evident whether or not she was telling the truth lending weight to Brattle’s assertion that Proctor had lied. Historians have accepted Calef’s assertion about Proctor’s pregnancy uncritically, however, without taking Brattle’s claim into consideration; William Phips, “Letters of Governor Phips,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 196-98; By late October the court of Oyer and Terminer had been disbanded and the executions stopped. On the court see Norton, *Devil’s Snare*, 278-90.

⁴⁶ “Petition in Support of John Proctor & Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 533-34; On the Proctor’s church attendance see Perley, *History of Salem*, 2:433. Per Perley, on March 25, 1677, the Salem town selectmen appointed John Proctor the fourth seat in the Salem Meeting House. On the women’s side of the meetinghouse Elizabeth Proctor was seated next to Rebecca Nurse.

and deacons John Burnam, Sr., William Goodhew, and Thomas Low, Sr. More than many other documents offered during the trials, the wording of this petition illustrates the kind of aid and assistance that believers extended to each other, even believers who were no longer members of the same church. As the petition states,

we being Smitten with the Notice of what hath happened, we Reccon it within the Duties of our Charitie, that Teacheth us to do, as we would be done by; to offer thus much for the Clearing of our Neighbors Inocencie; viz That we never had the Lest Knowledge of Such a Nefandous wickedness In our Said Neighbours, Sinc[e] they have been within our acquaintance; Neither do we remember any such Thoughts in us Concerning them; or any Action by them or either of them Directly tending that way; no more than might be in the lives of any other persons of the Clearest Reputation as to Any Such Evill.

Technically, John Proctor was no longer a “neighbor” of those who signed this petition. At least twenty-five years had passed since Proctor moved from Ipswich to Salem, but he still owned homes and land in the area and made frequent trips to manage his properties there. Some of the signers probably knew John from his days as a resident of Ipswich, others had likely become acquainted with him more recently. Perhaps John and Elizabeth visited the Essex church when they were in Ipswich on business. In any event, the wording of the petition indicates that its signers knew both John and Elizabeth well, and that they considered it their duty to speak up for the Proctors in the same way that they hoped someone would speak for them in similar circumstances.⁴⁷

In additional testimony that must have raised questions about the legitimacy of the accusations against Elizabeth Proctor, four young men with connections to the Salem and Beverly churches also testified on August 5 at the Proctor’s trial. William Rayment, Jr. and Daniel Elliott were both at Lt. Ingersoll’s house on March 26 when, according to

⁴⁷ “Petition in Support of John Proctor & Elizabeth Proctor,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 534-36; For biographical information on John and Elizabeth Proctor see Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 200-2.

Rayment, “some of the afflicted persons being present one of them or more cryed out there is goody procter there is goody procter and old wich Ile haue har hang.” Rayment then stated that Goody Ingersoll rebuked the girls for their comment and that the girls “semed to make a Jest of it.” According to Elliott, one of the girls claimed to have lied about the specter of Goody Proctor “for sport,” insisting that young girls “must haue some sport.” In a similar incident, Samuel Barton and John Houlton testified that they were at the home of Thomas Putnam on March 29 when one of the afflicted girls, Mercy Lewes, claimed that she “did not Cry out” against Goody Proctor and if anyone heard her do so, she must have been “out in her head for she said she saw nobody,” a statement which directly contradicted Lewis’s April 11 deposition in which she stated that she “saw the Apperishtion of Elizabeth proctor the wife of John proctor senior: and she did most grevously tortor me by biting and pinching me most grevously urging me to writ in hir book ...” In sum, public support for the Proctors originated within the community of faith and proved to be wide-spread. It included young men in their twenties such as Samuel Barton, aged twenty-eight and a halfway member of Salem First, as well as the Reverend John Wise, and likely contributed to the public unrest over the proceedings which Phips became aware of upon his return to Boston in October.⁴⁸

Governor Phips may have had someone such as Elizabeth Proctor in mind when he called a temporary halt to the trials in mid-October amidst concern that innocent people were being convicted and executed under the court of Oyer and Terminer. As

⁴⁸ “Testimony of William Rayment Jr. for Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 536-37; “Testimony of Daniel Elliott for Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 537; “Testimony of Samuel Barton for Elizabeth Procter, and Testimony of John Houghton for Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 537; “Deposition of Mercy Lewis v. Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 175-76; On the church affiliation of Daniel Elliott age 27, Samuel Barton age 28, and John Houghton age 23 see *The First Church in Salem Records*, 28, 39. Houghton was baptized as an infant while Barton and Elliott were both baptized as young adults. On William Rayment Jr. age 26, see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:513. According to Savage, Rayment attended the Beverly church under Minister John Hale.

Phips stated, “considering how the matter had been managed I sent a reprieve whereby the execution was stopped until their Maj[esty’s] Pleasure be signified and declared.” Seeds of doubt, both about the legitimacy of the charges against Proctor and about whether Satan could assume the shape of an innocent person, had already been raised by the petitions filed on behalf of the Proctors, especially the petition signed by the Reverend John Wise. As historian Bernard Rosenthal points out, Wise’s petition “emphasizes an issue at the heart of the witchcraft debate, whether the devil could impersonate an innocent person.” In recalling the way that Satan was permitted by God to tempt Job, the petition, for example, suggests that God “Some times may pe[r]mitte Sathan to [im]personate, dissemble, & thereby abuse Inocents, & Such as Do in the fear of God Defile the Devill & all his works.” Previous witchcraft convictions during the 1692 trials had been based largely on the use of spectral evidence and on the belief—wholeheartedly endorsed by Chief Judge and Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton—that Satan could only assume the shape of a guilty party. Importantly, petitions, such as those given by the Proctor’s church community, undermined the views of Stoughton and others about the validity of the spectral evidence used to gain convictions. Indeed, when the trials resumed under a new court in January 1693, Governor Phips acknowledged that the trials would proceed by “another method” to determine guilt or innocence and that the previous court had been “too violent and not grounded upon a right foundation” in its investigation of the accused. Equally important, according to Phips, the court now understood that “the Devill might afflict in the shape of an innocent person.” Phips’s decision would have important implications not just for the Andover women but for all those who still remained to be tried as of January 1693. By late October it would have

been too late to save John Proctor but not to save Elizabeth, who was probably released from prison sometime in late January or early February after her sentence was commuted by the Governor.⁴⁹

While some women full church members such as Elizabeth Proctor and Sarah Bradbury maintained their innocence throughout the witchcraft trials and enjoyed the support of their church ministers, brethren, and sisters, other accused full church members confessed to the charges against them—later recanting their confessions—and still received support from their church community in the form of petitions to the court advocating on their behalf. Concurrent with Governor Phips’s decision to call a temporary halt to the trials, twenty-six men from Andover—including two ministers, one deacon, and members of the North Andover First Congregational church—petitioned the court on October 18 asserting that several Andover residents charged with witchcraft had “wronged themselves and the truth” by falsely confessing. The petition, which was addressed to Governor Phips, the Council, and Representatives, cited the “extream urgency that was used with some of them...and the fear that they were under” as reasons for the false confessions. Although the petition does not name anyone specifically, it is clear that the petition’s crafters were advocating on behalf of a particular group of women when they wrote that “severall of the women that are accused were members of this church in full Communion, and had obtained a good report, for their blameless conversation, and their walking as becometh woemen professing godliness.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “Petition in Support of John Procter & Elizabeth Procter,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 534-36; William Phips, “Letters of Governor Phips,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 200-1.

⁵⁰ “Andover North Parish Church Records, 1686-1810,” Manuscript, North Andover Historical Society, North Andover, Massachusetts. As based on incomplete church records, excluding the ministers and deacon, nine men who signed the October 18 petition can be confirmed to be full members of the North Andover church. In addition, three men, and possibly four, had wives who were full members; “Petition of

Although the Andover men's October 18 petition stopped short of asking for the women's release, just a few days earlier, on October 12, six of the men who signed the October 18 petition had also signed another petition asking that their wives and children "might be Returned home to us" after paying whatever bond the court deemed appropriate. Citing the want of food, the "Coldness of the winter season that is coming," the general "distressed Condition" of the women, and the expense of incarceration to the families of the incarcerated, the men were clearly concerned about the ability of their wives and children to survive the winter months in prison. The October 18 petition, therefore, reinforced the men's October 12 petition, and expanded the base of support for these imprisoned women full church members, and set the stage for what would transpire on October 19. It would not be the last petition filed on behalf of the Andover women by their church community.⁵¹

In what should be seen as a courageous move, given that the only other individual who had previously recanted his guilty plea was swiftly executed, on October 19, the day after the men's October 18 petition, eight women full church members from Andover recanted their confessions. Claiming, as Mary Osgood stated, that they were "brought to the said confession by the violent urging and unreasonable pressings that were used" lest they "be hang'd," Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Mary Tyler, Sarah Wilson Sr., Mary Bridges Sr., and Mary Marston admitted that their earlier confessions had "wronged the truth." Perhaps the women were emboldened to recant by

Twenty-six Andover Men Concerning Townspeople Accused of Witchcraft," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 690-91.

⁵¹ "Petition of John Osgood Sr., John Frye, John Marston, et al. for Their Wives & Daughters," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 687-88.

the men's October 18 petition urging that "the truth" regarding the many confessors from Andover "may appear." Perhaps they were strengthened by a visit from the Reverend Increase Mather to whom the recording of the women's statement is attributed. Either way, the Andover men's petitions and the women's recantations made it abundantly clear to Governor Phips that justice was ill-served by keeping individuals imprisoned who claimed to be innocent, especially individuals whose walk professed "godliness," as the Andover men claimed.⁵²

Petitions and statements such as those from the Andover men and women only served to substantiate the "strange ferment of dissatisfaction" that Phips found upon returning to Boston in October and made him aware of the appalling conditions that all prisoners were enduring. Phips subsequently "caused some of them [those accused of witchcraft] to be lett out upon bayle," citing the prisoners' "great misery by reason of the extream cold and their poverty, most of them having only spectre evidence against them." Thus, petitions of support originally intended to help full church members had the unintended consequence of benefiting many of those who remained imprisoned in the fall of 1692, including non-church members. By the middle of January, all of the Andover

⁵² In "Declaration of Mary Osgood, Mary Tyler, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Sarah Wilson Sr., & Hannah Tyler," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 737-39, the women stated that they were aware that Samuel Wardwell, who had "renounced his confession, was "quickly after condemned and executed" (738). Wardwell was executed on September 22, 1692; "Recantations of Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Mary Tyler, Sarah Wilson Sr., Mary Bridges Sr., Mary Marston, Sarah Churchill, Hannah Post, & Mary Post, as Reported by Increase Mather," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 693-95; For a second petition in which four of the six women who retracted their confession on October 19 stressed that they were innocent and that they only confessed because they were persuaded that it was the only way to save their lives see "Declaration of Mary Osgood, Mary Tyler, Deliverance Dane, Abigail Barker, Sarah Wilson Sr., & Hannah Tyler," in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 737-38.

women who recanted their confessions had been released from jail, some having already been tried and found not guilty.⁵³

Even as Phips began releasing some of the witchcraft suspects from jail, support for the Andover women continued to grow. On January 3, 1693, the residents of Andover submitted yet another petition, this one signed by fifty-three Andover men and women—forty-one men and twelve women— including Andover First church ministers Francis Dane and Thomas Barnard and Deacon John Barker. In this petition the signers wrote that they “thought it our duty to endeavour their [the women’s] vindication so far as our testimony for them will avail.” The petition specifically mentioned a desire to speak on behalf of Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson and Abigail Barker, describing them as

women of whom we can truly give this character and commendation, that they have not only lived among us so inoffensively as not to give the least occasion to any that know them to suspect them of witchcraft, but by their sober godly and exemplary conversation have obtained a good report in the place, where they have been well esteemed and approved in the church of which they are members.

Citing the way that the women were urged to “confess themselves guilty” as the “only way to obtain favour,” the signers of this latest petition hoped to lay the groundwork before the resumption of the trials under the new court to ensure that the women would be found innocent. The petition also acknowledged that although the women were wrong to lie, it was a “thing very sinful for innocent persons to own a crime they are not guilty of,” yet considering the Godly reputation of these women and their “well-ordered

⁵³ William Phips, “Letters of Governor Phips,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 200. In his letter of February 21, 1693, Governor Phips states that when he dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer in late October there were at least fifty persons still in prison. Mary Osgood and Eunice Frye were the first Andover women to be released on bail from prison and were released on December 20, 1692.

conversation” within the community, the signers asserted that they “cannot but in charity judge them innocent of the great transgression that hath been imputed to them.”⁵⁴

When the trials resumed in early January 1693 there were fifty-two individuals awaiting trial. Some of the Andover women who had recanted their confessions and were named in the men’s petitions were among the first to be tried and found not guilty. Mary Marston, for example, was tried and found not guilty on January 6, 1693; Abigail Barker on January 6, 1693; Mary Tyler on January 7, 1693; Mary Bridges Sr., on January 12, 1693; Mary Osgood on January 12, 1693. Eunice Frye, along with Deliverance Dane, was released from prison in December 1692 but her case would not go to trial until May 19, 1693 when she was found not guilty. The disposition of Dane’s case is not known.⁵⁵

While some women full church members survived the witchcraft accusations against them with the support of their church communities, other high status full church women were simply never charged despite numerous allegations. The Reverend Thomas Brattle pointed out this inconsistency between who was formally apprehended and charged and who was not in his October 8, 1692 letter when he stated,

I do admire that some particular persons, and particularly Mrs. Thatcher of Boston, should be much complained of by the afflicted persons, and yet that the Justices should never issue out their warrants to apprehend them, when as upon the same account they issue out their warrants for the apprehending and imprisoning many others.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “Petition for Mary Osgood, Eunice Frye, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson Sr., & Abigail Barker,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 738-40.

⁵⁵ Only three individuals, all women, were convicted under the new court’s more stringent rules regarding the use of spectral evidence which were put in place by agreement of the judges and at the urging of Governor Phips. The three women that were convicted, however, were never hanged, their sentences also being commuted by the governor; “Petition of Twenty-six Andover Men Concerning Townspeople Accused of Witchcraft,” in *RSWH*, ed., Rosenthal, 690-91.

⁵⁶ Thomas Brattle, “Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692,” in *Narratives*, ed. Burr, 177-78.

Mrs. Thatcher was Margaret Thacher, a full member of the Old South Church and the widow of the Reverend Thomas Thacher, the first minister at Old South. Thatcher's position as a full church member and the widow of a minister apparently set her apart and insulated her from being imprisoned and charged with witchcraft, as it did for at least a few other women.⁵⁷

Conclusion

In seventeenth-century Puritan Massachusetts the decision to join a Congregational church was not something that one did with possible networking benefits in mind. When Mary Osgood joined the Andover First Congregational church, for example, she probably never imagined that her brethren and sisters in the congregation would become valuable allies in efforts to prove her innocence during the Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692. Similarly, when Dorcas the Blackmore joined the Dorchester congregation, she likely never thought that her congregation would pledge its time and money to help secure her freedom from slavery. When Ann Henden married Henry Leonard she could not have possibly known that she would be seeking a divorce from her abusive spouse just two years later or that her primary source of support would come from various friends and neighbors who attended one of several Boston area churches that she also attended.

Joining the church was also not something that one undertook lightly. The journey to full church membership could be long and arduous and was frequently fraught with uncertainty. Not all who applied were granted membership. Individuals had to be

⁵⁷ According to Koehler, in *Search*, Appendix 5, Witches Accused in 1692 Outbreak, Maria Mather, married to minister Increase Mather, was accused but not prosecuted as was Mistress Moody, married to the Reverend Joshua Moody.

reasonably assured that they were among God's elect, a position arrived at after much introspection, prayer, and sometimes counseling, before applying for church membership. The applicants must then agree to give a public confession of faith and submit themselves to a vote of the congregation before being received as a full church member. To apply for church membership was to open oneself to criticism, as the case of Sarah Fiske demonstrates. Additionally, as the women in this chapter illustrate, becoming a full church member, while it conferred high status within Puritan society, did not insulate one from enslavement, an abusive marriage, or charges of signing the devil's book, as during the Salem witchcraft crisis.

Yet, when women church members found themselves in vulnerable positions at various points in their life they turned to their church sisters and brethren as a social support system that provided all manner of aid and assistance including shelter, financial aid, and petitions of support directed at the courts, both local and provincial, and at the governor and his representatives as during the Salem witchcraft trials. The covenantal promises that believers made to each other upon joining a church, especially the promise to demonstrate love and succor, as this chapter illustrates, proved invaluable to women who, although not powerless in civil society, sometimes lacked the individual efficacy to assertively argue their position. Instead, women found strength in numbers as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Wives and Sisters in the Boston First Church Schism 1669-1674

On March 2, 1670, twenty female church members presented a petition to Boston First requesting that the church “dismiss us from your church fellowship, unto the fellowship of that church whereof our respective husbands are members,” the newly gathered Boston Third Church. The women concluded their petition by stating, “That this is desired of us all witness our hands.” At one time both the women and their husbands had been members in good standing at Boston First and had worshipped together, some for more than thirty years. Just nineteen months earlier, however, the women’s husbands had also requested that Boston First “grant us that dismissal, which we now here by crave,” so that they could leave the old church and gather a new one. Failing to receive the dismissal they sought, the men left Boston First *en masse* while their wives stayed behind.¹

The schism that compelled the men to seek dismissal from Boston First and to found a new church occurred when the Reverend John Davenport was called to the pastorate to replace the recently deceased minister, John Wilson, and was fundamentally the result of Davenport’s views on the halfway covenant. Davenport was opposed to an innovation that became known as the halfway covenant while the men who requested dismissal were in favor of it. In what became a colony-wide battle over Congregational

¹ See Appendix A for a list of names on the men’s and women’s petitions; “Third Church Narrative,” in Hamilton Andrews Hill, *History of the Old South Church 1669-1884* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 1:164-65, 28 (hereafter cited as “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*). The narrative of the founding of Boston Third Church contained in Hill’s *History* was written in 1691, some twenty years after the split with Boston First. The Narrative was written by a committee that included dissenting brethren and founding members Samuel Sewall, Jacob Eliot, Theophilus Frary, and Joshua Scottow and is reprinted in its entirety in Hill beginning on page 12.

authority and autonomy, Boston First repeatedly denied the men's right to separate from the church. Although the men never received the dismissal that they sought from Boston First, in May of 1669 they proceeded to gather the new church anyway, and Boston Third Church was established. As with the men, Boston First Church repeatedly refused to grant the women's dismissal, and four and a half years would pass between the time that the women submitted their petition for dismissal and the time that the "sisters" were finally able to join their husbands in full membership at Boston Third Church.²

Although other works have considered this schism from the perspective of the various brethren involved, this chapter argues that this episode is worth examining from the perspective of the "sisters"—the wives of the dissenting brethren and their supporters—because of what it illustrates about the way that female power operated within Puritan society. In an era in which women were formally excluded from both civil and ecclesiastical politics (only male full church members could vote, for example) the women imitated the representative structure of Puritan government by appointing several

² Robert G. Pope in *The Halfway Covenant Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969) argues that "the crux of the conflict was Davenport's attitude toward the halfway covenant" (155). For other works on the split at Boston First and the founding of Boston Third Church see Richard C. Simmons, "The Founding of the Third Church in Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly* 26 (1969): 241–52. Simmons suggests that political factors were also at play in causing the split and that some members who were not necessarily opposed to the halfway covenant nonetheless supported the call to Davenport because of his more independent stance towards royal authority. The Reverend John Norton, minister at Boston First from 1656 to 1663, and later on, the dissenting brethren, on the other hand, tended to be more moderate in "response to the English government's demands that Massachusetts allow religious and political freedom to non-congregationalists and obey the Acts of Trade" (Simmons, 243); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Harvard University Press, 1953; Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 93-118; Mark A. Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), chap. 5; Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); John Hull, "The Diaries of John Hull Mint-master and Treasurer Of The Colony of Massachusetts Bay," in *Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 3 (Boston, 1857). The *Records of the First Church in Boston* are curiously silent regarding the controversy, recording just one vote denying a dismissal to the dissenting brethren along with the dismissal of Edward Ransford and Jacob Eliot from the office of Deacon because they desired dismissal from the church. Robert D. Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* (Boston: The Society, 1961), 1: 62.

sisters to speak for the group in meetings with Davenport and with church elders. The sisters acted in unison on several occasions when deciding whether or not to visit the newly gathered Boston Third Church. At a time in which group petitions by women were rare—only three instances of group petitioning by women prior to the Revolution are known to historians—the women utilized the petition process not once, but on three separate occasions to make their voices heard. Indeed, the petitions drafted by the sisters of Boston First represent one of the earliest “collective political action[s]” by American women. Significantly, the original group of twenty wives who signed the first petition requesting dismissal from Boston First grew over the course of the conflict to include numerous other sisters who both supported the wives’ efforts to gain release from Boston First and who followed the wives into membership at the recently gathered Boston Third Church, thus illustrating the power of influence that women had with each other. While the women’s goal—orderly dismissal from one congregation to another so that they might worship with their husbands—is consistent with historians’ understanding of Puritan hierarchical family structures, this chapter asserts that the sisters’ actions and behavior in obtaining that goal demonstrate a kind of “sisterhood,” and group-consciousness that historians usually associate with the female aid societies and moral reformers of the early-nineteenth century rather than with the Puritan goodwives of the seventeenth century.³

³ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:167, 168, 202; On early women’s petitions see Mary Beth Norton, “‘The Ablest Midwife That Wee Knowe in the Land’: Mistress Alice Tilly and the Women of Boston and Dorchester, 1649-1650,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 55, no. 1 (Jan., 1998): 105-134. Norton argues that the petitions drafted in 1649 and 1650 on behalf of midwife Alice Tilly “represent American women’s first collective political action” (105); In *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Linda K. Kerber asserts that women’s petitions were “virtually unknown” until the Revolutionary era (41); David D. Hall in *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Alfred

The Origins of the First Church Schism

The schism that split the Boston First congregation in 1669 and placed women at the center of the conflict can be traced to a question that occupied most Congregational churches in the Massachusetts Bay colony from 1640 on: who qualified for baptism and membership in the church? Could parents who were baptized as children but had not related a conversion experience have their own children baptized? What was the status of children whose parents were not full members? If a moral life and knowledge of the faith had remained the requirement for church membership, the question of baptism would have been moot. Instead, by 1640 most congregations required applicants to publicly relate their conversion experience for full church membership. Full church membership, in turn, allowed members to have their children baptized, which increased the likelihood that those children would then experience conversion and full membership. As the second generation of Puritans replaced the first, however, many failed to relate a conversion experience and claim full membership, and the baptism and membership status of their children thus remained in doubt.⁴

A. Knopf, 2011) notes a petition by thirty-six women from Malden, Massachusetts's First Congregational Church to the General Court asking that the pastor be allowed to continue in his position. The discovery of more all-female petitions may follow because, as Hall states, an analysis of petitioning as a form of public participation "awaits its historian" (87); On the "sisterhood" that historians usually associate with early nineteenth-century female aid societies and moral reformers see Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), ch. 3; See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); For another work that addresses the role of women in the founding of Boston Third see Melissa Ann Johnson, "Subordinate Saints: Women and the Founding of Third Church, Boston, 1669-1674" (M.A. Thesis, Portland State University, 2009). Johnson interprets the women as "disadvantaged" in their efforts to secure release from Boston First because they could not vote and therefore were unable to "enlist formal help from other women in the congregation" (2-3); For works that mention, albeit briefly, the role of women in the founding of Boston Third Church see Leslie Lindenaue, "Piety and Power: Gender and Religious Culture in the American Colonies, 1630-1700" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 225-28; Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 120-23; Peterson, *The Price of Redemption*, 46-47.

⁴ On the need to enlarge baptism see: Pope, *Halfway Covenant*, chapter 1.

The congregation at Boston First had been wrestling with these questions when it voted in January of 1657 that it had a “duty” to exercise “church-power” over the children of its members. Exercising “church-power” meant that all children were subject to the watch and care of the church regardless of the status of their parents’ membership. Historian Robert Pope has argued that “this extension of discipline marked the first step toward a broader conception of membership and an enlargement of baptism.” Following Boston First’s January vote, a Ministerial Assembly met in Boston and further enlarged the scope of baptism by agreeing that a “member by birth, even though not personally regenerate,” could have his or her own children baptized “on condition of an express acknowledgement on his [the member’s] part of at least an intellectual faith and a desire to submit to all the covenant obligations implied in membership.”⁵

By January of 1661, the congregation at Boston First had begun implementing the extension of membership authorized by the Ministerial Assembly four years earlier. As John Hull records in his diary, Boston First agreed “that the elders should call upon the adult children of the church, to see whether they would own and take hold of the covenant of their fathers (which had been thus long, for the most part, neglected).” Some “adult children of the church” then came forward “in the face of the whole congregation” to “own and take hold of the covenant of their fathers” and “openly manifest their desire to acknowledge their relation to the church, according to the covenant of God which they plighted in their parents.” Although not full church members, those individuals who

⁵ Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:55, 99, 119; Pope, *Halfway Covenant*, 26; Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960), 261. Per Walker, The Ministerial Assembly that met in June of 1657 in Boston was not considered an official Synod because it lacked full church representation.

owned the covenant of their parents were then entitled to have their own children baptized.⁶

A year after the covenant owning ceremony recorded by Hull, a group of more than eighty ministers and laymen met at Boston First Church to debate this practice and to establish orthodoxy within the colony. What emerged from the Cambridge Synod of 1662 was an expansion of church membership that would later become known as the half-way covenant. Under the innovation of the half-way covenant, individuals were allowed to apply for an abbreviated form of church membership as long as they had been baptized as infants or children. Unlike full church membership, proof of a regenerative experience was not required for half-way members. As with full church members, half-way members were entitled to have their children baptized, thus increasing the likelihood that their offspring would eventually experience conversion and seek full church membership. Halfway membership could, and did, lead to full church membership. Only full church members, however, were entitled to take the sacraments and only male full church members enjoyed the franchise, both in the church, as in choosing new ministers, and in secular government.⁷

At Boston First, however, the innovation of the half-way covenant remained controversial despite the church's 1657 vote and the covenant ceremony recorded by

⁶ Hull, "Diaries," in *Transactions*, 3:198; The extant *Records of the First Church in Boston* make no mention of this covenant owning ceremony.

⁷ Pastor John Wilson, elders William Colborne and James Penn and brethren Capt. Thomas Savag and Jerimia Howchin attended the 1662 Cambridge Synod as representatives of Boston First. *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:58; According to Benjamin Colman in *A Manifesto or Declaration, Set Forth by the Undertakers of the New Church Now Erected in Boston in New-England, November 17, 1699* (Boston: Printed by B. Green and J. Allen?, 1699?), 3, when the Brattle Street Church was gathered in 1699, it allowed "every Baptized Adult Person who contributes to the Maintenance" to have a vote in electing a new minister. This provision meant that women could, and did, vote on the selection of a new pastor.

John Hull. Indeed, at the same time that Hull records the covenant ceremony of 1661, he also notes that two prominent Boston First members, Edward Hutchinson and Anthony Stoddard, had opposed the proceedings. Hutchinson, in fact, “turned his back upon the church” in protest when the ceremony began. Despite the opposition of Hutchinson, Stoddard, and probably others within the congregation, Boston First’s minister, John Wilson, was a strong advocate for the innovation—as was minister John Norton who preceded Wilson in death in 1663—and disagreement over the issue never threatened to split the congregation until after Wilson’s death in 1667.⁸

Following Wilson’s death the church was left without a pastor, and Boston First had lost its most powerful advocate on behalf of the halfway covenant. In seeking to replace Wilson, the “majority” of the congregation, led by Elder James Penn, was in “favor” of issuing a ministerial call to John Davenport, who had been the minister at New Haven, Connecticut for thirty years. Davenport’s opposition to the adoption of the halfway covenant, however, was well-known. Cotton Mather, according to nineteenth-century historian Hamilton Andrews Hill, even referred to Davenport as “the Greatest of the anti-synodists,” and the call to Davenport essentially ended any possibility that Boston First would continue to offer halfway membership. Without the continuance of the halfway covenant, no mechanism existed by which to formally bring non-members into the watch and care of the church.⁹

⁸ Hull, “Diaries,” in *Transactions*, 3:198; Hill, *Old South*, 1:10; The tenures of John Wilson (1630-1667) and John Norton (1656-1663) at Boston First overlapped. Both ministers were advocates for the halfway covenant.

⁹ Hill, *Old South*, 1:11, 10.

While the majority of the laity at Boston First supported the call to Davenport, a significant minority did not. In response to Davenport's call, the minority, who became known as the "dissenting brethren," requested that the question of Davenport's call be submitted to a church council consisting of representatives from the Dorchester, Dedham, Roxbury, and Cambridge congregations for debate. Despite the dissenters' objections, the move to call Davenport was upheld by the council. The council also recommended, however, that the dissenting men be dismissed prior to the ordination of Davenport. In August of 1668, following the council's affirmation of Davenport's call, the twenty-nine male dissenters signed and presented a petition to Elder Penn of Boston First requesting dismissal so that they might gather a new church.¹⁰

Following receipt of the dissenters' petition, Elder Penn read the document aloud to the congregation so that discussion of the issue might ensue. Before discussion on the petition could begin, however, the dissenting men were asked to leave the room. After several requests, the men withdrew from the meeting, but "some of their wives continued in the Church." Although women were prohibited from speaking in the meetinghouse—except to give their public confession of faith or to answer to disciplinary charges against them—their physical presence spoke volumes. That some of the women remained in the meeting even after their husbands had been asked to leave suggests that they did not automatically consider themselves part of the men's petition and therefore saw no reason to leave. It also suggests that the women may have been less troubled by Davenport's known views on the halfway covenant than their husbands. The women's action takes on even more significance when one considers that the women had just heard Elder Penn

¹⁰ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:29. For a list of the dissenting brethren who affixed their signature to the August 1668 petition, see page 28.

read the petition and had heard the section of the petition which states that the men “desired their Relations might be dismissed with them,” that the men desired that “our Deare relations who are in Covenant with yourselves might pass forth with us; unto that Church fellowship aforesaid.” If the women had been unaware of the wording of the petition prior to its submittal to the church, they were certainly aware after it was read by Elder Penn. Had the women considered themselves part of the men’s petition, they could have quietly filed out of the room along with their husbands. They did not.¹¹

After the men had left the room, some of the dissenting brethren pointed out to one of the elders that their wives should also leave the meeting because the men “desired their Relations might be dismissed with them.” Perhaps the men assumed that their petition included their wives. Perhaps the men assumed that the women would be presenting their own requests for dismissal at a later date. Ordinarily, “a member” who wanted to leave one church and join another was required to obtain “letters testimonial; & of dismissal,” according to the Cambridge Platform, so that the new church could receive them in good faith. The dismissal of one spouse did not automatically require the dismissal of the other, however. Just as husbands and wives joined the church individually, sometimes on the same day, they were often dismissed at the same time, especially when they intended to move to another town and desired fellowship with another group of believers. The question of who was and was not included in a group

¹¹ “Third Church Narrative” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:28-29. The narrative does not indicate which women may have stayed in the meeting and which may have left the room with their husbands.

petition for dismissal, such as the men submitted, however, was not addressed in the Platform and was therefore open to debate within individual congregations.¹²

Twenty-five years before the men of Boston First submitted their request for a group dismissal, the congregation at Wenham wrestled with a similar question of who was and who was not included in a group dismissal from the Salem Church. In 1644 the Wenham Church asked “Whether dismissal could be given orderly to such as had not desired it?” After debating the question, the church concluded that two women who wanted to remain at the Salem Church could do so despite the fact that their husbands had been dismissed from Salem to Wenham. Although initially assumed to be part of their husbands’ group petition for dismissal, the two women were allowed to remain at Salem. A third woman, Joan White, who did not have a husband in the Salem congregation and therefore could not be considered part of the group dismissal, was required to obtain an individual dismissal before she could transfer her membership from Salem to the Wenham Church. Based on the earlier debate at Wenham, it would not have been unprecedented for the men of Boston First to assume that their wives were included in their petition, nor would it have been unheard of for the wives to stay at Boston First even as their husbands requested a dismissal to gather a new church.¹³

¹² “Third Church Narrative” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:28-29; Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 226. The 1648 Cambridge Platform or Platform of Church Discipline was a doctrinal statement of church belief and practice produced by a Synod composed of representatives from twenty-eight Massachusetts churches as well as representatives from several other New England colonies. It remained the “legally recognized ecclesiastical standard for the colony” until 1780, according to John Von Rohr in *The Shaping of American Congregationalism, 1620-1957* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), 83.

¹³ Concerning the debate regarding group dismissals see John Fiske, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, ed. Robert G. Pope (Boston: The Society, 1974), 14, 16, 17, 31.

The 1644 Wenham debate, in fact, hints at a practice that would be addressed four years later in the 1648 Cambridge Platform: the practice of wives attending one church while their husbands attended another. The preface to the Cambridge Platform was clear that within a family—which the Platform defined as a husband, wife, children and servants—various members might belong to different churches without harm to the cohesiveness of the family unit and without undermining the husband’s authority over and responsibility for his dependents. “Disunion in families between each relation” was not necessarily the automatic outcome of allowing family members to belong to different churches. Nor was a husband bound to contribute financially to a church where one of his family members belonged. The Platform continued,

And though a godly householder may justly take himselfe bound in conscience, to contribute to any such Church, wherto his wife, or children, or servants doe stand in relation: yet that will not aggravate the burden of his charge, no more then if they were received members of the same Church wherto himself is related.¹⁴

On this point, that it was permissible for family members to belong to different churches and that the husband bore no additional financial responsibility for a family member such as a wife, for example, who belonged to a different church, the Platform’s writers were responding to criticism from England that their policies on church membership divided families. Faced with this concern, they were answering the charge that “wee sow seeds of division & hindrance of edificatio[n] in every family: whilst admitting into our churches only voluntaries, the husba[n]d will be of one church, the wife of another: the parents of one church, the children of another the maister of one church, the servants of another.” Thus the Platform affirmed the individual nature of

¹⁴ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 201.

church membership and left open the possibility that wives and husbands could attend different churches, if they wanted to.¹⁵

Not only does the Platform deny the charge that disunion resulted from such practices, it points out that there were advantages when family members attended different congregations: “Bees may bring more hon[e]y and wax into the hive, when they are not limited to one garden of flowers, but may fly abroad to many.” In other words, individuals might “profit by the word they have heard in several churches ... to the greater edification of the whole family.” Within the conception of church membership as defined by the Platform, therefore, it would have been acceptable for the wives of the dissenting brethren to remain, even temporarily, as members of Boston First even after their husbands had requested a dismissal to gather a new church, if they had so desired.¹⁶

By remaining in the meeting after the reading of the men’s petition, the wives could have been implying that they wished to remain, at least for the time being, as part of the body of believers that constituted Boston First Church. Based on a conversation two of the women had with Davenport, belonging to an orderly constituted church – one with deacons, elders, and that offered the sacrament – was an important consideration for the women, and it is possible that they were less eager than their husbands to sever ties with their established church in exchange for a new church that was not yet orderly gathered. Right before the women presented their first petition for dismissal from Boston First, for example, two of the wives met with Davenport and told him that they were

¹⁵ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 196, 201.

¹⁶ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 196, 201. To my knowledge, no study exists which examines the pervasiveness of this practice, of wives belonging to one church while the husband belonged to another. Yet, as based on the charges from England, we know that the practice existed. Chapter five examines women within Boston proper who, in the late-seventeenth century, acted independently by choosing to attend a different church from the church that their husbands attended.

“satisfied in the orderly constitution of that [new] Church whereof their husbands were members,” thus illustrating the importance of an orderly gathered and constituted church. Regardless of why the women chose to remain in the meeting after their husbands had left, the wives had no desire to risk being disciplined for remaining in a meeting that they had been asked to leave, and when ordered to withdraw, the women complied.¹⁷

Wives & Sisters Petition to Leave Boston First: “to provide for our own peace and spiritual comfort”

In May of 1669, nine months after the men and their wives were asked to leave the meeting concerning the dissenting brethren’s petition for dismissal, Boston Third Church was gathered. At this point, the dissenting brethren had not yet been officially dismissed from Boston First even though they were now attending and had participated in the gathering of the new church. The wives of the dissenting brethren, on the other hand, were still attending Boston First even though their husbands were attending the newly formed Boston Third. Only later, approximately one year after their husbands gathered Boston Third, did the women present their first petition for dismissal.¹⁸

The event that precipitated the submission of the wives’ first petition for dismissal occurred in February of 1670. Nine months after their husbands had established the new church, the women were still members in good standing of Boston First, but Davenport suspected that the wives were planning to take “the Sacrament” with their husbands at Boston Third. Until this point, the women had not yet requested dismissal from Boston

¹⁷ “Third Church Narrative” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:164.

¹⁸ For a list of the dissenting brethren who founded Boston Third Church, see Hill, *Old South*, 1:113.

First even though their husbands had formed and were attending the new church. At a church meeting on February 25, 1670, Davenport reminded the whole congregation, including the sisters, that it would be a breach of their covenant for any member to take the Lord's Supper elsewhere. In response to Davenport's admonition, the wives of the dissenting brethren acted together in deciding not to take the Lord's Supper with their husbands at the new Boston Third Church. As the "Third Church Narrative" states, the women "understanding how greivious and deeply offensive it would be for them to partake with their husbands in the seale next Lord's day, they out of Christian prudence forbare, not having made particular application unto the church for their dismissal." When the Lord's Supper was held at Boston Third on February 27, 1670, the wives were not in attendance. The women's loyalty, for the time being, lay with Boston First.¹⁹

The very next day, however, on Monday, February 28, 1670, two of the wives met with Davenport to try and work out a compromise that would satisfy both the women and Boston First, thus allowing the women to take the Lord's Supper with their husbands at Boston Third while continuing to attend and remain members of Boston First. If Boston First would permit them to "hold communion" with their husbands, the wives told Davenport that they had no "desire to alter their station until such time as they saw that their practice was answerable to their profession." Since the Lord's Supper was celebrated about once a month in Massachusetts's Congregational churches, the women's compromise meant that they would miss approximately every fourth service at Boston

¹⁹ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:163-64. The Lord's Supper was one of two sacraments celebrated by the New England Puritans, the other being baptism. On the meaning of the sacraments, both for individuals and for the church as a body see von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism* and Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

First. If the wives found that this “practice” changed—if, for example, they began to attend Boston Third more frequently than once a month—they would ask for a dismissal from Boston First to join the new church. If Davenport refused the wives’ compromise, the women were prepared to request a “regular dismissal.” The compromise offered by the women placed their future squarely in their own hands. Davenport apparently refused the women’s compromise because the “same sisters soone after applyed themselves to Elder Penn and Mr. Ja. Allen and other Brethren” and presented a petition requesting their dismissal from Boston First to join Boston Third Church. The petition was signed by twenty women and affirmed “That this is desired of us all [by the] witness [of] our hands.”²⁰

When the sisters finally presented their petition for dismissal from Boston First to Boston Third, some time before March 5, 1670 (the exact date is unknown), one of the reasons they cited for requesting dismissal was that it was scriptural that husbands and wives should worship together and that when “whole familyes worship together” it led to “Comliness and sweet order.” When families do not worship together, according to the women, when “husbands goe to one place and wives to another,” “confusion, disorder, and disturbance . . . unavoidably follow.” It is difficult to know if the women really embraced this argument—that families should worship together—or if they were using the previous charges leveled against Massachusetts Congregationalists—that permitting families to worship in different places resulted in disunion—to strengthen their hand for dismissal from Boston First. Perhaps after a year and a half of worshipping apart from

²⁰ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:164. The women’s petition is undated and its author is not named. For a list of the women’s names who requested dismissal see: “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:165. Ja. or James Allen served as teaching minister at Boston First Church from 1668-1710.

their husbands, the wives really were ready for a change. As based on their February 28, 1670 meeting with Davenport, the sisters also needed assurance that Boston Third would actually become an orderly gathered congregation offering all the same benefits of membership as Boston First, including the sacraments, before they committed to leave the old church to join the new. In their February meeting with Davenport the women declared “themselves satisfied in the constitution of that Church whereof their husbands were members.” Their rationale for seeking dismissal would change, however, in the second petition that the sisters presented for dismissal. In their second petition, submitted in April of 1670, one month after their first, the women made little mention of their husbands and of their desire to worship as a family. Instead, the sisters would ask for dismissal on the basis of “our own peace and spiritual comfort as may, in our own consciences, be most suitable to our duty for our edification in the Lord.”²¹

In submitting their first petition for dismissal, the women acted in solidarity for the third time in a week. In the first instance of solidarity, on February 27, 1670, the women decided as a group not to attend the Lord’s Supper at Boston Third. In the second instance, the women appointed two of their sisters to speak to Davenport on behalf of the group, and in the third instance, when their effort at compromise with Davenport failed, these same two sisters presented the women’s first group petition for dismissal to Elder Penn and the other brethren.²²

Elder Penn waited until March 5, 1670 before rejecting the women’s group petition, then stated that the women needed to submit individual petitions for dismissal.

²¹ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:164, 168.

²² “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:165, 167.

The sisters complied with Penn's request and submitted individual petitions substituting the word "we" in the original petition for "me." At a church meeting on March 25, 1670, the women's individual petitions for dismissal were read to the church and "after much agitation" were voted on and rejected. The record does not state if the petitions were considered and rejected individually or considered and rejected as a group, only that "the vote was passed in the negative by lifting up of hands."²³

What happened next illustrates the degree of unity among the women and their foresight in anticipating that their individual bids for dismissal might be rejected. After the vote was taken on the women's petitions and their dismissals denied, brother Chever moved that the church should consider giving the women an "indefinite dismissal," which would allow the sisters to join another church other than Boston Third. James Allen, teaching minister at Boston First, "bid the Brother forbear," and stated that if this was what the women wanted, that they should make the request themselves. Following Allen's statement, one of the sisters "having a writing in redinesse with the consent of the other sisters present desired it to be handed up to the elders." The request was "subscribed by some sisters in the name of the rest" and stated that if Boston First would not give the women a dismissal to join Boston Third, that Boston First should allow the women an "indefinite dismission" which would permit them to join "any Church in order." In other words, if Boston First took issue with the women's request for an orderly dismissal to join Boston Third, then perhaps the church would allow the women to join another congregation: Boston Second was only about a half a mile away from Boston First, for example, and was close enough to attend. The request represented the fourth

²³ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:165, 167.

time that the women acted in solidarity to accomplish their goal. The request was taken by one of the elders who placed it in his pocket without reading it or making the women's request known to the rest of the church. Thus no action was ever taken on the request.²⁴

At this point in the conflict, support for the wives of the dissenting brethren began to grow among the other women of Boston First. Two days after the wives' individual requests for dismissal were denied, Boston Third again celebrated the Lord's Supper, only this time, the women did not "forbare" or abstain in an attempt to keep the peace at Boston First. "Some of the [other] sisters" at Boston First, including Elizabeth Beck, who had been a full member of the church for twenty-seven years, took the Lord's Supper at the new Third church along with some of the wives.²⁵

One month later, an even larger group of women broke away from Boston First and took the Lord's Supper at Boston Third. This action represented the sixth time the women had acted in accord. As stated in Boston Third Church's record, on April 24, 1670, "The sacrament was celebrated at the new church where most of the sisters whose husbands were members of it, together with many sisters of the old church, both widows and others, did partake with them." On the face of it, the "widows and others" who joined the wives had no compelling reason to worship at Boston Third Church except to support the wives of the dissenting brethren. The "widows and others" had not signed a

²⁴ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:167. The author of the request is not named in the church record. For an early map of Boston showing the location of various churches see John Bonner, *The Town of Boston in New England/ by Capt. John Bonner* (Boston: Printed by Fra. Dewing, 1722).

²⁵ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:167. Elizabeth Hinds Beck joined Boston First in 1642 and was married to Alexander Beck who was probably deceased by 1669. Elizabeth was Beck's second wife. The couple had four children together: Ephraim and Deliverance, twins born in 1640, Strange, born in 1642, and Manasseh, born in 1645. Manasseh later joined Boston Third in 1672 while Elizabeth joined in 1674 along with the wives of the dissenting brethren. On Elizabeth Beck see James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England Showing Three Generations of Those Who Came Before May, 1692 on the Basis of the Farmer's Register* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1965), 1:150 and Hill, *Old South*, 1:167.

petition requesting to join husbands at Boston Third as the wives had. Some of the sisters who joined the wives at Boston Third most likely left husbands behind to worship alone at Boston First. Furthermore, the group of women who gathered at Boston Third on that April Sabbath must have been sizeable, and their absence during the worship service at Boston First certainly noticeable. Although the church record does not name the women who accompanied the dissenting wives to Boston Third, theirs was a courageous act of solidarity since the women left themselves open to discipline and censure by absenting from the worship service at Boston First. It is also significant that no men are recorded as accompanying the dissenting wives to Boston Third, only “many sisters.”²⁶

In a move that appears preplanned, on the same day that the wives of the dissenting brethren took the Sacrament at Boston Third with their husbands, April 24, 1670, they also presented Elder Penn with a second petition that they hoped would be “communicated unto the old Church.” The petition, containing the names of nineteen women, informed Boston First that the women had taken the Sacrament at Boston Third with their husbands. The petition also requested once again that Boston First release the women from their covenant with the old church which would, in turn, free them up to join Boston Third. In part, the petition stated that the women “earnestly request you so to release us of our Covenant engagement unto yourselves, that wee may, without offence to you, have liberty so to provide for our own peace and spiritual comfort as may, in our own consciences be most suitable to our duety for our aedification in the Lord.” In contrast to the sisters’ first petition, which gave the women’s desire to worship with their

²⁶ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:168. The wives of the dissenting brethren were, however, supported by their husbands at Boston Third. According to f.n. 1, for example, the women’s second petition, dated April 24, 1670, was in the handwriting of John Hull, one of the dissenting brethren and husband of Judith Hull, whose name was on the petition.

husbands as a rationale for dismissal, the second petition emphasized the women's own spiritual well-being. In this second petition, the women inverted the logic of the first. If union with the dissenting brethren was proving to be an ineffective rationale for gaining dismissal from Boston First to Boston Third Church, the women would request dismissal for their own "peace and spiritual comfort." "Duty for our aedification in the Lord," according to the petition, required it. When Elizabeth Raynsford signed the petition, perhaps at a later time since her signature is underneath the rest, she added, "I doe desire the like liberty with the rest of my sisters," thus indicating the spirit of cohesiveness that she shared with the rest of the women. If there was any doubt about the unity and sincerity of the women who were continuing to agitate for their dismissal from Boston First, the second petition should have put it to rest.²⁷

On April 24, 1670, the same day that the elders received the wives' letter stating that they had accompanied their husbands to the new church, First Church passed a "vote against" the wives of the dissenting brethren. Neither a censure nor an excommunication, the vote was signed by Elder James Penn and the Reverend James Allen and accused the women of two wrongs. The first wrong entailed ignoring the warning against taking

²⁷ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:168. Elizabeth Usher, whose name is on the first request for dismissal in March of 1669/70, had died in the interim and was not listed on the second petition. Margaret Thacher, whose name was not on the first petition but is on the second, had only recently married one of the dissenting brethren, Thomas Thacher. Sarah Pemberton, who signed the first petition, is not individually named in the second petition; rather the petition states, "Soe do the wife of James Pemberton," indicating that Sarah also desired inclusion in the second petition. At some point between March 5, 1669/70, when the sisters presented their first petition, and May 15, 1671, someone brought "a Question" to the elders of Boston First regarding Pemberton. At a May 15, 1671 meeting, the elders discussed "whether the church should deale with her." The elders concluded that "shee having irregularly withdrawne as wee Conceive from us and broken her Covenant with us and theirby manifested her selfe to be none of us, wee declare that we look on ourselves as disingated of any Covenant duty to her and that shee ceaseth to stand in memberly relation to us" (*The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:66). Pemberton's name appears again on the sisters' final 1674 petition requesting membership at Boston Third. Pemberton had been a member of Boston First for eleven years, since 1658. It seems that whoever brought Pemberton's name to the elders' attention was trying to increase the odds of her dismissal from Boston First since her name was also included in the sister's second petition.

communion with the men of Boston Third; the second accused the women of “having broken that rule: I Cor. 10:32” that states, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.” In accusing the women of breaking I Cor. 10:32, of causing another to stumble spiritually or sin, it seems likely that the elders of Boston First were referring to the fact that so many other women of Boston First had accompanied the wives to Boston Third Church on April 24 where they all partook of the Lord’s Supper. In contrast to the dissenting brethren, who were accused by Boston First of breaking fourteen separate scriptures by their “irregular departure,” but not I Cor. 10:32, the women were only charged with violating one scripture: I Cor. 10:32. The growing support for the sisters was apparently threatening to the elders of Boston First and speaks to the increasing influence of the wives upon others in the congregation.²⁸

Perhaps the elders at Boston First feared that the wives of the dissenting brethren would draw more women away from the old to the new church. By 1670 Boston Third was recognized as a legitimate congregation, one which had been orderly gathered according to the tenets of Puritanism. Other congregations, such as Dorchester, had already dismissed some of their members, both male and female, to join Boston Third, and the congregation was growing.

In charging the wives with violating I Cor. 10:32—causing others to stumble—the indictment is reminiscent of Anne Hutchinson’s 1638 excommunication from Boston First for “seduce[ing] many honest persons” who attended Hutchinson’s home meetings. In these meetings, attended by both men and women, Hutchinson freely shared her

²⁸ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:170; I Cor. 10:32 NIV; “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:179-80. Hill reprints a January 16, 1671, letter from Boston First Church to Boston Third Church in which the dissenting brethren were accused, by their “irregular departure,” of breaking fourteen separate scriptures, none of which pertained to causing other believers to stumble or sin.

religious opinions which were, according to her accusers, “known to be different from the word of God.” In the same way that Hutchinson was perceived to be a threat to church unity and order through the power of her ability to influence and “seduce many simple souls,” so too the wives of the dissenting brethren were levied with a similar charge. Perhaps the elders and lay men of Boston First feared that if “many sisters of the old church, both widows and others,” could be enticed to follow the wives of the dissenting brethren in partaking of the Lord’s Supper at Boston Third, as they had on April 24, then it was just a question of time before these “many sisters” would also request dismissals from Boston First to join Boston Third Church. If the vote against the wives was meant to discourage other women from following the wives to Boston Third, it was ultimately unsuccessful.²⁹

The result of the church vote against the wives was that the women were excluded from taking communion at Boston First. They were not excommunicated, but they were forbidden from participating in the Sacraments at the church where they were still in full membership. No similar vote was taken against the “widows and others” who accompanied the wives to Boston Third, even though they had also ostensibly disobeyed Davenport’s admonition against taking communion at any church besides Boston First. As stated in the petition, which was signed by Elder Penn and James Allen, “We do declare, therefore, we cannot have communion with such of ours at the Lord’s table who have and do communicate with them, [the dissenting brethren] untill they [the sisters]

²⁹ David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 316.

give us satisfaction, they have broken that rule, I Cor. 10:32.” The women, however, never gave the church the “satisfaction” that it sought.³⁰

Instead, the sisters began attending Boston Third regularly even though they had not been formally dismissed from the old church. For over four years, from April 24, 1670 until August 27, 1674, the wives and Boston First existed in an uneasy stand-off that paralleled the relationship between Boston First and the dissenting brethren. In the intervening years, several letters were exchanged between Boston First and Boston Third. For their part, Boston Third sought to restore “Brotherly love and mutual communion” between the two congregations and also hoped to secure the dismissal of the women. A December 28, 1670 letter written by Thomas Thacher and Edwin Rainsford and “by appointment of the rest of the brethren,” for example, briefly mentions the women and asks that they “may have their favorable and loving dismission unto ourselves.” Three years later, on June 13, 1673 “after a long silence,” the dissenting brethren again tried to make “another essay for peace” and again included the women by asking that Boston First might “grant your Loving dismission unto them.” The reply from Boston First came two months later in a letter dated August 20, 1673 in which the old church denied fault for the split between themselves and the dissenting brethren and added that the “sisters . . . upon their owne irregular choice [have] gone out from us and from any further Authority of this Church.” In short, Boston First denied responsibility for the separation that now existed between the church and the dissenting brethren and between the church and the wives. The church did, however, vote to send their ruling elder, Mr. Wiswell, “to see if any of our sisters would confess their fault, then they would indeavor to git them a

³⁰ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:170.

general dismissal to some Church in order.” The church record does not indicate if the sisters ever met with Wiswell, but it seems unlikely that such a meeting took place given the subsequent course of events.³¹

The sisters never received the dismissal that they sought from Boston First, and Boston First never received the acknowledgement of error that it sought from the women. Finally, during a May 28, 1674 ecclesiastical council consisting of clergymen and elders from various neighboring congregations, a “motion” was made by Boston Third Church which sought to clarify Boston Third’s responsibility toward the women, given that the women were barred from receiving communion at Boston First yet had been attending and now desired to join the new church. At the meeting, Boston Third inquired:

What is our duty towards those members of the Old church who were and still are secluded from communion with that church in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, only because of their participation with us therein, and who also desire to join in church fellowship with us?³²

In response to the question posed by Boston Third, the council concluded that it was “not justifiable” for any church to “seclude or suspend a considerable number of their own (otherwise inoffensive members) from communion with themselves in that holy sacrament merely and only” for participating with another church in the Lord’s Supper. It was lawful for “otherwise inoffensive” members to “orderly and occasionally for their own edification and comfort” take Communion at other churches. Furthermore, the sisters were free to apply for membership to Boston Third Church and Boston Third was free to admit them without transgressing “any rule of church order.”³³

³¹ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:178, 197, 200.

³² “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:203.

³³ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:203-4.

Based on the council's ruling, the way was finally cleared for the sisters to apply for membership at the new church. In one final show of unity, twenty-six women together signed their names to a petition asking that "wee may be fit to renew our Covenant with him [God] and with your church, and to walke in covenant with himself [God] and with yourselves." With the exception of Elizabeth Usher and Hulldah Davis, who had died, all of the wives who signed the first petition signed the sisters' third petition. Before signing their names the women concluded the petition with the phrase "Your Sisters in the Lord and fellowship of the Gospell," signifying the bond that the women shared not only with each other, but with the brethren of Boston Third. It was the eighth time in five years that the sisters spoke with one voice.³⁴

Wives & Sisters Join Boston Third: "wee ly under the same rule of Joyning"

Given the ruling of the council, that it was permissible for the women to apply for membership at Boston Third, it seems surprising that the women's third petition contained a rationalization for why Boston Third should now admit them. Yet it did. Perhaps the women felt the need to justify their membership request because, like the men, they never received their dismissal which was "soe often sought but in vaine." Perhaps the women were troubled by the thought that "to separate from a Church ... out of schisme ... is unlawfull & sinfull," according to The Cambridge Platform. Regardless, in a politically insightful move, the women claimed the right in this last petition to

³⁴ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:201-2. Elizabeth Rocke and Lydia Scottee were admitted three months later on January 8, 1675. The record does not explain why Rocke and Scottee were absent when the rest of the women were admitted in October. The wives' third petition is in the handwriting of John Hull.

covenant with the new church on the same grounds that the men had claimed in gathering the church five years earlier. As a body politic, the women put themselves on equal footing with their husbands when they claimed that “wee ly under the same rule of Joyning to you and being received by you, as you did of Joyning together and receiving each other in your first Coalition.” In other words, like the men, the women were leaving Boston First without a dismissal, which was customary, but the women argued that this should not be an impediment to membership at the new church any more so than it was for the men. On October 16, 1674, after their petition was read to the Third church and the sisters had owned it publicly, all but two of the women were admitted to fellowship. The two remaining women were admitted three months later on January 8, 1675.³⁵

By the time that the sisters finally joined Boston Third, the original group of twenty wives had grown to include twenty-six women from Boston First Church. The names of six additional women full church members from Boston First who were *not* part of the wives’ first or second petitions and did *not* have husbands at Boston Third were included in the sisters’ last petition requesting membership in the new church. Mary Norton, Elizabeth Beck, and Elizabeth Gibbs signed their own names to the petition while the names of Johanna Mason, Sarah Bodeman, and Alice Harper are in the hand of John Hull, according to a note in the narrative. In addition, at least three other female full church members of Boston First, and probably more, followed the sisters to Boston Third

³⁵ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 225-26; “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:201.

after the women had been admitted into membership at the new church; the three women were Mary Webbe, Anna Search, and Lidia Chapen.³⁶

It seems unlikely that the six women whose names appear on the wives' third petition and the three women who followed the wives to Boston Third would have done so because of the halfway covenant. As full church members, these women would have automatically been able to baptize their own children and thus the provision offered by the covenant would have been unnecessary. Additionally, most of these nine women were in their fifties and sixties, and their children were grown. Notwithstanding the fact that two of the women were related to each other, a sense of sisterhood and unity among these typical women could, however, account for the movement from Boston First to Boston Third church. In hindsight, the elders at Boston First had been right to be alarmed that the wives of the dissenting brethren would draw other members away to Boston Third.³⁷

Among those who signed the third petition and joined the new church alongside the wives on October 16, 1674, but did not have a husband at Boston Third, was Elizabeth Beck who had accompanied the sisters when they took communion at Boston Third for the first time. Beck, who was in her fifties, joined Boston First in 1642 and had been a member of the church for thirty-two years when she left to join Boston Third with the wives. Her husband, Alexander, was likely deceased by 1674.³⁸

³⁶ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, n. 1, 1:202. The Narrative does not state why the women's names are in Hull's hand, only that they are. It is possible that the women could not write or that they were not available when the petition was crafted.

³⁷ Hill, *Old South*, 1:119. Ranis Belcher was the daughter of Elizabeth Raynsford.

³⁸ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:37.

Like Beck, Sarah Bodman also followed the sisters to Boston Third. Bodman, who was also in her fifties, was the wife of John Bodman, a shoemaker, and had been a member of Boston First for thirty years at the time she signed the wives' petition. Bodman had three children baptized at Boston First so her roots in the church ran deep. Her husband, however, was not a member of either Boston First or Second Church.³⁹

Joanna Mason, who was in her forties, also joined the group and had been a member of Boston First for nine years at the time she signed the sister's third petition in 1674. Mason joined Boston First on September 3, 1665, and her husband, Arthur, a constable and baker who had not been a member of Boston First, followed her to Boston Third joining in 1704. One year after her husband joined Boston Third, Samuel Sewall marked Joanna Mason's death with a note in his diary which read, "I went to the Funeral of Mrs. Johanna Mason. She was a virtuous, pious woman, in the 70th year of her Age." Alice Harper, about who little is known, joined Boston First the same day as Joanna Mason in 1665, and it seems fitting that the two women also joined Boston Third at the same time.⁴⁰

As with Mason, Mary Tappin Avery also preceded a husband – her second – into membership at Boston Third, except that, unlike Mason, who signed the sisters' third petition but was not a dissenting wife, Mary Tappin Avery was a dissenting wife and her first husband, John Tappin, was one of the dissenting brethren. Mary and John Tappin had been members of Boston First since 1664, and along with the other dissenting wives,

³⁹ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:40. Bodman had been a member of Boston First since March 23, 1644; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:207.

⁴⁰ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:516; *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:60; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:166.

Mary signed all three of the wives' petitions, finally joining her husband in membership at Boston Third in 1674. When John died four years later in 1678, Mary subsequently married William Avery, Dedham physician, apothecary, lieutenant in Dedham's company, and freeman. *New England Marriages Prior to 1700* states that William Avery and Mary Tappin were likely married before November 8, 1679, meaning that when William joined Boston Third on October 8, 1680, he would have been following his wife into membership. Whether John joined the church before or after his marriage to Mary, however, is impossible to know with certainty. Given Avery's prominent position in Dedham, it is likely that he joined the church after his marriage to Mary. Regardless, it is significant that the couple remained in Boston after their marriage rather than returning to Dedham where William Avery had held a position of significant influence.⁴¹

Elizabeth Gibbs also signed the sisters' petition and followed the women to Boston Third. Elizabeth married Robert Gibbs in 1660 and joined Boston First in 1666, thus she had only been a member for three years at the time the schism occurred in 1669. At some point prior to 1676, Elizabeth's husband Robert died, and on March 20, 1676, she married second husband Jonathan Corwin. Although she signed her name as Elizabeth Gibbs on the sisters' third petition, she is listed as Elizabeth Corwin in the Boston Third Church records. Like thousands of other women in the seventeenth century who joined a Congregational meetinghouse on their own, Elizabeth Gibbs joined both

⁴¹ On John Tappin see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 4:254; On Mary Tappin Avery see *An Historical Catalog of the Old South Church*, 269; On William Avery see *An Historical Catalog of the Old South Church*, 269 and Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:83; Clarence Breen Torrey, Elizabeth Petty Bentley, *New England Marriages Prior to 1700* (Baltimore, MD.: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1985), 27.

churches without a husband as a co-member. No record exists that would substantiate church membership for either her first or her second husband.⁴²

One of the most prominent and influential woman to stand alongside the sisters by signing their August 1674 petition was Mary Norton, the widow of the Reverend John Norton, Davenport's predecessor as minister at Boston First Church. Norton had been a member of the old church since July 6, 1656 and joined the new church at the same time as the wives of the dissenting brethren: in October of 1674. Prior to joining Boston Third, Norton donated "one parcell of land" upon which to build the new church. The record does not indicate why Norton waited to join the new church until the wives of the dissenting brethren joined. She apparently never sought a dismissal from Boston First, nor was she ever disciplined for absenting herself from worship at the old church, as other women were. She probably could have joined the new church at any time after it was gathered in 1669: A total of eighty-two other women joined Boston Third between 1669 and October of 1674, for example, some having obtained dismissals from other churches such as Dorchester. It is telling that Mary Norton waited to join Boston Third until the wives were also admitted and argues, once again, for the spirit of unity with which the women viewed themselves.⁴³

Even after the wives and other sisters were admitted into fellowship at the new church, other female full church members of Boston First continued to leave the old for the new congregation. Within nine months of the date that the sisters joined Boston

⁴² *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:61; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:247; *An Historical Catalogue of the Old South Church*, 246-47.

⁴³ "Third Church Narrative," in Hill, *Old South*, 1:133; *Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:56-57; *An Historical Catalogue of the Old South Church*, 247-48.

Third, three more women from Boston First had come over to Boston Third; in addition, all three came to Boston Third without a dismissal from Boston First. On January 8, 1675, three months after the wives were admitted to Boston Third, for example, Mary Webbe joined the new church alongside the two wives who had not been admitted in October. Webbe had been a full member at Boston First since 1645, having joined shortly after her husband, Richard, a shoemaker, joined the church. Boston First Church records contain no record of her dismissal, indicating that, like the dissenting wives, Webbe apparently joined Boston Third without being properly dismissed from Boston First. Even if church records are simply incomplete and Webbe did obtain a dismissal from Boston First to join Boston Third Church, it is surprising that she would leave a congregation which she had been a member of for thirty years, the entirety of her adult life, and where her children had been baptized.⁴⁴

Two months after Webbe joined, Anna Search also became a member of Boston Third, joining the new church on March 5, 1675. Search had also been a full member of Boston First, and on April 4, 1675, one month after she joined the Boston Third congregation, Boston First charged her with being a “Covenant-breaker” for having “put her selfe into fellowshipe with the 3d church in boston without dismission.” In other words, Search joined Boston Third even though she did not have a dismissal from Boston First. Additionally, Anna Search was the second wife of John Search, a Boston weaver, who had been a full member of Boston First since September 26, 1641. Was John Search deceased when Anna joined Boston Third? Perhaps he remained at Boston First while

⁴⁴ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1: 43, 298; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 4:446.

Anna attended Boston Third. There is no record of John Search ever joining Boston Third church nor is his death recorded in any of the extant documents.⁴⁵

One month after Anna Search joined Boston Third, Lidia Chapin/Chapen followed suit, joining the new church on April 30, 1675. Seven months previously, on September 20, 1674, Chapin had been excommunicated from Boston First for “Remaineinge obstinate though Clearly Convicted of severall Lyes and Chargeinge Reproachinge the elders and willfully breakeinge her Covenant with the church.” What did Chapin lie about? How had she reproached the elders? Was Boston First charging Chapin, as it had the wives of the dissenting brethren, with breaking her covenant with the church because she had been attending Boston Third while still a member of Boston First? Did Chapin ever seek a dismissal from Boston First? These questions must, due to lack of evidence, remain unanswered. The fact remains, however, that Chapin and her husband, David, had joined Boston First in November of 1669 just as the schism was unfolding. Unlike his wife, David Chapin never joined the new Boston Third church.⁴⁶

Neither Webbe, Search nor Chapen had a husband at Boston Third when they joined. Webbe’s husband, for example, had died on July 2, 1659, so unlike the wives of the dissenting brethren these women were not motivated to change churches by a desire to worship alongside their husbands; what likely connected these women to the new church, what might have compelled someone such as Mary Webbe, who had been a full member of Boston First for thirty years, to leave one church for another, was more than

⁴⁵ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:24, 73.

⁴⁶ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:64, 71.

likely the wives of the dissenting brethren, their sisters in Christ, who were already members of Boston Third by the time the three women were admitted.⁴⁷

Not only did the gathering of Boston Third Church draw women full church members away from Boston First, it also had a dampening effect on the number of new women converts who joined neighboring congregations, particularly after the wives of the dissenting brethren were admitted to Boston Third in 1674. In the decade after Boston Third was gathered, for example, the percentage of women who joined neighboring Boston Second Church fell by eight percent, while at Boston First, the percentage of women fell by a more modest two percent, indicating that at least some of the women who would have joined either Boston First or Second joined Boston Third instead. The statistics comparing female membership at Boston First in 1670 and 1671 with 1674-1677, after the sisters joined Boston Third, are even more telling. In 1670 twenty-nine women joined Boston First. In 1671 the number of new female members dropped to twenty-five. After 1674, however, when the wives of the dissenting brethren were admitted to Boston Third, the number of new women members admitted to Boston First fell to eight women in 1674, six women in 1675, five women in 1676, and seven women in 1677. By 1677 Boston had three Congregational churches within close proximity to each other, and men and women had a greater choice regarding which church to attend. By their actions, the women of Boston First made the choice to remain in covenant with their sisters, even if it meant leaving a church where some of these women had been members for decades.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 4:446.

⁴⁸ On membership statistics for Boston Second Church see "Second Church (Boston, Mass.) Records, 1650-1970," Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. In the decade

Conclusion

The women who petitioned Boston First church for dismissal were not feminists in any modern sense of the word. Nor were they “primitive feminists,” a term historian Lyle Koehler uses to describe the earliest women who “consciously recognized that sexual inequities existed in society, found those inequities objectionable, and protested against them by design.” The women of Boston First were not protesting against a sexual inequality, *per se*. rather they were advocating for the same “rule of Joyning” that their husbands claimed. In other words, they were advocating for the same ability to change churches and to covenant with the congregation of their choice. In this sense the women were proponents of a form of gendered equality within the context of the Congregational church.⁴⁹

To accomplish their goal the women banded together as a cohesive group. At any point after Boston Third was gathered in May of 1669 any one of the wives could have followed her husband’s lead and simply walked away from First church, *sans* dismissal, to attend the new church. Yet no one did. The women waited almost a full year before deciding *en masse* to attend the new church. Throughout the process of trying to obtain a dismissal from First church the women remained united. With the exception of two

prior to the gathering of Boston Third, from 1659 to 1668, the number of women who joined Boston Second Church represented seventy-two percent of the total who joined: From 1659 to 1668, fifteen men joined Boston Second as compared with forty women. In the decade following the establishment of Boston Third, from 1669 to 1678, the number of women as a percentage of the whole at Boston Second fell to sixty-four percent: From 1669 to 1678, thirty-seven men joined Boston Second as compared with sixty-six women; On membership statistics for Boston First Church see: *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:58-75. In the decade prior to the gathering of Boston Third, from 1659 to 1668, the number of women who joined Boston First Church represented sixty-six percent of the total who joined: From 1659 to 1668, fifty-four men joined Boston First as compared with one-hundred and eight women. From 1669 to 1678, the number of women as a percentage of the whole at Boston First fell to sixty-four percent. From 1669 to 1678 sixty-seven men joined Boston First as compared with one-hundred and twenty-three women.

⁴⁹ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1: 20; Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The “Weaker Sex” in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 228.

women who died, *all* of the women who signed the sisters' first petition signed the third petition.

In functioning as a unit, the women's actions, especially their final petition, illustrate a kind of group-consciousness that historians usually associate with the female aid societies and moral reformers of the early-nineteenth century rather than with the Puritan goodwives of the seventeenth century. Historian Nancy Cott, for example, argues that a sex-specific group-consciousness emerged with the "evangelical associationism" of the nineteenth century. This "evangelical associationism," according to Cott, "served to elucidate" the idea of a "'different but equal' doctrine" with regard to the sexes. Yet this same "different but equal" ideology appears in the sisters' final petition. In signing their last petition "Your Sisters in the Lord," and in claiming that the same "rule of Joyning" which allowed the brothers to gather the new Boston Third Church also permitted the sisters to join the men in fellowship, the sisters of Boston First, like the evangelical women of the nineteenth century, also recognized themselves as distinct or different from men yet entitled to the same privileges.⁵⁰

While the women of Boston First were not feminists, they were activists in that they saw themselves as an empowered group of individuals that was capable of effecting change to better their lives, historian Elizabeth Jameson's definition of activism. Far from being "the weaker vessel in both body and mind" whose "husband ought not to expect too much from her," as one historian has referred to Puritan women, the women of Boston First self-identified as "sisters in the Lord" and stated that they were "bold" in doing so. The women's final petition requesting membership at Third church, for

⁵⁰ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 157; Hill, *Old South*, 1:201-2.

example, concludes with the salutation, “wee are bold to subscribe ourselves, Dearly Beloved in the Lord. Your Sisters in the Lord and fellowship of the Gospell.”⁵¹

As a group the sisters petitioned for what they believed was both their duty and their “liberty.” It was their duty to take the sacraments with their husbands and their “liberty,” as stated in their second petition, to worship as their “consciences” deemed “most suitable to our . . . aedification in the Lord.” In claiming the “liberty” to worship as their conscience dictated, the language of the women’s petition echoes the language of the colony’s first law code, the “Body of Liberties,” which provided the “libertie” to “all the people” to “gather themselves into a Church Estaite.”⁵²

The women acted in unison on eight different occasions to secure their dismissal from Boston First so that they might join Boston Third Church. They signed petitions, appointed spokespersons, held private meetings, forbore from taking the Lord’s Supper at Boston Third, sought compromise, then “upon their owne irregular choyce” the women left the old church for the new. That they had the support of their husbands, who also argued for their wives’ dismissal, should not detract from the significance of the women’s actions. Significantly, the original group of twenty wives of the dissenting brethren had grown over the course of five years to include other sisters who followed the women to Boston Third Church, both in support of the wives’ efforts to gain dismissal from Boston

⁵¹ I agree with Elizabeth Jameson who in “Bringing it all Back Home: Rethinking the History of Women and the Nineteenth-Century West,” in *A Companion to the American West*, ed. William Devereell (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) argues that historians should not “force women into models of activism defined by public organizational leadership, but instead ask what issues engaged women” (191). As Jameson notes, “If women’s activism is defined not in terms of public leadership, but as any act to empower women, or improve their lives. . . then activism defines a spectrum from private acts of resistance to organizations fully mobilized to achieve clearly articulated agendas for change” (192). Using Jameson’s definition, the women who petitioned for membership at Boston Third were activists; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 44; Hill, *Old South*, 1:201-2.

⁵² “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:168; *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. VIII of the Third Series (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1843), 275.

First and in membership at the new church. The church network had become a vehicle for organizing female power for women such as Elizabeth Raynsford who emphatically stated, “I desire the like liberty [of church membership] with the rest of my sisters.”⁵³

⁵³ “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:201-2, 168.

APPENDIX A/ PETITION SIGNATURES

Dissenting Men's Petition (1668)	Sisters' First Petition (Mar. 1669/70)	Sisters' Second Petition (April 1670)	Sisters' Third Petition (August 1674)
<i><u>Brethren Whose Wives Were Full Church Members</u></i>			
John Allden	Eliz Allden	Eliz Alden	Elizabeth Alden
Jos Belcher	Ran Bellcher	Reanis Belcher	Reanis Belcher
Peter Brackitt	Mary Brackett	Mary Brackitt	Mary Brackit
	Hulldah Davis *	Hulldah Davis *	Johanna Davis *
Wm Dawes	Susanna Daws	Susanna Dawes	Susanna Dawes
Jacob Elliot	Mary Elliot	Mary Elliot	Mary Ellet
Theop Ffrary	Hannah Ffrairy	Hannah Frary	Hannah Frary
John Hull	Judith Hull	Judith Hull	Judith Hull
Peter Oliver	Sarah Olliver	Sarah Oliver	Sarah Oliver
James Pemberton	Sarah Pemberton	Sarah Pemberton	Sarah Pemberton
Ed Rainsford	Eliz Ransford	Elizabeth Raynsford	Elizabeth Rainsford
Ed Rawson	Rach Rawson	Rachel Rawson	Rachel Rawson
Joseph Roche	Eliz Rock	Elisabeth Rock	Elizabeth Roche
Wm Salter	Mary Sallter	Mary Salter	Mary Salter
Tho Savage	Mary Savage	Mary Savage	Mary Savage
Joshua Scottow	Lidia Scottow	Lidia Scottow	Lidia Scottow
John Tappin	Mary Tappin	Mary Tappin	Mary Tapen
		Margaret Thacher *	Margreatt Thacher *
Ben Thirston	Elis Thirston	Elishua Thurston	Elishua Thirton
Hez Usher	Elizabeth Usher *		
Robr Walker	Sarah Walker	Sarah Walker	Sara Walker
<i><u>Brethren Whose Wives Were Not Full Church Members</u></i>			<i><u>Additional Women Full Church Members Who Signed the Wives' Third Petition But Did Not Have a Husband at Boston Third</u></i>
Theodore Attkinson			Elizabeth Beck
Jos Belknap			Sarah Bodeman
Thomas Brattle			Elizabeth Gibbs (Corwin)
Joseph Davis			Alice Harper
Benjamin Gibbs			Johanna Mason
John Sanford			Mary Norton
<i><u>Single Brethren</u></i>			
Edward Alline			
John Pease			
Seth Perry			

* **Hulldah Davis** – Hulldah Davis' husband, William, did not sign the dissenting men's petition but was a founding member of Boston Third Church. Hulldah Davis likely died sometime prior to 1674.

* **Johanna Davis** – Johanna Davis is probably the youngest daughter of William Davis and step-daughter to Hulldah Davis per *An Historical Catalog of the Old South Church*, 318. Her name appears on the sisters's third petition, but not on the first or second.

* **Margaret Thacher** – Margaret Thacher, widow of Jacob Sheaffe, married Thomas Thacher, who was the first minister of Boston Third, soon after Thacher's first wife died in 1664. Margaret had been a member of Boston First since 1647. Margaret did not sign the wives' first petition but did sign the second and third petitions. Thomas Thacher joined Boston First in August of 1667, and in October of 1669 he was dismissed to the Charlestown congregation. The following February, in 1670, Thomas Thacher was installed as the pastor of the new Boston Third Church.

* **Elizabeth Usher** – Elizabeth Usher had been a member of Boston First since 1656. She signed the wives' first petition requesting dismissal but died sometime before the second petition was signed in 1670.

Brethren Whose Wives Were Not Full Church Members

Theodore Attkinson – Theodore Attkinson married his second wife, Mary, who was the widow of Edward Lyde, in Oct, 1667 just prior to schism. Mary was not a member of Boston First. She joined Boston Third in July of 1673, just prior to the wives' third petition.

Jos Belknap – Jos Belknap married third wife, Hannah (maiden name, Meakins) in 1669 just as the schism was beginning. There is no record of Hannah joining either Boston First or Second church.

Thomas Brattle – Thomas Brattle married Elizabeth (maiden name, Tyng) in ? Elizabeth joined Boston Third May 3, 1672, two years prior to the wives' third petition. She was not a member of Boston First.

Joseph Davis – Joseph Davis married Elizabeth (maiden name, Saywell) in May of 1662. Elizabeth Davis joined Boston Third in May of 1674, just months before the sisters joined *en masse* in October of 1674.

Benjamin Gibbs – Benjamin Gibbs married Lydia (maiden name, Scottow) in 1664. Lydia was the daughter of Joshua Scottow, who signed the dissenting brethren's petition, and Lidia Scottow, who signed all three sisters's petition. Lydia Scottow was baptized at Boston First but was not a member. She joined Boston Third in 1671, after the sisters's second petition.

Seth Perry – Savage does not name a wife for Perry. Hill, *Old South* says that he was married to Dorothy (maiden name, Powell) who joined Boston Third in 1670. Dorothy was not a member of Boston First.

John Sanford – John Sanford married Sarah Potter, widow of Robert Potter, in 1656. There is no record of Sarah Potter Sanford joining either Boston First or Second church.

Single Brethren

Edward Alline – Edward Alline is not included in list of founding members of Boston. Alline never married.

John Pease – John Pease either returned to or stayed at Boston First as church records indicate he was “Released from his Excommunication” in 1676 (*The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 73).

Sources:

The men’s petition is in “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1: 27-28. The sisters’ petitions are in “Third Church Narrative,” in Hill, *Old South*, 1:164, 165, 168, 201-2. Biographical information on the founders/members through 1719 can be found in *An Historical Catalog of the Old South Church*, 215-350 and Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary*.

Chapter Five

Puritan Women, Religious Experience, and Legacy

In 1672 the male congregants of one Boston, Massachusetts church were reminded to make the instruction of religion “easy” on their wives. The admonition was necessary since, according to historian Edmund Morgan, the Puritans understood women to be the “weaker vessel in both body and mind.” A husband simply “ought not to expect too much” from his spouse when it came to understanding theology. In this traditional historiographical interpretation of religion and domestic relationships, the husband was the unquestioned spiritual head of the household, whole families worshipped together on Sunday, the Puritan Sabbath, and fathers bore the primary responsibility for the spiritual instruction of their offspring as well as for their wives. This gendered domestic hierarchy replicated the gendered hierarchy of the church where men, not women, served as the pillars upon which a new congregation was gathered and where only men called up and voted on the selection of a new pastor. In short, despite their numerical preponderance as full church members, the ordinary women who filled the pews were destined to be spiritual followers, not leaders; their religious experiences shaped by others in authority over them.¹

That many Puritan families fit this traditional model is illustrated by the diary of men such as Samuel Sewall who recorded numerous instances of leading his family in

¹ Boston Sermons 1671-1679, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, quoted in Edmund S. Morgan’s seminal work *The Puritan Family Religion & Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 44. The phrase “weaker vessel” also appears in Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, ed. Gordon W. Jones (Barre, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1972), 233, although Morgan does not cite it; Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 31, describes the Sabbath morning processional to the meeting house as a “man and wife walking first, and the children in quiet procession after them. Often a man-servant and a maid walked on either side of the heads of the family.”

daily devotions. One Sabbath morning in 1686, for instance, Sewall wrote, “this morn sung and read in the family” the “Exposition of Habakkuk 3rd.” But not every family had a man such as Sewall at its head, and at times women assumed the responsibility for their own spiritual edification and for that of their family. Sewall’s example notwithstanding, this chapter seeks to complicate this traditional understanding of gendered power both as it pertains to religion and domestic relationships and within the context of the church. It expands upon a theme introduced in chapter four: women who leave husbands behind at one church in order to join a new one. As early as 1675, for example, at least a few women in the Boston area were changing churches independent of their husbands, even leaving churches they had attended for decades. Sometimes a woman would join a new church while her husband continued attending the old, thus creating a two-church household. In other instances, men followed their wives to the new church; sometimes husbands joined the new church and at other times they did not. In those cases where the husband had no church affiliation—a significant number given that by the end of the seventeenth century, women outnumbered men three to one as full church members in many congregations—women acted independently quite apart from their husbands in joining and changing churches of their own volition.²

² Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 1:127; On family devotions as a private extension of public worship see Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 136-40 and Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 143-50; Boston was the only Massachusetts Bay town with more than one church in the seventeenth century. For a list of colonial clergy and churches in New England see Frederick Lewis Weis, *The Colonial Clergy and the Colonial Churches of New England* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1977); While chapter four, “Wives and Sisters in the Boston First Church Schism, 1669-1674,” demonstrates how a group of women from Boston First agitated for an orderly dismissal from one church to another so that they might worship with their husbands—a goal consistent with historians’ understanding of traditional family structures—it also presents examples of several women who, rather than follow their husbands, left husbands behind at Boston First in order to join their “sisters” at Boston Third. See pages 161-64.

This chapter also explores several ways that women claimed the authority to craft their religious experience and legacy, not just through changing churches, as in the Boston area, but as participants, as patrons, and as women who were willing to engage the civil authorities when a church/state conflict impinged on their practice of religion. Women such as Elizabeth Pole of Taunton were influential patrons, both in life and in death, shaping their spiritual legacy through bequests to their minister and church. In Malden, thirty-six women collectively petitioned the General Court to keep their minister in the pulpit. In Boston, two women from Boston Third church engaged the civil state when it interfered with their practice of religion. And as previously stated, toward the end of the seventeenth century the women of Boston began changing churches independent of their husbands. Although they were not permitted to vote in civic matters or on the choice of a minister, except at the Brattle Street church—which was not founded until 1699—the women of Boston voted with their feet by choosing which church they would attend. In sum, women in colonial Massachusetts towns such as Boston, Taunton, and Malden were not simply content to have decisions about their religious experiences controlled by their husbands or others in authority over them but consciously made choices that determined the context within which they publicly practiced their faith and the legacy that they would leave, often quite successfully.³

³ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 44; The Malden women's petition is only the second instance of group petitioning by women known to historians of the Colonial Era: the first being the petitions offered for midwife Alice Tilly. On Tilly see p. 137n.

Elizabeth Pole: Patroness—“I give unto the Church of God at Taunton”

One woman who made choices about the way in which she practiced her faith was Elizabeth Pole/Poole, who in 1637 came from England to Dorchester and then to Taunton as part of what would become known as the Great Migration. Pole was both a patron of Taunton’s First Congregational church, as illustrated by her will, and someone whose influence upon and importance to the religious life of the community was recognized by the General Court in the form of land grants. Described by her contemporary, John Winthrop, as a “gentle-woman” and memorialized in stained glass by a later generation of Taunton residents as “instrumental in . . . establishing the first church,” Pole’s contributions were not unlike those of other nonconforming Puritan women in England from whence she emigrated.⁴

Elizabeth Pole arrived in New England late in 1637 having left Weymouth, England on April 22, 1637 aboard the *Speedwell*, bringing with her “2 friends, 14 servants, goods valued at £100, and 20 tons of salt for fishing provision,” her assets marking her as a woman of means. Her brother, William, had preceded her across the Atlantic, perhaps by as many as seven years, although his exact arrival date in New England is unknown. By January 1638 Elizabeth had established herself and her

⁴ John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 245; For claims that Pole was instrumental in establishing Taunton’s first church see: the Old Colony Historical Society website, <http://www.oldcolonyhistoricalsociety.org>. Extant documents which might have confirmed the Historical Society’s claim, however, were destroyed in a 1838 fire; See also: Taunton’s First Parish Church Williams Stained-Glass Window (1950) which “depicts the great events of church and Taunton history” including “the signing of the Church Covenant in 1637 by Elizabeth Pole, William Hook, the first minister, Richard Williams, and William Pole, Elizabeth’s brother,” according to “A Visitor’s guide to The First Parish Church in Taunton,” page 5, Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, Massachusetts; On the church patronage of Puritan women in England see R.C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 134-38; See also Richard L. Greaves, “The Role of Women in Early English Nonconformity,” *Church History* 52, no. 3 (Sep., 1983): 299-311.

livestock on a farm in Taunton. As Winthrop records in a diary entry for January 16, 1638, “This year a plantation was begun at Tecticut by a gentle-woman, an ancient maid, one Mrs. Poole. She went late thither, and endured much hardship, and lost much cattle. Called after, Taunton.” Although Winthrop refers to her as “an ancient maid,” she was in fact just fifty years old although she had never been married.⁵

As an unmarried woman, a *feme sole*, Elizabeth Pole was able to own land, and early Plymouth Colony records detailing land allotments serve to illustrate the centrality of her place within the town’s religious hierarchy. In March of 1639/40, at the same time that the General Court set aside “meadow grounds” for the “inhabitants of Taunton,” it added a provision ordering that the town’s two ministers, “Mr. Hooke [and] Mr. Streete,” along with “Mrs. Pool shall have competent meadow and uplands for farms laid forth for them about May next by Capt. Standish and such others with him as shall be especially

⁵ English Port Books reproduced in Peter Wilson Coldham, “Genealogical Gleanings in England Passengers and Ships to America, 1618-1668,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (September 1983): 163-79; Wilton E. Cross in *Elizabeth Pole The Valiant, 1637-1937* (Taunton, Massachusetts: the Davol Printing House, 1937), n. pag, asserts that “in all probability,” Taunton First Congregational Society’s first ministers, William Hooke and Nicholas Street, came to New England with Elizabeth Pole and her brother William, and that one may “take it for granted that the four, of about an age, had many talks about emigrating to the new world and founding a church.” Cross does not include footnotes, but English Port Books suggest that he could be correct. Although Hooke and Streete are not listed as passengers with Elizabeth Pole on the *Speedwell’s* April 22 sailing, both men had livestock aboard another ship, the *Elizabeth*, which sailed five days after the *Speedwell*, thus indicating that the men either sailed sometime around April 22 or were already in New England. The men are not listed as passengers aboard the *Elizabeth* either. According to Coldham in “Genealogical Gleanings,” “The names of passengers were not recorded unless they also happened to be exporting dutiable goods, though some exceptions are to be found to this practice, for whatever reason, for the year 1637 in the Weymouth Port Books” (163). Thus it is possible that the men sailed with Pole on April 22 but their names were not recorded since they shipped their livestock on a different ship five days later; Samuel Hopkins Emery in *History of Taunton, Massachusetts* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Company, Publishers, 1893), 161, also states that both ministers “were guided, through the agency, it is believed, of the Poles,” to Taunton; That an English Puritan woman might have helped procure the settlement of a new minister was not out of the question according to Oliver Heywood, *The Reverend Oliver Heywood 1630-1702 His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote, and Event Books Illustrating the General and Family History of Yorkshire and Lancashire in three Volumes, with Illustrations*, ed. J. Horsfall Turner (Brighouse: A.B. Bayes, 1882), 49, who states that his mother helped “procure the settlement of [a] pious minister” in England; For biographical information on William Pole/Poole see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:455-56; John Winthrop, *Journal*, 245.

assigned thereunto.” As named in the court’s provision alongside Hooke and Streete, Pole was in good company. The meadow and uplands, however, represented only a portion of the 250 acres that was eventually allocated to Pole. As recorded in the Taunton Proprietor’s Records, Pole was not only allocated “forty acres of meadow” at her Littleworth farm—the same place where Winthrop stated that she had earlier established a plantation and “endured much hardship”—she was also given “fifteen acres to the next unto Mr. Hooke’s house” for her “home lot.” Tellingly, Pole’s “home lot,” where she resided from 1639 to 1653 and where she was buried, was next door to Hooke’s house and was just steps away from the site of the Taunton First church, thus placing Pole in a central location within the emerging town. The Reverend Nicholas Street’s home lot was located on the other side of Hooke’s.⁶

According to the language in the *Early Records of the Town of Dedham*, a sizeable land grant in such a central part of town was indicative of one’s “usefulness either in Church or Commonwealth” as well as one’s “Ranke & Qualitie,” the later description more often applied to men than to women. In the absence of early Taunton town records, one may assume that similar qualifications for land grants were applicable there as well. The location and size of Pole’s home land grant would have thus been indicative of her “usefulness” to Taunton’s larger religious community. Prior to the construction of Taunton’s first church, for example, Pole might have offered her yard for

⁶ While spinsters and widows could own property, ownership of married women’s real property passed to the husband upon marriage. On women’s property rights see Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 161-69; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (Boston: The Press of William White, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1855-1861), 1:142-43; The Taunton Proprietors’ Records, 1:16, which notes the lands “laid out unto Mrs. Elizabeth Pool, of Taunton,” is reprinted in Emery, *History of Taunton*, 104; The Taunton First church, or First Congregational Society, was constructed some time prior to 1647 by Henry Andrews, another Taunton resident who received land in exchange for his labor according to Emery, *History of Taunton*, 30, 175; In 1771 Pole’s remains were reinterred in the Plain Cemetery in Taunton.

Sabbath meetings. As historian William F. Hanna points out, before the first church was built Hooke would have gathered the congregation in his home or, “weather permitting, the yard of one of his church members.” Living right next door to Hooke, Pole was in a position to extend hospitality in hosting Sabbath services. Either way, the General Court affirmed Elizabeth Pole’s importance to Taunton’s religious community by granting her land next door to the meetinghouse and its ministers. William Pole’s “home lot,” in contrast, lay approximately seven miles away, just north of Elizabeth’s Littleworth Farm.⁷

In addition to Plymouth Colony land records, which help substantiate Pole’s commitment to the infant church, her “Last Will and Testament,” drawn up shortly prior to her death on May 21, 1654, also demonstrates her patronage to the same. Among her bequests, for example, Pole gave a cow to the church at Taunton. As stated in her will, “I give unto the Church of God at Taunton, for the furtherance of any special service thereof, one cow whichsoever the overseers shall like best to take for that end, after my decease, and improve it for that end.” Significantly, an inventory of her estate reveals that her four cows represented the single most valuable items she possessed. While her “yoke of oxen,” for example, was valued at £5 per ox, one heifer was valued at £8.10 and the other at £6. Two additional cows were valued at a combined £4.10. Since Pole did not specify which cow the church overseers should take but left it to their discretion, it is possible that the church received a gift worth almost £9, not an extravagant amount but not an insignificant one either, equal to approximately five percent of her total estate.

⁷ Dedham, Mass., *Early Records of the Town of Dedham, 1636-1659* ed. Don Gleason Hill (Dedham, Massachusetts: Printed at the Office of the Dedham Transcript, 1892), 3:92; William F. Hanna, *A History of Taunton Massachusetts* (Taunton, Massachusetts: Old Colony Historical Society, 2007), 18. For a map of early Taunton ca. 1639, including Elizabeth Pole’s Tetiquet Settlement, see Hanna, 6.

While Pole gave her land, clothing, and other personal and household items to family and friends, the church received an item of value that could be easily liquidated thus ensuring her influence on church practices into the future.⁸

Female Patrons: “I do hereby also Give”

Elizabeth Pole was not the only Massachusetts woman to serve as a patron of her church, most certainly in death if not also in life. At the same time that they bequeathed petticoats and waistcoats, muskets and swords, dwelling houses and land to their family and friends, ordinary Puritan women also remembered their ministers and churches when writing their wills. In her July 31, 1676, will, for example, Mary (Chilton) Winslow of Boston gave a financial bequest to her pastor, stating: “I do hereby also Give and bequeath unto Mr. Thomas Thacher paster of the third Church in Boston the Sume of five pounds in mony to be pd convenient time after my decease by my Executr.” As one of the original *Mayflower* settlers, Mary Winslow and her husband, John, had previously been members of the Plymouth church before receiving a dismissal to join Thacher’s Boston Third church in 1671. Significantly, with the exception of monies set aside to compensate one Mrs. Tappen “for and towards the maintenance” of Winslow’s granddaughter, Ann Gray, until she reached the age of maturity, Thacher was the only non-family member included in her will.⁹

⁸ Elizabeth Pole’s will is reprinted in: Emery, *History of Taunton*, 95-97; Elizabeth Pole, “Inventory of the Estate of Elizabeth Pole—1654,” Collection of the Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, Massachusetts. Pole’s total estate was valued at £188.11.7 and included shares in an iron works valued at £25.10 as well as “wearing clothes amounting to the value of £31.16. 9.”

⁹ For a copy of Mary Winslow’s will see The Plymouth Colony Archive Project, <http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/wills.html>; *Records of the Old South Church in Boston*, 5. John Winslow and Mary Chilton were married in 1627. John died in 1674.

As based on her May 11, 1644, will, Joanna Cummins of Salem not only made a financial bequest to her minister, the Reverend Edward Norris of Salem First, she also stipulated that funds should go to the church and to the church deacons to provide for the needs of the poor. As Cummins states, “I give to Mr Noris Twenty shillings & to the Church twenty shillings: desiring them to Exsept so small a gift,” the language of her will suggesting that she was embarrassed about the modest size of her gift. Cummins further instructs that the money bequeathed to her minister and church should come from the sale of “all my best Apparel bed & bedding and all my housould goods.” After her debts were satisfied, “the Rest” of the money from the sale of her possessions should be given to the church Deacons “for them to give where is appoynted.” Thus Cummins, through the vehicle of the church, was engaged in the kind of philanthropy that marked her as a “friendly Neighbor, pitiful to poor. Whom oft she fed, and clothed with her store,” admirable and desirable qualities in a woman according to Puritan poetess Anne Bradstreet.¹⁰

Like Winslow and Cummins, Hester Sears of Wobourne remembered her minister, Increase Mather of Boston Second church, in her March 2, 1680, will with a £4 bequest, a significant amount given the size of her other bequests. Other bequests, for example, stipulated that £5 was to be divided up between one of her sister’s children and another £5 to her brother’s offspring. Smaller amounts were bequeathed to various siblings and cousins with household items similarly divided. Sears not only indicated

¹⁰ George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1916) (hereafter cited as: RFQCEC), 1:65-66; Anne Bradstreet, “An Epitaph On my dear and ever honoured Mother Mrs. Dorothy Dudley, who deceased Decemb. 27, 1643. and of her age, 61,” *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse* (Charlestown: Abram E. Cutter, 1867), n. pag.

who was to receive what, she also instructed her brothers, Isaac and Israel How, to use money from the rent of the “meadow and upland at Dorchester, that her father How gave her” to pay Mather. Interestingly, Sears’s will stipulated that if she preceded her husband in death, the meadow and upland that she received from her father would stay in the family. Although the rent from these properties would go to her husband, John, during his lifetime, after his death, the property would go “outright” to her brothers, and they in turn were “to pay to Mr. Increase Mather, teacher of the 2nd church in Boston, 4li [£].” Thus Mather only received his bequest if Sears outlived her husband, otherwise the rent money from Sears’s properties would go to her husband.¹¹

In an unusual move, the first beneficiaries listed in Elizabeth Spooner’s July 22, 1673, will were not family, as was customary. Instead Spooner named two ministers from the Salem church, John Higginson and Charles Nicholet/Nicholets, as recipients of bequests. As Spooner states, “I give unto our Reverant pastor Mr. John Higenson five poundes in money: & to Mr. Nicolatt forty Shillings in Goods.” Only after naming Higginson and Nicholet does Spooner list the rest of her bequests: linen to her granddaughters and silver spoons to her grandson, for example, with the remainder of her estate going to her son-in-law, John Rucke Jr.¹²

Perhaps reflecting her affiliation with various churches throughout her lifetime, Anne Mills of Watertown left her entire estate to four different churches. Boston First church received “One Quarter Part” of her estate while Old South in Boston, the

¹¹ RFQCEC, 3:2-3.

¹² RFQCEC, 4:306. Elizabeth Spooner was the widow and second wife of Thomas Spooner, a freeman and full church member at Salem. Thomas died c. 1664. John Rucke was married to Elizabeth’s daughter, Hannah. For biographical information on Thomas and Elizabeth Spooner see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 4:152.

Watertown church in the “West part” and the Watertown church in the “East part” of town also received one quarter of Mills’s estate. Her November 27, 1725, will indicated that she wished the funds to be used “for the relief of the Poor of the said Churches and such Poor as usually congregate with said Churches, at the Discretion of the Minister or Ministers and Deacons.”¹³ Bequests such as those made by Elizabeth Spooner, Elizabeth Pole and others illustrate the importance of the church community in the lives of Puritan women and speak to women’s role as participants in and patrons of New England Puritanism, rather than as passive observers

Women Vote With Their Feet: Multi-Church Households

Elizabeth Pole’s move across the Atlantic from England to New England necessitated a concomitant change in churches. For other Puritan women already settled in the Massachusetts Bay area, however, the decision to change churches had nothing to do with a change of residence. That Bay-area women were able to change churches without also changing their place of residence was due to the fact that Boston had four Congregational churches by 1700: Boston First, Boston Second, Boston Third, and the Brattle Street Church. Boston, like other New England towns, however, began with only one Congregational meeting house.

In the early decades of settlement in the Massachusetts Bay colony Puritan immigrants established communities in which the meeting house was the center of town, both figuratively, and at times, literally. Used for public worship and assembly and viewed as the “Centor of the wholl Circomference” in towns such as Ipswich, Hingham, and Weymouth, residents were initially required to build their homes within half a mile

¹³ *Records of the First Church in Boston*, 2:469.

of the meeting house. As stated in a 1635 law, “noe dwelling house shall be builte above half a myle from the meeting house.” Although the law was “repealed” five years later in 1640, the meeting house continued to play a central role in both the civic and religious life of the town, and in places such as Dedham, Plymouth, Cambridge, and Boston, a building for public assembly and worship was usually the first communal structure erected. Within these humble buildings, as required by law, individuals gathered together on Sunday, the Puritan Sabbath or Lord’s Day, to worship God.¹⁴

Although an individual meeting house might be enlarged and improved over time, in most towns one meeting house was sufficient to meet the community’s needs throughout the seventeenth century. The ideal sized congregation, according to The Cambridge Platform, required enough members to “conveniently carry on Church-work” but not so many that people could not “meet together conveniently in one place.” In Boston, however, the population had grown large enough by the mid-seventeenth century that a second Congregational meeting house was required. Thus in 1650 Boston Second was established. A third Congregational meeting house was founded in 1669 when a dissenting faction of brethren split from Boston First and established Boston Third or Old

¹⁴ “Essay on the Ordering of Towns,” in *Winthrop Papers*, 3:1631-1637 (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), 3:181. The “Essay” is an undated and anonymous document included as part of the Winthrop Papers; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628-1641* (Boston: From the Press of William White, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1853), 1:157, 291. No explanation for repeal of the law is given, although one suspects it became impractical as based on the remittance of a fine to Willi Luddington for “failing therein” to keep the law (291); On seventeenth-century New England meeting house history and architecture see: Marian Card Connelly, *The New England Meeting Houses of the Seventeenth Century* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968); On November 4, 1646, the General Court passed a law which made attendance at public meetings, including the Lord’s day and fast and thanksgiving days, mandatory. For the text of the law see Shurtleff ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628-1641*, 2:177, 178; For a brief overview of the role of law in enforcing Sabbath behavior and attendance see Edgar J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process, 1620-1692* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 45-48.

South church. The gathering of the Brattle Street church in 1699 brought the total number of Congregational churches in Boston to four by 1700.¹⁵

Having multiple churches within the relatively small geographic area that constituted Boston—as illustrated by John Bonner’s 1722 map—meant that as early as 1650, individuals had a choice of which church to attend and/or join. The Boston Second



This photo of John Bonner’s 1722 Boston map illustrates the close proximity of the first four Boston churches. Boston First (blue dot) was approximately one-half a mile away from Boston Second (green dot) and one-eighth of a mile away from Boston Third (yellow dot) and Brattle Street (red dot). John Bonner, *The Town of Boston In New England* (Boston: George G. Smith, Engraver, 1835).

¹⁵ For a useful list of all Congregation meetinghouses built between 1631 and 1700 in New England see Connelly, *The New England Meeting Houses*, 121-30; Williston Walker, ed., *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960), 206. The Cambridge Platform was the New England Congregational church platform of church discipline drawn up in 1648 and agreed to by a synod of ministers and elders; By 1700 Boston also had a Quaker, a Baptist and an Anglican church.

meetinghouse, for example, lay in the “North End” of town and was a little more than a half a mile away from Boston First, considered a reasonable distance to travel in 1650. Boston Third and Brattle Street were even closer to Boston First: approximately one-eighth of a mile away in opposite directions, while the Boston Third and Brattle Street congregations were about one quarter mile distant from each other. In short, for those who wanted to change churches from Boston First to Third, as, for instance, during the Boston First church schism where members split off from Boston First church to form Boston Third, the distance from one church to another would not have been an impediment.¹⁶

Significantly, by 1669 with the establishment of Boston Third Church, and later with the gathering of the Brattle Street Church in 1699, church membership records indicate that at least a few women in the Boston area were changing churches independent of their husbands, even leaving churches they had attended for decades. Sometimes a woman would join a new church while her husband continued attending the old, thus creating a two-church household. In other instances, men followed their wives to the new church; sometimes husbands joined the new church and at other times they did not. In those cases where the husband had no church affiliation—a significant number given that by the end of the seventeenth century, women outnumbered men three to one

¹⁶ Distances between the Boston-area churches are based on John Bonner’s 1722 map: *The Town of Boston In New England* originally published in 1835 by George G. Smith, Engraver in Boston; To my knowledge, there are no other works examining what I call Puritan religious consumerism, the idea that individuals would leave one church in favor of another that was close by because of doctrine or practices that the congregant found more favorable; On the Boston First church schism see chapter four, “Wives and Sisters in the Boston First Church Schism: 1669-1674.”; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in *Good Wives Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 217, points out that distances of three or four miles would have been prohibitive to travel for Sabbath worship, especially for the aged, women, and small children.

as full church members in many congregations—women acted independently in joining and changing churches of their own volition.¹⁷

While all of these scenarios complicate the traditional historiography on the Puritan family in which, as stated in the introduction, families worshipped together and husbands were responsible for the religious instruction of their wives, the Massachusetts Bay Puritans were not necessarily uncomfortable with the idea of multi-church households in which family members might worship apart from each other. In response to concerns emanating out of England, for example, the Preface to the Cambridge Platform states that if a “wife, or children, or servants doe stand in relation” to another church and “profit by the word they have heard” this is “to the greater edification of the whole family ... Bees may bring more hony, & wax into the hive, when they are not limited to one garden of flowers, but may fly abroad to many.” The male head of the home, however, those “godly householders in the Citty,” still had a responsibility to “take account of their children & servants, how they profit by the word they have heard in several churches.” Thus even if families worshipped apart, the husband still had a moral responsibility to oversee the spiritual education of his children and servants. As the *Platform* makes clear, however, a husband was not similarly tasked with “tak[ing] account” of whether or not his wife was profiting by the teaching she heard in another church, nor were women precluded from attending the church of their choice. The multi-

¹⁷ A comparison of the membership records of Boston First with Boston Second could also turn up examples of women who left Boston First for Boston Second church as could a comparison of Boston-area church membership records with outlying churches such as Cambridge. Such a study was not undertaken for this work, however; In Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978; reprint of the 3d ed., Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741) Mather remarked that “in a church of between three or four hundred communicants there are but few more than one hundred men; all the rest are women” (48).

church household may not have been typical of most Massachusetts towns in which there was only one Congregational church, but it did exist in Boston.¹⁸

Although changing churches was not a decision to be taken lightly and, in the case of full church members, required a formal dismissal, the popular seventeenth-century practice of attending weekday “lectures” or mid-week sermons, sometimes traveling from “town to town” to do so, created a laity that was accustomed to listening to and evaluating the preaching style and efficacy of various ministers. These lectures were not meant to take the place of regular Sabbath worship at one’s own church, but, as the Reverend John Cotton stated, “every week in most of our Churches,” those “whofe hearts God maketh willing, and his hand doth not detaine by bodily infirmitie, or other neccessary imployments, (if they dwell in the heart of the Bay) may have opportunitie to heare the Word almoft every day of the weeke in one Church or other, not farre diftant from them.” Those who lived outside of Boston might come to town to hear a weekday lecture while someone living within Boston but attending Boston Third could still hear the preaching of the Boston First minister, for instance, on Boston’s Thursday lecture days. Attending weekday lectures also created the context within which lay men and women got to know the members of other congregations, thus making the transition from one church to another, if and when it did occur, more familiar.¹⁹

¹⁸ Walker, ed., *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 201. Per *The Creeds*, one of the charges emanating out of England was that the New England Puritans “sow seeds of division & hinderance of edification in every family ... the husband will be of one church, the wife of another ... the parents of one church, the children of another the maister of one church, the servants of another. And so the parents & maisters being of different churches from their children & servants, they cannot take a just account of their profiting by what they heare, yea by this meanes the husbands, parents, & maisters, shall be chargable to the maintenance of many other churches, & church-officers, besides their own: which will prove a charge & burden unsupportable” (196). The New England Puritans disputed these charges.

¹⁹ Weekday lectures were popular mid-week sermons which served as “recreation” for the people according to Annie Haven Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston 1630-1822*

The Reverend Peter Thacher and his wife, Theodora, help illustrate the frequency and ease with which Congregationalists visited other churches. In one seven month period between September 1680 and April 1681, for example, the Thachers traveled multiple times, sometimes taking others with them. On September 23, 1680, they traveled to Boston to attend the weekday lecture. On October 5 Peter and Theodora rode to Weymouth to hear Mr. Adams lecture and returned home that same night. On Sunday, October 16 Theodora went to Boston without her husband, possibly attending a Sabbath service there. On April 4, 1681, Peter and Theodora again traveled to Weymouth to attend the weekday lecture, and finally, on April 7, 1681, Peter Thacher records that he carried Mrs. Betty Davie to Boston to hear Mr. Eliot Senior.” In short, as illustrated by the frequency with which the Thachers visited neighboring churches, if and when women decided to change churches, as for example, when the Brattle Street church was gathered, they likely already knew the minister, elders, and at least a few members of their new congregation.²⁰

When the Brattle Street church was gathered in 1699 its founders introduced several innovations in church practice that would have been attractive to women, innovations that may help explain why women would chose to join Brattle Street rather than another Boston area church and why women would leave a church where they were long-time members to join the Brattle Street congregation. On March 1, 1702, for example, the widow Elizabeth Whetcomb, aged forty-seven, left Boston Third church and

(Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1920), 15; On weekday lectures see also: Thomas Lechford, *Plaine Dealing or News from New England* (Boston: J. K. Wiggin & Wm. Parsons Lunt, 1867), 19; John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England* (London: Matthew Simmons in Aldersgate Street, 1645), 70. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 99-100.

²⁰ Peter Thacher, “Peter Thacher Diaries, 1679-1958,” Microfilm Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

became a member of Brattle Street. Whetcomb and her late husband, James, had been members “under the baptismal covenant” at Boston Third since 1680. In other words, they had been half-way members at Boston Third for over twenty years, a membership status which allowed the Whetcombs to have three of their children baptized. In addition to Elizabeth Whetcomb, thirty-four other women joined Brattle Street during the first three years of its existence. Of these thirty-four women, fifteen, or 44%, joined the church on their own without a husband. Clearly, something enticed Whetcomb and other Boston-area women to leave their home church for the newly gathered Brattle Street congregation.²¹

Prominent among the changes that Brattle Street implemented was the decision to allow women a vote in the choice of a pastor. As the *Manifesto* of the Brattle Street Church states, “we cannot confine the right of choosing a Minister to the Male Communicants alone, but we think that every Baptized Adult Person who contributes to the Maintenance, should have a Vote in Electing.” Part of the draw at Brattle Street may also have been the choice of Benjamin Colman as the first minister. Sarah Colman, Benjamin’s sister, remarked in a letter to her brother that he possessed “tenderness” in his “judgment toward our sex,” indicating a level of understanding towards women perhaps not in evidence elsewhere.²²

²¹ Hamilton Hill, ed., *1669-1882 An Historical Catalogue of the Old South (Third Church)*, Boston (Boston: Printed for Private Distribution, 1833), 1:329; According to Sewall, *Diary*, 1:126, James Whetcomb died on November 23, 1686, meaning that Elizabeth was a widow when she left Boston Third to join Brattle Street. Three Whetcomb children were baptized at Boston Third: James in 1680, William in 1681, and Elizabeth in 1684. Elizabeth Whetcomb died in 1712, ten years after joining Brattle Street. As a half way member, she would not have needed a formal dismissal from Boston Third in order to join Brattle Street.

²² Benjamin Colman, *A Manifesto or Declaration, Set Forth by the Undertakers of the New Church Now Erected in Boston in New-England, November 17, 1699* (Boston: Printed by B. Green and J. Allen? 1699?), 3; Colman, Sarah, “Letter from Sarah Colman (Boston) to Her Brother Benjamin Colman

Another key Brattle Street innovation involved eliminating a practice which had the unintended consequence of silencing women's singing voices within the meetinghouse over the course of the seventeenth century. At a general meeting on December 20, 1699, the congregation of Brattle Street church "voted unanimously that the psalms in our public worship be sung without Reading line by line," a practice that had become known as "lining out." In voting to do away with "lining out," the congregation was agreeing to return to singing the "regular way," that is, with musical notation, lyrics, and three-part harmony from a printed song book—the singing style preferred by the first Puritan settlers. In contrast to singing the regular way, lining out was a practice that was begun in the mid-seventeenth century following the adoption of the *Bay Psalm Book* in which the pitch, tune, and tempo of the worship song was set by the male deacon. Lining out proved to be problematic for women whose voices were "naturally" higher than the "low-sounding Voice of a Man," and the end result was a "disorderly noise" in which women's singing voices had become effectively quieted within the meetinghouse. The Brattle Street church's decision to abandon lining out in favor of regular singing would prove to be a precursor to the colony-wide debate over the same issue that erupted just sixteen years later in 1715 and marks the beginning of a movement to restore women's voices to worship singing.²³

About Accepting the Call of the Brattle Street Church and Returning to Boston, 3 June, 1699," Benjamin Colman Papers, 1641-1806, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

²³ *The Manifesto Church*, 5; Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, an Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note: Fitted to the Meanest Capacities*. [Evans Digital Collection] (Boston: Printed by J. Franklin, for S. Gerrish, near the brick church in Cornhill, 1721), 5, 2; Chapter six takes up the 1715 Singing Controversy that resulted from the move among various churches to do away with "lining out" in favor of a return to singing the "regular way."

Given Brattle Street's adoption of practices that permitted fuller participation by women within the church, both during the worship service and as it pertained to decisions about who would pastor the church, it is not surprising that between 1700 and 1710 the percentage of women who joined other Boston area churches declined at the same time that Brattle Street's female congregation grew. This development suggests that women were consciously choosing to join Brattle Street as opposed to other Boston-area churches. The number of women as a percentage of the whole who joined Boston First in the decade following the gathering of the Brattle Street church, for example, declined 15%. Declines at Boston Second and Third churches were smaller: 8% and 2% respectively, but they were declines nonetheless. Significantly, the number of men as a percentage of the whole who joined Boston First, Second, and Third churches following the establishment of Brattle Street increased, thus reflecting the decline in the number of women who joined these churches since the number of men who joined other Boston churches remained fairly constant. Sixty-four men joined Boston Second in the decade preceding the gathering of Brattle Street church, 1690-1699, for example, while sixty men joined Boston Second in the decade after Brattle Street was established, 1700-1709.²⁴

²⁴ Source for Boston Second church membership statistics from: Cotton Mather, "Record Book, List of Members, 1650-1741" Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. In the decade prior to the gathering of the Brattle Street church, 1690-1699, a total of 186 men and women joined Boston Second in full communion: sixty-four men joined, representing 34% of the total, and 122 women joined, representing 65% of the total. In the decade following the gathering of Brattle Street church, 1700-1709, a total of 156 men and women joined Boston Second in full communion: sixty-six men joined, representing 42% of the total, and 90 women joined, representing 57% of the total admissions; For Brattle Street church membership statistics see *The Manifesto Church*, 95-104.

Women Vote With Their Feet: Multi-Church Households

Among those women who shaped their religious experience by changing churches while their husbands stayed behind at the old church were Susanna Campbell, Elizabeth Mills, Mercy Bridgham, and Lucy Dudley. When Susanna Campbell, for instance, joined the Brattle Street church on October 6, 1700, her husband, Duncan, stayed behind at the couple's old church, Boston Third. Duncan, a Scottish bookseller in Boston, had joined Boston Third as a half way member thirteen years earlier in June of 1687 and by all accounts was a respected member of the community. His 1693 contribution to a fund honoring the Reverend Samuel Willard of Boston Third for his "work of the ministry among us," illustrates Duncan's commitment to the church. While Duncan was firmly planted at Boston Third, his wife's allegiance lay elsewhere, and for almost two years, until Duncan's death in July of 1702, the Campbells were a two-church household.²⁵

When Susanna Campbell married for a second time she again married someone who was a member of Boston Third church. James Smith, however, was a full rather than a half way member as was Duncan. Unlike Duncan, who never left Boston Third, on May 2, 1714, four years after his marriage to Susanna, Smith joined Susanna's Brattle Street church after receiving a dismissal from Boston Third. As based on his church

²⁵ A record of Susanna Campbell's church membership can be found in: *The Manifesto Church*, 102; For church membership and biographical information on Duncan Campbell see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:331; *An Historical Catalogue of the Old South Church*, 196; *History of the Old South Church (Third Church) Boston*, 1:295. Duncan gave three pounds to the fund for Samuel Willard, a modest amount compared to Samuel Sewall's twenty pounds. He died in July of 1702 per *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: to Which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1895), 3:283 n.

membership at Brattle Street, Smith was more willing to compromise on the issue of church membership and to follow his wife's lead than was Duncan Campbell.²⁶

Like Susanna Campbell, Elizabeth Mills joined the Brattle Street church while her husband, Edward, was still a member of a neighboring church. Edward was a Harvard graduate, a school-master, and a member of Boston Second church, having joined the congregation in full membership in 1691, probably around the time of the couple's marriage. By 1696, Elizabeth had given birth to a son, Edward, and on September 20, 1696, the infant was baptized at Boston Second church. As noted in the church record, "Mills, Edward, of Ed., bp. Sept. 20, 1696." Although Elizabeth's name is not included in the church baptismal record for Edward—which is not necessarily uncommon—it is likely that she attended Boston Second, at least for a few years, but never joined the church. By 1701, however, the record is clear that she had joined in membership at Brattle Street even though her husband was still alive and attending Boston Second. There is no evidence to indicate that Edward followed his wife to Brattle Street or that he left Boston Second. Edward's name does not appear in the fairly complete list of communicants for Brattle Street, for example, nor is there any record that Edward petitioned Boston Second for a dismissal to join another church: something full church members needed to do in order to change churches. The most likely scenario is that from 1701 until her death in 1717, Elizabeth attended Brattle Street while her husband continued to attend Boston Second. In contrast to the traditional Puritan household

²⁶ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:422-23; On Susanna's marriage to James Smith and Smith's membership at Brattle Street see *The Manifesto Church*, 96, 230. The membership record for Brattle Street indicates that Smith had received a dismissal from the Old South, or Boston Third church.

typified by some such as Samuel Sewall, the Mills were a two church household for sixteen years.²⁷

In another example of a multi-church household, Lucy Dudley, wife of Chief Justice Paul Dudley, joined the Brattle Street church on November 3, 1706, three years after her marriage to Paul, even though he was a full member of the neighboring Roxbury church, joining ten years earlier in December of 1696. Paul Dudley was not *just* a member of the Roxbury congregation; He was an elite member of society and a generous “benefactor” of the church, contributing significantly to, among other things, the building of the third meeting house in Roxbury. Despite being a member in good standing at Roxbury, Paul Dudley presented four of the couple’s six children for baptism at his wife’s Brattle Street church, even though he never joined the Brattle Street congregation. Given Paul’s membership at Roxbury, the children could have been baptized there, yet it is clear that they were baptized at their mother’s home church, thus further strengthening the Dudley family ties with Lucy Dudley’s Brattle Street congregation.²⁸

²⁷ A record of Elizabeth Mills’s church membership can be found in *The Manifesto Church*, 102; Edward and Elizabeth Mills were married sometime after the death of Edward’s first wife, Mehitable, in 1690. See *Colonial Collegians: Biographies of Those Who Attended American Colleges Before the War for Independence*. CD-ROM. Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2005. (Online database. *AmericanAncestors.org*. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2008); For a record of Edward Mills’s church membership and Edward Jr.’s baptism see *Records of the Second Church in Boston* in “Boston Church Records” The Records of the Churches of Boston. CD_ROM. Boston, Mass.: New England Historic Genealogical Society. 2002. (Online database. *AmericanAncestors.org*. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2008), 132; For Edward Mills Jr. see Boston (Mass.). Record Commissioners, *A Report of the Record Commissioners Containing Boston Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths, 1630-1699* (Boston, Mass.: Rockwell and Churchill, 1883), 9:227.

²⁸ Lucy Wainwright and Paul Dudley were married in September 1703 per *Boston, MA: Marriages, 1700-1809*. (Online database: *AmericanAncestors.org*, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2006), Originally published as: *Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Containing the Boston Marriages from 1700 to 1751* (Vol. 28), Boston, Municipal Printing office, 1898. *Records Relating to the Early History of Boston, Containing Boston Marriages from 1752 to 1809* (vol. 30), Boston, Municipal Printing Office, 1903. 301; For a record of Lucy Dudley’s church membership see *The Manifesto Church*, 103; Paul Dudley (1675-1752) was the son of Massachusetts governor Joseph Dudley. See Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:76; Paul Dudley, Esq. presented Thomas Dudley for baptism in 1705, Lucy Dudley in 1709, another Lucy in 1710, and Rebecca in 1712 per *The Manifesto*

When Mercy Bridgham joined the Brattle Street church on July 6, 1707 she, like Elizabeth Mills and Lucy Dudley, also joined without her husband, Joseph, by her side. Joseph Bridgham, however, was not some wayward sinner neglecting Sabbath worship in favor of drinking and card playing. Bridgham was not only a member of Boston First, having joined in full membership in 1677, he was also a deacon and later an elder. In 1701, for example, six years before Mercy joined Brattle Street, Joseph Bridgham was ordained an elder following a “publick and general fast.” In joining Brattle Street, Mercy would have given up any advantages that Joseph’s status as an elder at Boston First would have afforded her, advantages such as preferential pew seating. In fact, at Brattle Street, Mercy would likely have sat in the “Women’s Gallery” where seating was less expensive than sitting in the pews “below.”²⁹

As was the case for Elizabeth Mills, extant church records indicate that Mercy Bridgham never joined her husband’s Boston First church even though two of her children were baptized there. On April 20, 1701, for example, four-day-old “Joseph Bridgham the son of our Deacon” was presented for baptism. Three years later, on November 19, 1704, Joseph Bridgham also presented his daughter for baptism. When she changed churches, however, Mercy Bridgham saw to it that her third child was

Church, 126, 129, 130, 132; For a record of Paul Dudley’s baptism and church membership see Walter Eliot Thwing, *History of the First Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1630-1904* (Boston: W.A. Butterfield, 1908), 126; In 1700 the Roxbury church was approximately three and a half miles distant from the Brattle Street church. Today, Roxbury is a Boston neighborhood.

²⁹ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 2:371; On wives having a pew seat that by its placement in the meetinghouse was accorded equal importance to that of their husband see Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 49; Alice Morse Earle, *Meetinghouse Hill 1630-1783* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.: 1972), 145; At the Brattle Street church, a pew “below” cost its owner “half a Crown every Sabbath” while a seat in the Gallery cost “Eighteen pence” (*The Manifesto Church*, 26).

baptized at Brattle Street rather than at Boston First, and on July 20, 1707, just two weeks after she joined the church, Mercy presented her newborn son James for baptism.³⁰

Precisely why someone such as Mercy Bridgham would decide to join the Brattle Street congregation when her husband was still alive and held a prominent position at Boston First cannot be known with any certainty. Nor can we know whether the Bridgham children attended church with their father at Boston First or their mother at Brattle Street. None of the children's names appear in the membership rolls of either Boston First or the Brattle Street church, indicating that they did not follow their parents' example in membership at these churches. What we do know about Mercy is that she had an adventurous spirit. She accompanied her third husband, the Reverend Joseph Baxter, for example, on a 1717 expedition to Arrowsick Island where the group hoped to make a treaty with the Indians. Whether it was her adventurous spirit, the liberal practices of the Brattle Street church, or some other factor that induced Mercy to leave Boston First, the fact remains that as the wife of a prominent Boston elder, Mercy Bridgham consciously chose to attend and join a congregation other than the one that her husband belonged to. In this sense, Mercy consciously shaped the kind of religious experience that she desired; she was a consumer of religion within patriarchal seventeenth-century Boston.³¹

Elizabeth Danforth Foxcroft, the wife of Colonel Francis Foxcroft and the daughter of Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth of the Massachusetts Bay Colony,

³⁰ *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 2:371, 374. The couple's daughter was named Mercy, after her mother.

³¹ Joseph Bridgham died on January 5, 1709, and was remembered by Samuall Sewall in his *Diary* as "a Righteous, Mercifull, publick-spirited man, very usefull in the Town ... The Lord sanctify this awful sudden Stroak; and help us duly to lay it to heart" (2:614); On Sewall's journey to Arrowsick see Sewall, *Diary*, 2:1123-27.

provides yet another example of a woman whose church affiliation differed from that of her husband. Baptized at the Cambridge First Congregational church in 1664 and raised as a Congregationalist, Elizabeth married Francis, who was a “warden of King’s Chapel and an ardent Anglican,” in 1682. A loyal follower of Governor Andros and a “leading member of the Church of England,” Colonel Foxcroft was even imprisoned for his views at the end of the Dominion of New England in 1689. Elizabeth, perhaps wisely, never embraced her husband’s Anglicanism and instead, Colonel Foxcroft attended his wife’s Congregational church even though he never relinquished his Anglican affiliation. In 1685, for example, the young couple was still living in Boston, and despite his Anglican ties, both Francis and Elizabeth presented their daughter, Elizabeth, for baptism at Boston’s Third Congregational church. Twelve years later, when the family moved to Cambridge to take up residence at Elizabeth’s family estate, the Colonel and his family began attending William Brattle’s Cambridge First Congregational church, the same church that Elizabeth was raised in.³²

Rather than follow in their father’s Anglican footsteps, the couple’s two sons also embraced their mother’s Congregationalism. Francis, the couple’s eldest son and his father’s namesake, became a prominent member of the Cambridge Congregational church, joining in full membership in 1713. Thomas, the younger of the two boys,

³² Elizabeth Danforth was baptized at the Cambridge Congregational church on January 29, 1664. Both of her parents were also full church members. On Elizabeth see Stephan Paschall Sharples ed., *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England 1632-1830* (Boston: Eben Putnam, 1906), 6; *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:xl; For biographical data on Francis and Elizabeth Foxcroft see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:197; For a biography of Thomas Foxcroft, son of Francis and Elizabeth which also contains information about Colonel Foxcroft see *Colonial Collegians*, 2082; “Boston Church Records” *The Records of the Churches of Boston*, 2082; On King’s Chapel Anglican Church, which was founded in 1686, see the church’s website: <http://www.kings-chapel.org/About/History.html>; Although Cambridge and Boston are only three miles distant from one another, the Charles River would have posed a significant impediment to travel between the two towns in the late-seventeenth century making it reasonable for Colonel Foxcroft to attend the Cambridge church rather than ride into Boston for Anglican church services.

originally “reflected his father’s beliefs” and “leaned pretty much to the Church of England,” and yet in 1712 while he was still a student, Thomas also joined the Cambridge Congregational church in full membership. He later attended Harvard University, joined Boston First Congregational church in 1717, and in 1718 accepted a ministerial position at the same church. As stated in the introduction of the *Records of the First Church in Boston*, Thomas “adopted his mother’s religion” rather than that of his father, Colonel Foxcroft.³³

Families such as the Foxcrofts illustrate both the flexibility of family worship in greater Puritan Boston and the influence of women on their children’s religious upbringing and affiliation. Even though Colonel Foxcroft maintained his Anglicanism, for example, he also attended in his wife’s Congregational church. For her part, Elizabeth’s spiritual legacy is best expressed in her 1721 funeral sermon, which was preached by her youngest son, the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft. In her eulogy, Elizabeth is remembered as an “early convert” to Christianity who was an “Example of Piety and Devotion” through “Reading and Hearing GOD’S Word, and in religious Acquaintance, and Conference with good people.” The church affiliation of the family patriarch did not necessarily become that of his wife or family, and in fact, examples such as the Foxcrofts illustrate that it could also be the other way around.³⁴

³³ Sharples ed., *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge*, 45; *Colonial Collegians*, 2082; *Boston First Church Records*, 1:xl.

³⁴ Thomas Foxcroft, *A Sermon Preach’d at Cambrige [sic], After the Funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Foxcroft, Late Wife of Francis Foxcroft Esq; who Died there, July 4th. 1721. in the 57th year of her age. With an addition, chiefly referring to her death: also a funeral poem of the Reverend Mr. John Danforth. By T.F. one of the bereaved Sons* (Boston in New-England: Printed by B. Green, for Samuel Gerrish, at his shop nigh the First brick Church, 1721), 38-39.

In the same way that Colonel Foxcroft attended his wife's Congregational church, Thomas Atkins accompanied his wife, Abigail, to the new Brattle Street church on the day that she joined the church, May 5, 1700. Yet according to extant church records, Thomas never became a church member. Unlike other Congregational churches, Brattle Street did not require potential members to give a customary confession of faith, thus fear of examination by the elders and/or congregation need not have kept Thomas from membership at the new church. His behavior indicates, however, that although he did not join the church, he supported his wife's decision to do so. Not only did Thomas accompany his wife to Sabbath services on the day that she joined the church, for example, he also presented their sixteen month-old daughter, Abigail, for baptism at the same time, yet his own name never appears in the Brattle Street church's list of male communicants.³⁵

It is possible that Thomas Atkins intended to follow in his wife's footsteps and join the church at a later date. Records for Boston Second church illustrate that Atkins was not adverse to church membership. In 1674, for example, Atkins and his first wife, Mary, joined Boston Second, and in 1677 they had their son baptized there. At some point in their membership with Boston Second, Thomas and Mary Atkins also received a dismissal from the church, but church records do not indicate where the couple went after leaving the Second church. When Thomas Atkins's first wife passed away he married Abigail in 1687. Unfortunately, Abigail Atkins died on November 13, 1700, just six

³⁵ Abigail Jones of Charlestown was a widow when she married Thomas Atkins, widower, on August 11, 1687. See *Charlestown MA: Vital Records to 1850*. (Online database. *American Ancestors.org*. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2008), 27; On Thomas, Mary, and Abigail Atkins see also Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 1:74; For a record of Abigail's membership at Brattle Street church see *The Manifesto Church*, 102; For a list of all the men who joined the Brattle Street congregation between its founding in 1699 and 1746 see *The Manifesto Church*, 95-101; For a record of sixteen month-old Abigail's baptism see *The Manifesto Church*, 124.

months after joining Brattle Street, and at this point, Thomas fades from the church records. In the case of the Atkins family, as with at least a few other Boston families, it would appear that Abigail led the way, albeit with her husband's implicit support, with respect to the public devotional life of the family.³⁶

The Malden Women and Church/State Debates: “friends of the meek preacher Marmaduke Matthews”

Not only did women such as Abigail Atkins act individually in trying to shape the nature of their religious experience, a group of women at Malden First Congregational church in Malden, Massachusetts acted corporately to accomplish a similar goal. On October 28, 1651, fifty years before the new Brattle Street church *Manifesto* included the statement that it could no longer “confine the right of choosing a Minister to the Male Communicants alone,” for example, thirty-six women from Malden First Congregational church petitioned the General Court requesting that their minister, Marmaduke Mathews, be allowed to continue “in the service of Christ” at their church. When the women submitted their petition, the Court was in the process of trying Mathews on the charge that he used “unsafe, if not unsound, expressions in his publicke teaching”: a complaint that could have resulted in Mathews's removal from the pulpit. In submitting their petition—the first known petition by Malden women and the only petition offered on Mathews's behalf—the women argued that through Mathews's “pious life and labors, the Lord hath afforded us many saving convictions, directions, reproofs, and consolations.”

³⁶ For a record of Thomas and Mary Atkins's church membership at Boston Second see Cotton Mather, “Second Church (Boston, Mass.) Records, 1650-1741,” Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts; For a record of Thomas Jr.'s baptism in 1677 see “Boston Church Records” *The Records of the Churches of Boston*, 8.

Notwithstanding the charges against their minister, the women requested that the Court “would be pleased to pass by some personal and particular failings” attributed to Mathews and “permit him to employ those talents God hath furnished him withal” in the service of their congregation. After all, the church had only recently concluded its search for a new minister by hiring Mathews. According to the women, the “Almighty God in great mercy to our souls, as we trust, hath, after many prayers, endeavors, and long waiting, brought Mr. Mathews among us, and put him into the work of the ministry”; the wording of their petition suggesting that they had shared in the anxieties and frustrations associated with selecting Mathews even if they had not cast the final vote approving his ordination, a privilege which was reserved for the male members of the congregation.³⁷

In submitting their petition, the women also became participants in a political power struggle involving church and state in which the state claimed the right to dictate who the church could and could not call as its minister. In addition to the charge against Mathews that his teaching was “unsafe,” the state also charged the church of Malden with an “offence” for ordaining Mathews, claiming that the Malden congregation had settled Matthews “contrary to the rules of Gods word ... [and] to the offence of magistrates, reverend elders, and some churches.” Although the women were probably not called to testify during the court proceedings—three men and “severall others of the church of

³⁷ Colman, *A Manifesto*, 3; The women’s petition can be found in the Mass. Archives x, 79. The women’s petition is also reproduced in *The Bi-Centennial Book of Malden: Containing the Oration and Poem Delivered on the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town, May 23, 1849; With Other Proceedings on the Day; and Matters Pertaining to the History of the Place* (Boston: Printed by Geo. C. Rand & Co. No. 3 Cornhill, 1850), 140 and in Deloraine Pendre Corey, *The History of Malden, Massachusetts, 1633-1785*, (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Son, 1899), 145-46. Corey asserts that the Malden Congregational church women’s petition was the first women’s petition in Malden; Shurtleff ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1): 42-43, 70-71, 90, 113, 236.

Malden” represented the interests of the church—the petition that the women submitted spoke for them and expressed their desires and point of view.³⁸

The thirty-six women who signed the October petition represented typical Puritan wives and widows, sisters and daughters for whom the congregational religious experience lay at the center of their lives. Among these women was Bridget Dexter who Savage in his *Genealogical Dictionary* refers to as “one of the friends of the meek preacher Marmaduke Matthews.” The women’s petition also includes the names of Elizabeth Adams, whose husband, Richard, was the town constable; Elizabeth Carrington, who was married to one of the founders of the church, Richard Carrington; Joanna Call, who was the second wife of Thomas, a baker; and Bridget Squire, a woman whose husband also helped found the church. Squire would later petition the Middlesex Court for separate support from her husband, noting in her petition that “I have spent my strength for these 20 years with my husband,” reminding the court of the degree to which men and women labored together to accomplish their goals.³⁹

In the short term, the Malden women got what they asked for. Mathews was not removed from the pulpit although both he and the congregation were fined. The court

³⁸ David D. Hall argues that the debate over the Malden congregation’s ordination of Mathews was part of a larger “clash” between “local groups” and the “civil state” over congregational liberties. Hall, *A Reforming People*, 75-76; See also Corey, *The History of Malden*, 126-64; *The Bi-Centennial Book of Malden*, 133-43; During the Matthews trial, Joseph Hill, Edward Carrington, and John Waite represented the interests of the church during the trial. Shurtleff ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1): 70.

³⁹ On Bridget Dexter see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 2:45; On Elizabeth Adams see *The History of Malden*, 114; On Joanna Call see *The Bi-Centennial Book of Malden*, 240; On Elizabeth Carrington and Bridget Squire see *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England 1620-1633, Volumes I-III*. (Online database: *AmericanAncestors.org*, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2010), 316, 1740; The name of Elizabeth Green appears in the petition three times. It is impossible to know if there were actually three women named Elizabeth Green who signed the petition or if the repetition of the name is a mistake. One of the signatures can be attributed to Elizabeth Green, wife of James Green, a church founder. On Elizabeth Green see *The Bi-Centennial Book of Malden*, 235.

issued a “judgment” against Mathews for “ten pounds,” although it was later remitted, while the Malden congregation was fined “fifty pounds,” ten of which were eventually forgiven. Mathews’s tenure as Malden’s minister, however, was short-lived. Mathews left the Malden church sometime in 1652, and three years later he departed for England. Several Malden church members accompanied Mathews on his return trip to England including the widow Margaret Weldon who was one of the signatories on the 1651 Malden women’s petition.⁴⁰

When it concerned their religious experience, the Malden women did not need their husbands to speak for them but claimed the authority to speak for themselves through the written word of their petition. In addition, the women claimed to speak for “many others” who shared their opinion about Mathews. The women were willing to agitate for their minister, despite his “particular failings,” because he met their spiritual needs. In his brief time with the church, for example, his ministry helped convict many of their need for repentance, provided direction in life, offered chastisement when necessary, and consolation where appropriate. Despite the patriarchal nature of Puritan society, the Malden women did not shy away from expressing themselves in the public square through their petition. At a time in which group petitions by women were “virtually unknown,” the Malden women’s petition speaks to the willingness of women to participate in public political discourse, something that has been assumed to be the exclusive domain of men during this era.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Shurtleff ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1650-1660*, 4 (pt. 1):71; On Mathews return to England see Corey, *The History of Malden*, 158.

⁴¹ The Malden church was founded in 1648 by Joseph Hill, Edward Carrington, Thomas Squire, John Waite, James Greene, Thomas Osborne, John Lewis, and Thomas Caule. *History of Malden*, 106-7, 113.

Women and Meeting House Politics

As in Malden, two women from Boston Third church became participants in a power struggle with both political and religious overtones when they confronted then-governor Sir Edmund Andros about his use of their meeting house for Anglican worship services. For over a year the “Church of England men” had been holding their morning and afternoon Sabbath services in the Congregational meeting house, alternating use of the space throughout the day with the Congregationalists. The encounter between the women and Andros occurred on June 22, 1688, when Mrs. Anna Joyliffe and Mrs. Dorcas Grecian, according to Samuel Sewall, went to “his Excellency, and expostulate[d] with Him about his Design of meeting first on Sabbath-days in our Meetinghouse.” Although Sewall does not record the content of the women’s conversation, it would appear that mounting frustrations over Anglican use of the meeting house, which had been the cause of “difficult circumstances” for the Congregationalists, had finally compelled the women to act.⁴²

The situation was complicated in that, politically, many Bostonians viewed Andros as an illegitimate ruler and were opposed to his requisitioning of the meeting house for “Common-Prayer Worship.” When the English crown revoked Massachusetts’s charter in 1684 it forcefully replaced the elected colonial governor with Andros who, upon arriving in Boston in 1686, promptly inquired about using one of

⁴² Sewall, *Diary*, 1:142, 171; As based on Thomas Lechford’s account of Boston First church services in *Plaine Dealing*, 16-19, the Puritans typically met for two services each Sabbath. The first meeting was at 9:00am, lasted roughly two to three hours and consisted of an opening prayer, scripture reading, a psalm, a sermon, and a final prayer. Once a month morning services were extended to include the Lord’s Supper. The afternoon service was held around 2:00pm and included an opening prayer, a psalm, and a sermon. The afternoon service was followed by church business which included baptisms, the “contribution,” admission of new members, discipline, and resolution of church problems, all of which was concluded by a final psalm, prayer, and blessing (19); During the time that they held services at Boston Third, the Anglicans typically met from 8:00-9:00am and again from about noon to 1:30pm.

Boston's three Congregational churches for Anglican meetings: The Anglican church, Kings Chapel, would not be built until 1689. Despite his position as governor, Andros's request was rebuffed. As Sewall states, "twas agreed that [we] could not with a good conscience consent that our Meeting-Houses should be made use of for the Common-Prayer Worship." Besides, the church land and meeting house were privately owned. They are "ours," wrote Sewall, implying that the facilities belonged to those who worshipped there. The land had been donated by Mrs. Norton and the structure "twas built by particular persons, as [for example] Hull, [and] Oliver, [at a cost of] 100.£ apiece." Regardless, on March 25, 1687, the sexton of Boston Third church, Goodman Needham, was "prevailed upon to ring the Bell and open the door at the Governor's Command" so that the Anglicans could hold their services.⁴³

It is clear from Sewall's diary that Andros's forced dual-usage of the meeting house posed problems for the Congregationalists. On March 27, 1687, for example, Sewall wrote that the Governor and his "retinue" had used Boston Third church but had not vacated the building at the pre-arranged time. On this particular Sabbath the Anglican church services ended, or "broke off," later than expected, at 2:30pm rather than at 1:30pm, "because of the Sacrament and Mr. Clark's long Sermon," according to Sewall. Since the meeting house was supposed to have been turned over to the Congregationalists by 1:30pm, Sewall observes that it "twas a sad Sight to see how full the Street was with people gazing and moving to and fro because [they] had not entrance into the House." On another occasion the Congregationalists decided to forgo celebrating

⁴³ On Andros's tenure as royal governor during the Dominion of New England see Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 276-80; Sewall, *Diary*, 1:128, 135.

the Sacrament altogether, “remembering how long they [the Anglicans] were at Easter, we were afraid ‘twould breed much confusion in the Afternoon, and so, on Wednesday, concluded not to have our Sacrament for saw ‘twas in vain to urge their promise.” In June of 1687 a mid-week “privat Fast of the South-Church” at Sewall’s home failed to bring any kind of lasting resolution to the problem.⁴⁴

Squabbles over Sabbath worship times continued on and off for approximately a year and appeared to come to a head on June 10, 1688, when the Congregationalists were a little late ending their morning worship. Sewall records that he did not return home until “about a quarter 12,” while the Anglicans would have preferred that they “leave off” sooner. In retaliation, the Governor, who was “angry that had done so late . . . caused their Bell to be rung about a quarter past one . . . So ‘twas about a quarter past Three before our Afternoon Bell Rung about 1 ½ hour later than usual.” In other words, the Congregationalists were about ninety minutes late beginning their afternoon services, something that would have had a disruptive impact on women who still had children to care for and afternoon meals to prepare. Twelve days later the women held their meeting with Andros.⁴⁵

Sewall’s use of the word “expostulate” to describe the women’s discussion with Andros suggests that they approached him with a sense of confidence about their legitimacy to do so and with a strong desire to influence religious practice despite the fact that neither woman was yet a full church member. Dorcas Grecian would join as a half way member just two months later, however, and as a full member in 1692. According to

⁴⁴ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:136, 139, 141.

⁴⁵ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:170, 139.

extant records, Anna Joyliffe apparently never joined the church although her husband, John, was a full member. That neither of the women's husbands was prominent in the church—neither man was a deacon or an elder, for example—speaks further to the idea that both women acted strictly on the basis of their own perceived authority to do so.⁴⁶

The women's face to face meeting with Andros apparently paved the way for a meeting the following day between "his Excellency" and two men from Boston Third: Samuel Sewall and Capt. Frary. As with the women, the topic of discussion between the men and Andros was Anglican use of the meeting house. Sewall records in his diary that he and Capt. Frary requested that the governor "not alter his time of Meeting" but continue to meet at the previously agreed upon time. One can assume that the women's and men's meetings with Andros had the desired effect; Sewall only notes the lateness of the governor in "coming out" from worship services on one other occasion during the course of the next year. By June of 1689 the Anglican King's Chapel had finally been built and dual use of the Congregationalists' house was no longer required. In the midst of what was a power struggle between Andros and the Boston Third church leadership, Joyliffe and Grecian did not stand idly by. Instead, they went straight to the source in confronting the one individual who was arguably the most powerful man in the colony, the one man who had the ability to change the situation. The women attempted to shape

⁴⁶ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:171; As recorded in *An Historical Catalog of the Old South Church*, Grecian joined the church as a half way member on August 12, 1688 (17) and became a full member on August 28, 1692 (112); Anna Joyliffe was twice widowed by the time that she married John Joyliffe in 1657. Her first marriage was to the wealthy privateer, Thomas Cromwell, who died in 1649, and her second married was to Robert Knight, who died in 1655. I searched for but was unable to locate evidence of prior church membership for Anna using the names Anna Cromwell/Crumwell and Anna Knight. For biographical information on John and Anna Joyliffe see *An Historical Catalog*, 241.

their Sabbath-day experience in a way that was pleasing to them, rather than allow others to make the decision for them.⁴⁷

Conclusion

As church and probate records make clear, Puritan women acted independently to craft both the nature of their religious experience and the kind of legacy that they would leave behind. In so doing, they demonstrated a kind of authority and personal power that is at odds with one Puritan minister's exhortation to husbands to make the instruction of religion "easy" on their wives, an exhortation that has helped shape the historiography on gendered religious power within Puritanism. In contrast to the idea that the responsibility and capacity for religious instruction and leadership rested predominantly with men, the never married Elizabeth Pole played a significant role in furthering the establishment of the early Taunton church, not unlike the women in seventeenth-century England from whence she came. Like Pole, ordinary Puritan wives and widows also left bequests of property and cash to their ministers and churches, thus shaping their spiritual legacy. Beginning as early as 1669 with the founding of Boston Third church, if not before, married women in the Massachusetts Bay area voted with their feet in choosing to leave one church and join another. In so doing they created multi-church households and influenced the denominational leanings of their children. Factors such as the composition of the congregation, the preaching style of the minister, whether or not confessions of faith were public or private for women, whether or not confessions were required for membership, whether or not women were permitted to vote on the selection of a minister, and the nature of congregational singing during the worship service likely influenced

⁴⁷ Sewall, *Diary*, 1:171.

their decision about which church they would attend. Even the timing of the worship service, as the case of Mrs. Joyliffe and Mrs. Grecian at Boston Third church demonstrates, was a concern for women and justified their involvement in what was ostensibly a church/state issue. Lastly, the women of Malden took responsibility for their own “edification” by pursuing the retention of their minister, Marmaduke Matthews. Significantly, no evidence exists to suggest that neither the Malden women nor Joyliffe and Grecian were ever admonished for their behavior, indicating that within Puritan society, space existed for women to raise specific kinds of church/state issues without fear of reprisal. Unlike the women of Boston, the Malden women did not have the option of changing churches or of finding a meeting house whose practices were more to their liking. Malden only had one Congregational meeting house. Rather than sit on the sidelines and watch events unfold around them, the Malden women joined forces in petitioning for what they desired and in the process claimed the authority to engage in questions involving church/state debates and issues.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Boston Sermons 1671-1679, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, qtd. in Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 44; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, “Puritan women, Spiritual Power and the Question of Sexuality,” in *The Religious History of American Women Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 65, also mentions the case of the Malden women but concludes that “the court discounted” the women’s petition “as they rejected all the pleas of the town in their review of Mathews,” presumably because both Mathews and the church were fined, although Westerkamp does not say. Westerkamp, however, fails to note that even though Mathews and the town of Malden were fined, Mathews was not dismissed from his position, an outcome which denoted victory for the women since their petition asked that he remain in the pastorate. Mathews ultimately left his position with the Malden congregation approximately one year later and return to England, but not because he was dismissed by the court.

Chapter Six

Women, Gender, and the Singing Controversy of 1720

In 1647 the influential minister John Cotton of Boston First church wrote a treatise which addressed, in part, the question of “whether women may sing” during Sabbath worship services. While women were not permitted to teach in church, “whether in expounding or applying Scripture,” or to ask questions since a woman “might so propound her Question, as to Teach her Teachers,” Cotton was unequivocal that scripture provided “ground sufficient to justifie the lawfull practice of women in singing together with men the Praises of the Lord.” In short, Cotton affirmed a woman’s duty to participate in this integral part of the worship service. Cotton undoubtedly hoped that his treatise, *Singing of Psalmes A Gospel-Ordinance* (1647), would serve as the last word concerning not only *how* singing was to be conducted but also on the question of *who* should sing in the meeting house, issues that had become controversial within Massachusetts’s Congregational churches by mid-century. But it would not.¹

Seventy-three years after Cotton’s *Singing of Psalmes* was published, the question of women’s participation in worship singing once again emerged as part of a larger debate over whether or not congregations should return to a singing method known as “regular singing,” that is singing by musical note from printed music, a debate which

¹ John Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes A Gospel-Ordinance Or A Treatise, Wherein Are Handled these Particulars: 1. Touching the Duty itself. 2. Touching the Matter to be Sung. 3. Touching the Singers. 4. Touching the manner of Singing By John Cotton, Teacher of the Church at Boston in New-England* (London: Printed by M.S. for Hannah Allen, at the Crowne in Popes-Head-Alley: and John Rothwell at the Sunne and Fountaine in Pauls-Church-yard., 1647), 42-43. Cotton undoubtedly had Anne Hutchinson in mind when he stated that women were not permitted to ask questions in the meeting house since a woman “might so propound her Question, as to Teach her Teachers.” Cotton was the minister at Boston First from 1633-1652; According to Joyce Irwin, “The Theology of “Regular Singing,” *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 1978): 176-192, Cotton’s was the only work of its kind in seventeenth-century Massachusetts.

historians have subsequently referred to as the singing controversy. Regular singing was the singing method practiced during the first decade of settlement at Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth, and a return to this mode of singing would, as the Reverend Thomas Symmes argued in 1720, be more “pleasing” both to God in heaven and to the saints on earth than the prevailing and frequently cacophonous practice of “lining-out” which had come to dominate church music by the end of the seventeenth century. In lining-out, a male presenter, usually the deacon or a clerk—in England—would establish the tune, tempo, and pitch of the psalm and then repeat the words, one line at a time, to be sung in turn by the rest of the congregation, including women. Lining-out was not indigenous to the colonies but originated in England and was subsequently adopted by the colonists as a tool to introduce new psalm, that is, song books to a semi-literate population. As the practice developed in New England, however, the resulting sound was often far from melodious.²

Significantly, the 1720 move to replace lining-out with regular singing was initiated by clergymen who, like Cotton in 1647, also found it necessary to clarify their position on women’s participation in worship singing. As part of the larger controversy

² Regular singing was the contemporary term used by ministers such as Thomas Symmes (minister at Boxford, Massachusetts, 1702-1708) in *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing or Singing by Note; In an Essay to Revive the True and Ancient Mode of Singing Psalm-Tunes, According to the Pattern in our New-England Psalm-Books; the Knowledge and Practice of which is Greatly Decay’d in Most Congregations* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, for Samuel Gerrish, and Sold at his Shop Near the Brick Meeting House in Corn-Hill, 1720), title page, 3; While the scope of this chapter does not extend beyond the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies, the singing controversy that erupted in 1720 eventually spread throughout New England. For a list of all the ministers who preached, wrote, or signed their names in support of regular singing see the appendix of Laura Becker’s “Ministers vs. Laymen: The Singing Controversy in Puritan New England, 1720-1740,” *The New England Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Mar. 1982): 79-96; For other works on the singing controversy see Irwin, “The Theology of “Regular Singing”; Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Meetinghouse Hill, 1630-1783* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1972), ch. 10; Linda R. Ruggles, “The Regular Singing Controversy: The Case Against Lining-Out,” *Early American Review*, Fall 1997; Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), ch. 2; For a brief history of lining-out see Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (3):511-544, especially 532-3.

over the adoption of regular singing, ministers such as Peter Thacher, John Danforth, and Samuel Danforth in *An Essay By Several Ministers of the Gospel for the Satisfaction of Their Pious and Consciencious Brethren, as to Sundry Questions and Cases of Conscience, concerning The Singing of Psalms* (1723), for example, found themselves addressing the question, “May Persons of the Female Sex, be admitted to sing in the church?” Thacher, Danforth, and Danforth were not alone in responding to questions about women’s participation. Of ten extant essays, sermons, and instructional tracts authored by Bay-area ministers between 1720 and 1725 pertaining to “regular” singing, seven either directly or indirectly addressed women’s participation. These ten works in turn represented the viewpoint of no fewer than twenty ministers throughout the Massachusetts Bay.³

This chapter will argue two main points that come to light through an analysis of the extant works on the singing controversy. The first point is that a majority of the

³ Peter Thacher, John Danforth, and Samuel Danforth, *An Essay By Several Ministers of the Gospel for the Satisfaction of Their Pious and Consciencious Brethren, as to Sundry Questions and Cases of Conscience, concerning The Singing of Psalms* Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland, for S. Gerrish, and Sold at his Shop in Corn-Hill, 1723), 15; In addition to Thacher, ministerial works which directly or indirectly addressed women’s participation include Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*; David P. McKay, “Cotton Mather’s Unpublished Singing Sermon,” *The New England Quarterly* 48 (1975): 410-422. McKay’s piece contains the text of Cotton Mather’s Singing Sermon from April 18, 1721; Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer* (Boston: Printed by B. Green for S. Gerrith at his shop in Cornhill, 1721); *A Brief Discourse Concerning Regular Singing: Shewing From the Scriptures, the Necessity and Incumbency Thereof in the Worship of God* (Boston, N. England : Printed by B. Green, Jun. for John Eliot, at his shop at the south end of the town, 1725); Thomas Walter, *The Sweet Psalmist of Israel: A sermon Preach'd at the Lecture Held in Boston, by the Society for Promoting Regular & Good Singing, and for Reforming the Depravations and Debasements our Psalmody Labours Under, in Order to Introduce the Proper and True Old Way of Singing.: Now published at the Desire of Several Ministers That Heard It, and at the Request of the Society Aforesaid* (Boston : Printed by J. Franklin, for S. Gerrish, near the Brick Meeting-House in Cornhill, 1722); John Tufts’s *An Introduction To the Singing of Psalm-Tunes In a plain and easy Method With A Collection of Tunes In Three Parts* (Boston, in N.E.: Printed for Samuel Gerrish, at the lower end of Cornhill, 1720) is a pamphlet on singing method. A date of 1715 is sometimes given for the first edition of Tuft’s *Introduction*, but John H. Butler in “John Tufts: Aurora Unaware” *Music Educators Journal* 55, no. 5 (Jan., 1969): 44-46, 105-106 supports the idea that 1720 is a more likely date of publication; Becker, “Ministers vs. Laymen” convincingly argues that ministers both “initiated and championed” singing reform (79). Becker does not address gender, however.

ministerial works that emerged beginning in 1720 as part of the regular singing controversy made an appeal to women to participate in worship singing. This appeal, in turn, illustrates the extent to which ministers were becoming more cognizant of the need to acknowledge their female parishioners—who on any given Sabbath constituted the majority of those seated in the pews—at a time when historians agree that ministerial authority and prestige was itself on the decline. The “nexus between piety and power,” as historian David D. Hall describes it, or the privileged position enjoyed by the first generation of ministers, seemed a distant memory by 1700 when, according to historian Laura Becker, many New England ministers “were feeling generally besieged by their parishioners.” In short, male ministers made a deliberate effort to validate the participation of their female congregants—to re-engage their audience—at a time when the clergy’s own social status appeared fragile.⁴

The second point this chapter will argue is that by 1700, women’s singing voices had, for all practical purposes, gone quiet within many congregations. As argued in chapter one, “Women and the Congregational Church: An Overview,” women’s speaking voices were already being heard less and less frequently over the course of the century as fewer women gave their confession of faith in public. By the turn of the eighteenth century, it had also become more and more difficult for women to participate in worship singing which had “degenerated” at the same time that men’s voices began to dominate. This gradual non-participation by women in singing, however, was not intentional. Rather, it was a seemingly unintended consequence of the switch from a Psalter, or psalm

⁴ David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 228; Becker, “Ministers vs. Laymen,” 79.

book, containing musical notation, to a Psalter which did not contain musical notes: the *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated Into English Metre*, more commonly known as the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640). The adoption of the *Bay Psalm Book* by the majority of Bay-area churches over the course of the seventeenth century, in turn, engendered the move toward lining-out, which, as will be demonstrated, placed the female voice at a distinct disadvantage during worship singing. As this chapter asserts, the singing controversy was about more than musical aesthetics, however. By 1720 it was in the best interests of the clergy to restore the largest portion of their audience—women—to fuller participation in worship singing and by extension, acknowledge women as an integral part of congregational vitality, the justification for which was rooted in biblical antiquity.⁵

The Singing Style of the First Generation

For the first generation of Puritans in Massachusetts Bay and at Plymouth, psalm singing was an integral part of worshipping God. Edward Winslow, for instance, recalled that prior to leaving Holland for Plymouth, “Wee refreshed ourselves after our teares with singing of Psalmes, making joyfull melody in our hearts, as well as with the voice, there being many of the Congregation very expert in Musick.” John Cotton in his 1647 *Singing*

⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer*, 22; In chapter one, “Women and the Puritan Church: An Overview,” I introduce the Singing Controversy and link it to mid-century debates about the place of women in the Bay-area Congregational church; One can only speculate on why the earliest editions of the *Bay Psalm Book* were printed without musical notation. Not until 1698 was an edition of the *Bay Psalm Book* printed with musical notation. Between 1698 and 1721, all music printed in colonial America was printed using relief-cut blocks on a typical letter press, a more formal and specialized process than the engraved copper plates which replaced wood blocks in 1720. It is possible that prior to 1698, printers judged it economically unfeasible to invest in hiring someone to carve the blocks required for printed music given the relatively limited consumer base that existed. On Early American music printing and publishing see Richard Crawford and D.W. Krummel, “Early American Music Printing and Publishing,” *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed., William L. Joyce et. al. (Worcester, MA.: American Antiquarian Society, 1983).

of *Psalmes* affirmed the value of “translating the Psalmes into verse in number, measure, and meeter, and suiting the Ditty with apt tunes” as a way “to stirre up the affection” and “to make a gracious melody to the Praise of God and edification of his People.” Psalms were typically sung twice during the morning Sabbath worship service and once in the afternoon. In the tradition of John Calvin, that is, without choirs or instruments—considered Popish embellishments in the meetinghouse—the singing of Scriptural psalms set to metrical verse was designed to enrich the worship experience by allowing participants to meditate exclusively on the word of God without distraction.⁶

Immigrants to both Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth brought Psalters that combined musical notation and words when they came to New England. As Puritan separatists from the Church of England intent on planting a new church, Winslow’s Pilgrims at Plymouth as well as the Puritans in Salem and Ipswich, for example, brought copies of Henry Ainsworth’s *The Book of Psalmes in English Metre* with them. Originally published in 1612, the 1632 edition of Ainsworth’s *Psalmes* contained all 150 biblical psalms set to thirty-nine melodies combining words and musical notation. In

⁶ Edward Winslow, *Hypocrisie Unmasked: By a True Relation of the Proceedings of the Governour and Company of the Massachusetts against Samuel Gorton (and his accomplices) a Notorious Disturber of the Peace and Quiet of the Severall Governments Wherein He Lived: With the Grounds and Reasons Thereof, Examined and Allowed by their Generall Court Holden at Boston in New-England in November last, 1646. Together with a Particular Answer to the Manifold Slanders, and Abominable Falshoods Which Are Contained in a Book Written by the Said Gorton, and Entituled, Simplicities Defence Against Seven-Headed policy, &c. Discovering to the View of All Whose Eyes Are Open, His Manifold Blasphemies; as Also the Dangerous Agreement Which He and His Accomplices Made with Ambitious and Treacherous Indians, Who at the Same Time Were Deeply Engaged in a Desperate Conspiracy to Cut Off All the Rest of the English in the Other Plantations. Whereunto is Added a Briefe Narration (occasioned by certain aspersions) of the True Grounds or Cause of the First Planting of New-England; the President of Their Churches in the Way and Worship of God; Their Communion with the Reformed Churches; and Their Practise Towards Those That Dissent From Them in Matters of Religion and Church-Government* (London : Printed by Rich. Cotes, for John Bellamy at the three Golden Lions in Cornhill, neare the Royall Exchange, 1646), 90; Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, 60; On Puritan religious music see Cyclone Covey, “Of Music, and of America Singing” in Max Savelle, *Seeds of Liberty The Genesis of the American Mind* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965); Chase, *America’s Music*, chapters 1 & 2; Zoltán Haraszti, *The Enigma of the Bay Psalm Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956); Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1964).

Ainsworth, Old Testament Psalms, such as the 23rd Psalm—The Lord’s Prayer—were translated as accurately as possible from Hebrew to English and from prose to meter. Psalm books such as Ainsworth permitted congregations to begin and end a song in unison and in a key that was comfortable for all, in short to make a “joyfull noyse” unto the Lord.⁷



This page from Henry Ainsworth’s *The Booke of Psalmes In English Metre* demonstrates the way that musical notation and words were combined in early Psalters including Sternhold and Hopkins.

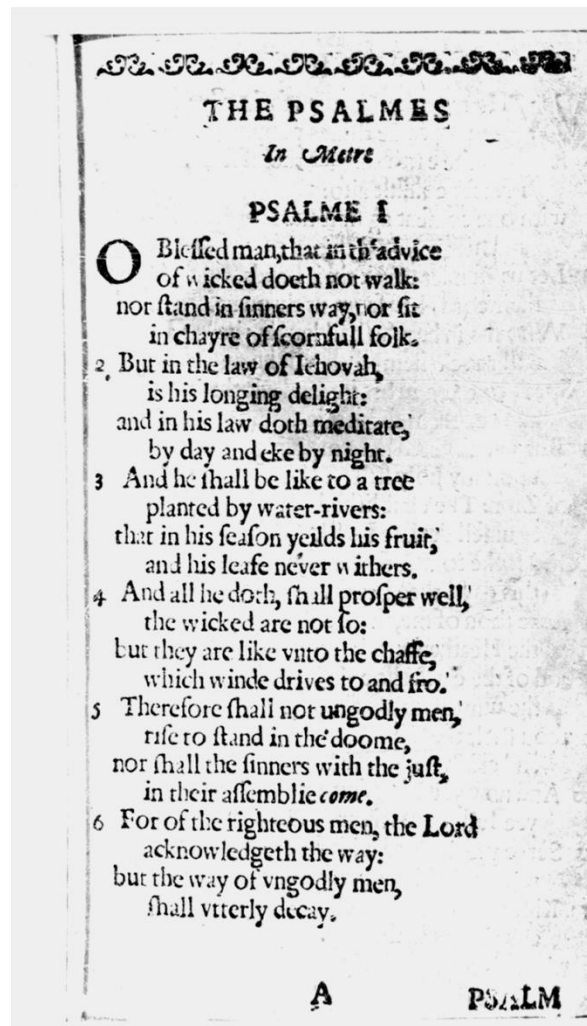
⁷ Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, 12.

While Ainsworth was favored at Plymouth, Salem and Ipswich, most other Congregational churches in the Bay area sang from Sternhold and Hopkins's *The Whole Book of Psalmes* during the first decade of settlement. As one historian has stated, the founders of the Bay Colony "had been brought up" on Sternhold and Hopkins which had "taken deep roots in the mind of the people." First published in London in 1552, Sternhold and Hopkins went through more than six hundred editions and was the standard psalm book in England until 1696. It was also the standard in the Bay area until it was superseded by the Bay Psalm Book beginning in 1640. In contrast to Ainsworth, which only contained biblical psalms, Sternhold and Hopkins also contained spiritual songs as well as biblical psalms, but like Ainsworth, those biblical psalms were translated into metrical verse with the melody indicated by diamond shaped notes on a staff. As stated by antiquarian Ola Winslow, the first settlers were "familiar with psalmody" and "not ignorant as to the 'regularity' of music." Because many first generation Puritans knew how to sing by note, they were also more musically literate than the generations that would follow them, at least until 1720. As Symmes wrote in 1720, "There are many Persons of Credit now Living, Children and Grand-Children of the *first Settlers of New-England*, who can very well remember, that their Ancestors sung by *Note*" (emphasis in the original).⁸

Despite the widespread use of the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter and the familiarity of the first generation Puritans with the text, by 1640, a committee of approximately thirty New England divines had decided to replace it with what they considered a more faithful versification of the Psalms, one that promised to stick more

⁸ Haraszti, *Enigma*, 7; Winslow, *Meetinghouse Hill*, 154; Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*, 6.

literally to the wording of Scripture than Sternhold and Hopkins did. This revised Pslater, *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated Into English Metre*, became commonly known as the *Bay Psalm Book*, and, as stated by the book's authors, was necessary because of the "frequent and many times needless" "addition to the words, [and] detractions from the words" in Sternhold and Hopkins. In what would turn out to be a significant factor for women, the earliest editions of the *Bay Psalm Book* were



In contrast to Ainsworth's *The Booke of Psalmes in English Metre*, the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) was published without musical notation thus engendering the need over time for greater reliance upon the deacon to line-out the tune.

printed without musical notation, which would not be added until the book's ninth edition in 1698. By 1698, however, lining-out was the customary singing style in much of the Bay colony, and women were finding it challenging to participate fully in worship singing for reasons which will be made clear.⁹

Even though the Bay area Puritans replaced Sternhold and Hopkins with the *Bay Psalm Book* beginning in 1640, the Puritans at Plymouth, Salem, and Ipswich continued to use Ainsworth exclusively for several more decades. As it turned out, however, the Ainsworth versifications were notoriously difficult to sing, and eventually congregations at Plymouth and Salem voted to supplement Ainsworth with the *Bay Psalm Book*. In 1667, for example, the Salem congregation resolved that due to “the difficulty of the tunes ... the Bay Psalm Book should be made use of together with Ainsworths.” As with the church at Salem, the Plymouth congregation also struggled with what they called “difficult” translations in the Ainsworth Psalter, and on August 7, 1692, they voted that “when the tunes are difficult in the Translation wee use, wee will sing the psalms now used in our neighbor churches in the Bay.” Thus by 1692, congregations in Salem and Plymouth had joined together with the rest of the Bay and were singing, likely more frequently than not, from the *Bay Psalm Book*.¹⁰

⁹ *Bible O. T. Psalms. English. Bay Psalm Book 1640: The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre; Whereunto is Prefixed a Discourse Declaring not only the Lawfulness, but also the Necessity of the Heavenly Ordinance of Singing Scripture Psalms in the Churches of God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Stephen Day, Imprinted 1640), n. pag; The translators of this text are generally assumed to include Richard Mather, John Eliot, and Thomas Weld although Haraszti in *Enigma*, 12, points to a statement by Cotton Mather in *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England, From its First Planting in the Year 162 Unto the Year of Our Lord* (London, 1702) which indicates that other colonial ministers also participated in the task. The *Bay Psalm Book* was the first book printed in British North America.

¹⁰ Richard D. Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts 1629-1736* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute: 1974), 115; Plymouth, Mass. First Church, *Plymouth Church Records, 1620-1859* (Boston, Massachusetts: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 171.

The Turn Toward Lining-Out

As stated previously, the publication of the *Bay Psalm Book* represented a significant break with the musical tradition of the Puritans as demonstrated in the Ainsworth and Sternhold and Hopkins Psalters since the *Bay Psalm Book* was printed without musical notation until 1698.¹¹ Without musical notes to follow and as musical literacy began to fade over time, congregations became more and more dependent upon the male deacon to line out the tune. In contrast to simply choosing the tune or giving a starting note, lining-out meant that the deacon controlled the pitch, tune, and tempo of the singing, a task he was ill-trained to perform and something he frequently had trouble carrying out. Additionally, as a “woman naturally strikes eight Notes above the grum and low-sounding Voice of a Man,” according to the Reverend Thomas Walter, minister at Roxbury, matching the pitch of the male deacon proved to be problematic for women.¹² Although the Deacon commonly had a set repertoire of approximately fourteen different tunes to choose from, it was challenging to establish and maintain the tune in a key that was comfortable for both men and women.

The results of the turn toward lining-out were far from melodious. As historian Cyclone Covey states, the *Bay Psalm Book* may have provided “a more literal

¹¹ The 1698 edition of the *Bay Psalm Book* was printed with musical notation in two-part arrangements, according to musicologist Lowens, *Music and Musicians*, 33. Musical notation and two-part arrangements began to improve “the fortunes of New England congregational song,” something that was not fully accomplished until the singing schools of the 1720s, as Lowens states (33).

¹² Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, an Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note: Fitted to the Meanest Capacities* (Boston: Printed by J. Franklin, for S. Gerrish, near the brick church in Cornhill, 1721), 5; In his 1647 treatise *Singing of Psalmes*, the Reverend John Cotton made an allowance for lining-out “so that they who want either books or skill to reade, may know what is to be sung, and joyne with the rest in the dutie of singing” (62). Cotton’s concession, however, should not be confused with the disorderly practice of lining-out which had taken root by 1720. Cotton viewed lining-out as a “helpe” that was “needless” in the majority of congregations where psalm books were available and where the congregation was literate (62). In 1647 Cotton could not have anticipated the decline in musical literacy or the disorderly turn that lining-out would take by the turn of the eighteenth century.

versification of the psalms” but it was not “a more singable one.” A variety of factors were to blame for what the Reverend Cotton Mather described as the “Odd Noise” that came to characterize worship singing by 1720, not the least of which was the inability of the lead singer to reliably carry the tune. According to Symmes, the “Leading-singer [often the Deacon] would take the Liberty of raising any Note of the Tune, or lowering of it, as best pleas’d his Ear, and add such Turns and Flourishes as were grateful to him.”¹³ Oftentimes the leading singer mixed various tunes together or struggled to maintain a particular pitch, as Samuel Sewell noted in his diary on at least three separate occasions when he was leading the singing at Boston Third, or Old South, church:

Mr. Willard ... Spake to me to set the Tune; I intended Windsor, and fell into High-Dutch, and then essaying to set another Tune, went into a Key much too high. [December 28, 1705]

I try’d to set Low-Dutch tune and fail’d. Try’d again and fell into the tune of 119th Psalm. [July 5, 1713]

Lord’s Day. In the morning I set York Tune, and in the 2d going over, the Gallery carried it irresistibly to St. David’s, which discouraged me very much. [February 2, 1718]¹⁴

In short, Sewall could not seem to carry a particular tune throughout the entire psalm, switching melodies three times on one occasion.

Any musical shortcomings on the part of the lead singer, such as difficulty in carrying the tune, would have been amplified by other problems which affected

¹³ Covey, “Of Music, and of America Singing,” 500; Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer*, 22; Symmes, *Reasonableness*, 8.

¹⁴ Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall 1674-1729*, ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 1:538, 2:720, 2:881. The various tunes that Sewall refers to—Windsor, High-Dutch, Low-Dutch, 119th Psalm, York, and St. David’s—represent five of the fourteen most common tunes lined-out by deacons during this period; As based on Harold Field Worthley, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts Gathered 1620-1805* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 63-64, Sewall was not a deacon but lead the singing on numerous occasions.

congregational worship music such as a lack of psalters, declining literacy—particularly musical literacy—and the failure of the Puritans to establish singing societies for the furtherance of musical instruction as was the custom in England. Although the first three editions of the *Bay Psalm Book* produced at minimum 3,700 copies, no known editions of the *Bay Psalm Book* were published in the colonies between 1651 and 1695, and historians agree that there were insufficient numbers of psalm books to go around despite additional shipments of the *Bay Psalm Book* from English printers to New England booksellers. Even when psalm books were available, a steady decline in overall musical literacy made reliance on the deacon, who generally had no formal musical training, even more pronounced. The end result was that worship singing, as Walter described it, “had been committed and trusted to the uncertain and doubtful Conveyance of *Oral Tradition*.” Symmes echoed Walter’s concern when he stated that “there was no Way to learn; but only by hearing of *Tunes Sung*,” problematic indeed when Sewall and others like him led the singing. Thus by 1720, in the words of musicologist Irving Lowens, “musical literacy had virtually disappeared in the population at large.”¹⁵

As is characteristic of congregations that are bereft of individuals skilled in hymn singing for extended periods of time, worship music became slow and lackluster, losing

¹⁵ Walter, *The Grounds and Rules*, 3; Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*, 8; The first edition of the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) produced 1,700 copies. 2,000 more copies were added with the third edition (1650). On the insufficient number of psalm books and the general decline in literacy in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries see Laura Becker, “Ministers vs. Laymen,” *The New England Quarterly*, 88-89; Lowens, *Music and Musicians*, 19; Beginning in 1678 in England, young men would gather together in religious societies for the purpose of learning to sing by note. Once so trained, these individuals would spread out among the other congregants during the worship service to help improve the singing of the whole per Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (3): 511-544, especially p. 537.

the edifying qualities it was intended to impart.¹⁶ Men began to dominate the singing with extraneous “Flourishes” in which, according to Walter, “no two Men in the Congregation quaver alike, or together.” “Our tunes are ... left to the Mercy of every unskillful throat to chop and alter, twist and change, according to their ... odd Humours and Fancies.” By 1720 worship singing had declined to such a low point that some Congregational churches decided that it was easier to abandon singing altogether when no qualified person could be found to lead the singing than to continue with such “disorderly noise,” again quoting Walter. Perhaps Symmes summed up best the degeneration of worship music that occurred over the course of the seventeenth century when he stated that

The Declining from, and getting beside the *Rule* [by note] was *gradual and insensible*. *Singing-Schools* and *Singing-Books* being laid aside, there was no Way to learn; but only by hearing of *Tunes* Sung ... The Rules of Singing not being taught or learnt, every one sang as best pleased himself, and every *Leading-Singer* would take the Liberty of raising any *Note* of the *Tune*, or lowering of it, as best pleas'd his Ear, and add such *Turns* and *Flourishes* as were grateful to him; and this was done so *gradually*, as that but few if any took Notice of it, One *Clerk* or *Chorister* would alter the *Tunes* a little in his Day, the next, a little in his, and so one after another, till in *Fifty* or *Sixty* Years it caused a *Considerable Alteration*.¹⁷

In 1718 Cotton Mather appeared poised to do something, anything to improve worship singing when he recorded in his diary, “The Psalmody is but poorly carried on in my Flock ... I would see about it.”¹⁸

¹⁶ On the singing style that develops in congregations bereft of musical direction for extended periods of time see Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing”; The practice of lining-out was not peculiar to the Massachusetts Bay but was typical of congregations that lacked musical literacy according to Temperley.

¹⁷ Walter, *The Grounds and Rules*, 2; Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*, 8.

¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, 2:560.

The Return of Regular Singing or Singing by Note

In response to the disorderly noise that characterized worship singing, ministers in the greater Boston area began advocating for a return to the singing method practiced by the first generation of Puritans: regular singing or singing by note or rule, as it was sometimes called. Thomas Symmes's essay, *The Reasonableness of Regular singing, or, Singing by Note; In an Essay, To Revive the True and Ancient Mode of Singing Psalm-Tunes, according the Pattern in our New-England Psalm-Books; the Knowledge and Practice of which is greatly decay'd in most Congregations* (1720), was the first in a series of ministerial essays, sermons, and instructional booklets to be published on the subject. Two instructional booklets quickly followed Symmes's essay: The Reverend John Tufts's *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes, in a Plain & Easy Method, With a Collection of Tunes in Three Parts* (1721), in which Tufts advocated singing by note as "indicated by initials (for fa, so, la, mi) on a staff"; and Walter's *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained* (1721). While the first edition of Tuft's *Introduction* only contained the psalm tune melody, the third edition (1723) had two parts, while the fourth (1723) contained "Tunes in three parts, Treble, Medius, and Bass," according to an advertisement in the *Boston News-Letter*. Music in parts, according to historian Cyclone Covey, was intended for three different voices, "cantus taking the melody; medius for the female voice, and bass."¹⁹

¹⁹ Covey, "Of Music, and of America Singing," 499. When Covey speaks of "parts for three different voices," he is speaking of later editions of the *Bay Psalm Book*, which contained music in three parts; According to Lowens, *Music and Musicians*, 39-57, the first edition of Tufts *Introduction* (1721) contained only the psalm tune melody. The third edition (1723) had two parts, while the fourth (1723) and fifth editions (1726) contained parts for three voices. The fifth edition is the earliest extant; *Boston News-Letter*, June 20/27, 1723. Tufts was the minister at West Newbury, Massachusetts from 1714 to 1738.

Given the tortured state of worship music that resulted from the practice of lining-out, it makes sense that congregations would have welcomed the return of regular singing advocated by Symmes, Tufts, Walter and others. After all, at least one Bay-area congregation had already abandoned lining-out. In 1699 the congregation of the newly gathered Brattle Street church had “voted unanimously that the psalms in our public worship be sung without Reading line by line,” a decision that was consistent with another liberalizing practice put in place by the Brattle Street congregation, that of permitting women a vote in the choice of the minister, a first for Bay-area churches.²⁰

Yet the suggestion that congregations should return to regular singing proved to be controversial among some laymen, particularly among those living outside of Boston whom Symmes referred to as “the common Country People.” Resistance to regular singing led some to object that singing by note would impose a kind of ritual upon worship singing that would take away congregational autonomy and individuality and lead to rote and meaningless prayer and sermons. The end result of such practices would be a return to the “popery,” or Catholicism, that the first generation of Puritan immigrants had sought to escape. As one lay critic in Braintree—where the debate over regular singing was particularly acrimonious—wrote:

We are so exceedingly troubled with the Spirit of singing Psalms *by Rule*, as they call it, that we are afraid the new Singers will bring in *Popery* upon us before we are aware of it. Truly, I have a great Jealousy, that if we once begin to sing by Rule, the next thing will be to pray by Rule, and preach by Rule; we must have the Common Prayer, *Forsooth*, and then comes *Popery*.²¹

²⁰ The Church in Brattle Square (Boston, Mass.), *The Manifesto Church: Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, with Lists of Communicants, Baptisms, Marriages, and Funerals 1699-1872* (Boston: The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, 1902), 5.

²¹ Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*, 21; Chase, *America's Music*, 22, states that the opposition to regular singing was located primarily in rural, rather than in urban, areas, although the distinction was not absolute; *The New England Courant* (Boston, Massachusetts), March 18, 1723-March

Regular singing not only engendered fears among laymen about a return to popery, however, it also contained implicit messages about the gendered place of women within Congregational church singing, messages that threatened to disrupt the predominantly male sound of worship music to which many had become accustomed. In satirizing the effect of lining-out on women, one writer for James Franklin's *New England Courant* labeled it a "Procurer of Abortion." As stated in the *Courant*:

I am credibly inform'd, that a certain Gentlewoman miscarry'd at the ungrateful and yelling Noise of a Deacon in reading the first Line of a Psalm [i.e., singing it by rote]; and methinks if there were no other Argument against this Practice (unless there were an absolute necessity for it) the Consideration of it's being a Procurer of Abortion, might prevail with us to lay it aside.²²

While Franklin's *Courant* was the primary vehicle of resistance for those who opposed regular singing, satirical statements such as that quoted above expose the gendered dimensions of the controversy and suggest that there was something particularly challenging for women about the way lining-out was carried out in practice.²³

What becomes clear in many of the essays, sermons, and instructional manuals that emerged in the wake of Symmes's suggestion to return to singing by note is that over the course of the seventeenth century, it had become more and more difficult for women to participate in congregational singing. In some congregations, women had simply quit trying, to the dismay of their ministers. At Cotton Mather's Boston Second church, for example, on April 18, 1721, Mather preached a sermon in which he admonished women,

25, 1723; Only one minister, Samuel Niles of Braintree, according to Becker in "Ministers vs. Laymen," object to regular singing.

²² *The New England Courant* (Boston, Massachusetts), February 17, 1724-February 24, 1724.

²³ For other pieces in the *Courant* expressing opposition to the new way of singing see November 19, 1722 – November 26, 1722; March 18, 1723 – March 25, 1723; April 8, 1723 – April 15, 1723; August 12, 1723 – August 19, 1723. There is no evidence indicating that any minister ever published a pamphlet opposing regular singing.

those “Handmaids of the Lord,” for their non-participation in what was an essential “duty” of worship. As Mather states:

We cannot but beware and reprove the too visible and prevailing Want of Delight in this excellent Duty of Singing Psalms, even among Professors; the general Neglect of It in private Familys, and the frequent (sometimes constant) Omission of It by many particular Persons in our public Congregations, especially among the Handmaids of the Lord, whom the Examples of *Miriam* and *Deborah* with others do loudly condemn and reproach.²⁴

Rather than reprove women for not singing, as Mather did, the author of *A Brief Discourse Concerning Singing* (1721) laid the blame for women’s non-participation on the dominance of older men’s voices when he observed that “the Daughters of Musick are brought low” when the “Old Men” of the congregation lead the singing. There was something about the way that the older men led the singing that made it difficult, if not impossible, for women to participate. Regardless of the cause, despite women’s numerical preponderance in most congregations—by a ratio of three to one, according to Mather—it becomes evident that female voices were not taking part in worship singing to the extent that they were commanded to in scripture. By default, male voices were left to dominate.²⁵

As promoted by advocates of regular singing such as Tufts, Walter, and others, singing in three parts, however, signaled a departure from the dominance of the male voice engendered by lining-out in that it provided a legitimate space for women’s voices to be heard, something that may have been disconcerting to laymen accustomed to

²⁴ McKay, “Cotton Mather’s Unpublished Singing Sermon,” 417. Beginning on page 416, McKay’s article includes the transcribed text of Mather’s unpublished sermon.

²⁵ *A Brief Discourse*, 15.

John Tufts *An Introduction to Singing in Psalm Tunes in a Plain and Easy Method* (1726) includes notes, as indicated by initials, and three part harmony: Cant., Med., Bass. In this edition of Tufts, the words to the psalms were printed elsewhere within the psalm book. Regular singing by note, such as that advocated by Tufts, not only relieved the congregation from reliance upon the deacon to line-out the tune, it also made an audible space within which women's unique voice could be heard.

hearing their voices dominate. In Walter's lecture day or mid-week sermon, *The Sweet Psalmist of Israel A Sermon Preached at the Lecture held in Boston, by the Society for promoting Regular and Good Singing, and for Reforming the Depravations and*

Debasements our Psalmody labours under, In order to introduce the proper and true Old Way of Singing (1722), for example, Walter makes a strong case for the practice of three part singing. Harmony, according to Walter, had a “blessed Influence . . . upon the Soul” and was helpful to Devotion to “excite, assist, promote or preserve it.”²⁶

Walter goes on to link personal piety, or the “*Inward Harmony* of Piety and Devotion of Mind,” to musical harmony, which he describes as the “harmonious vehicle of our voices sending up to Heaven the inward holy Sentiments and Dispositions of our Souls” which are “above all” to be “labor[ed] after.” Musical harmony was Biblical, according to Walter, who states that the music of the Temple of Israel and of David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” was sung in three parts consisting of “Low . . . which is call the Bass . . . Middle which is commonly called the Medius or Tenor . . . [and] High, which is called the Alto.” Walter then adds that although the highest or alto part was likely performed by a male voice during David’s era, that the word “Hhalmah,” which was used in scripture to denote “A Musical Tone or Sound at the *Height* of a *Female Voice*, which is an *Octave* above that of a *Man*,” was “A Noun signifying the *Age of Virginity*,” implying perhaps that such parts were intended for the female voice. Walter then concludes his lecture day sermon with a prayer that “The God of all Grace grant . . . That we may faithfully perform our Part in the songs of the church here below” signifying that everyone had a part to play in the worship music of the time.²⁷

Singing by note also eliminated the extraneous “Flourishes” and “fancies” that laymen had relied on to embellish musical worship and to which so many had become

²⁶ Walter, *The Sweet Psalmist of Israel*, 11.

²⁷ Walter, *The Sweet Psalmist of Israel*, 9, 27-28.

attached. In contrast to lining-out, singing by note placed every person in the meetinghouse, male and female, member and non-member alike, on equal footing. As Symmes in *Utile Dulci Or a Joco-Serious Dialogue, Concerning Regular Singing* (1723) states, “*everyone* in the Congregation has as much Liberty to Sing, as the *Oldest* Deacon in the Church, and as good a Right to decide this Question.” Tellingly, the move to return to singing the regular way was led by clergymen such as Symmes.²⁸

Ministerial Appeal to Women: “the Handmaids of the Lord”

As statements by Symmes and others suggest, the desire on the part of the clergy to return to regular singing was about more than creating a more pleasing musical aesthetic, however, especially within Boston proper. In promoting regular singing, ministers could demonstrate leadership through success in appealing to those who had heretofore been largely silent, particularly women.²⁹ By 1700 Boston had four Congregational churches, and as demonstrated in chapter five, “Puritan Women, Religious Experience, and Legacy,” women were acting independently in joining and changing churches of their own volition, even leaving their husbands behind at one church in order to attend another. A woman no longer needed to attend a particular church simply because her husband attended there. Ministers could no longer take for granted that men and women would attend their church simply because it was close to

²⁸ Walter, *The Grounds and Rules*, 2; Thomas Symmes, *Utile Dulci Or a Joco-Serious Dialogue, Concerning Regular Singing: Calculated for a Particular Town, (where it was publickly had, On Friday Oct 12. 1722) but may serve some other places in the same Climate* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, for Samuel Gerrish, near the Brick Meeting House in Cornhill, 1723), 52.

²⁹ Essays and sermons by several ministers strongly suggest that there were also generational aspects to the adoption of regular singing, something which this work does not take up but which receives brief mention in Becker, “Ministers v. Laymen,” 93-94. According to Becker, young people were more likely to favor the adoption of regular singing.

home. Particularly with the gathering of the Brattle Street church in 1699—which permitted women the right to vote on the choice of a minister and did away with the practice of lining-out—a greater element of choice had been injected into the decision about which church to attend.

As those who filled the pews on any given Sabbath and dominated church membership rolls, and as those who were most likely to be in a position to make sure that their children were baptized—a significant factor given that baptism was the first step in bringing unsaved souls under the watch and care of the congregation—women’s attendance at and allegiance to a specific congregation took on greater significance at a time when ministers perceived that their own status was in decline. That women’s attendance at Sabbath services mattered and was noticed is suggested by a diary entry made by Samuel Sewall. On Mar 1721, in the midst of the singing controversy, for example, Sewall blames the weather for women’s absence in noting that the meetinghouse was “not so full of women, by reason of Rain and Dirt.”³⁰

As numerous historians have pointed out, ministerial concern over a perceived loss of status and authority shows up in church records, sermons, and essays and in a decline in the number and quality of young men willing to assume the pulpit. Conflict between ministers and their congregations was common and arguments occurred between the two groups about everything from salaries and doctrine to the placement of the meetinghouse.³¹ Not coincidentally, some of the same ministers who advocated so

³⁰ Sewall, *Diary*, 2: 978.

³¹ For works on the early-eighteenth century loss of ministerial prestige and authority see James Schmotter, “Ministerial Careers in Eighteenth-Century New England: The Social Context, 1700-1760,” *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 2 (1975): 249-267; J. William T. Youngs, Jr., *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700-1750* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 27-28, 37-38, 63-64, 97-108.

vociferously for a return to regular singing also published essays and delivered sermons which revealed concern over issues such as ministerial maintenance.³² The title of one of Symmes's sermons, for example, *The People's Interest in One Article Consider'd & Exhibited. Or, A Sermon Shewing that it is the Interest of the People of God, to Do Their Duty, Toward the Subsistence of Such as Preach the Gospel to Them* (1724), speaks to this very idea as does the title of Tufts's 1725 essay, *Anti-Ministerial Objections Considered, Or the Unreasonable Pleas Made By some Against Their Duty to Their Ministers, With Respect To Their Maintenance Answered*. Hand in hand with concerns about issues such as ministerial maintenance, clergymen, according to historian J. William T. Youngs Jr., feared that they were "losing their audience." Indeed, failing to sing the psalms or singing half-heartedly was in itself a sign of congregational inattentiveness, according to the Reverend Joseph Baxter, minister at the Medfield, Massachusetts church.³³

At the same time that ministers published sermons and essays designed to reinforce the idea that congregants had a "duty" to provide for their clergymen, they also began appealing more and more to their female parishioners, both with sermons that explicitly addressed women's marital concerns—such as one given by the Reverend Samuel Willard in 1704 which emphasized the reciprocal duties between husbands and wives—and by arguing for women's participation in worship singing, as illustrated by the

³² I owe the observation regarding the link between ministers who argued for regular singing and those who wrote discourses on the rights of the clergy to Becker, "Ministers vs. Laymen," 92.

³³ Youngs, *God's Messengers*, 63. I owe the mention of Baxter's observation about congregational singing to Youngs who cites Joseph Baxter, Ministerial Meetings, August 15, 1704, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

essays and sermons published in the wake of the singing controversy.³⁴ At the same time that ministers argued that a return to regular singing would prove more aesthetically pleasing, they also appealed to women to participate in worship music. Thomas Symmes, for example, in *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing or Singing by Note* (1720), advocates for women's participation when he states:

Do not the Handmaids of the Lord need to be put forward in this Duty? Are not they as much obliged to perform it as any? Were there not Women-Singers, as well as Men-Singers of old? Would it not be very proper for them to have suitable Instructions and Schools on convenient Seasons? Are not they to be employed in Singing God's Praises in the Heavenly World, and why should they not in the Churches and Families on Earth? Have not they the pleasantest Voices (generally Speaking) And how will they answer it to God who gave them such Voices, if they don't improve them in Singing His Praises?³⁵

Women, those "Handmaids of the Lord," according to Symmes, had a "Duty" and an obligation to sing that was both biblical and historical, and like men, should also receive musical instruction. Symmes's essay, as he states, "offered several Arguments to encourage Regular Singing, and answer'd the Principal Objections against it" implying that, as for John Cotton in 1647, some laymen still objected to any sort of vocalizations by women within the meetinghouse.

One year after Symmes's essay was published, Cotton Mather, in *The Accomplished Singer* (1721), again references biblical history in reminding his audience that women were "Commanded" to sing the "praises of God." According to Mather:

³⁴ Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion are Unfolded, their Truth Confirm'd, their Excellence Display'd, their Usefulness Improv'd; Contrary Errors & Vices Refuted & Expos'd, Objections Answer'd, Controversies Settled, Cases of Conscience Resolv'd; and a Great Light Thereby Reflected on the Present Age. By the Reverend & Learned Samuel Willard, M.A. Late Pastor of the South Church in Boston, and Vice-President of Harvard College in Cambridge, in New-England. Prefac'd by the Pastors of the Same Church* (Boston, New England: printed by B. Green and S. Kneeland for B. Eliot and D. Henschman, and sold at their shops, 1726), 608-613.

³⁵ Symmes, *Reasonableness*, 19.

Even they who are *Forbidden to Speak in the Church*, are *Commanded* nevertheless to sing there. The Handmaids of the Lord, forget *Miriam*, and *All the Women that went out after her*, if they decline their part in singing the Praises of GOD; since diverse of our *Spiritual Songs* were composed by Persons Of the *Female Sex*, 'tis but Reasonable that the *Female Sex* bear their part in *Singing* of these, and all the rest. A Georgina the Renowned Sister of *Nazianzen*, is commemorated for it ... no *Persons* are to be exempted.³⁶

Two years after Mather's essay, Peter Thacher, John Danforth, and Samuel Danforth in *An Essay, By Several Ministers of the Gospel* (1723) once more address the question of women's participation when they respond to the question, "may persons of the Female Sex, be admitted to sing in the Church?" Their response is emphatic: "undoubtedly they may and ought." The authors of the text go on to state that

The *Sister of Moses*, with a vast Number of Women Singers in the Congregation Of *Israel*, sang the Praises of GOD ... In *Judges* 5:1 we read, '*Then Sang Deborah*;' and in the Congregation of the LORD that came from *Babylon*, it's put Upon Sacred Record that there were Two Hundred Singing Men and Singing Women ... When they are Commanded to *keep Silence in the Church*, (1 Cor. 14. 34.) They are restrained from being *Authoritative Teachers*, as the next Verse shews, but not from being *Melodious Singers* there: And how can they, which have the pleasantest Voices answer it to God, who gave them, if they don't improve them in a Musical Speaking together in Psalms and singing Spiritual songs.³⁷

Thus, according to Thacher, *et al* while "Authoritative" teaching was prohibited for women, "Melodious" singing in the tradition of biblical prophetesses such as Miriam and Deborah was not.

John Eliot's instructional piece, *A Brief Discourse Concerning Regular Singing* (1721)—published the same year as Mather's *Accomplished Singer*—is less gender specific than Symmes, Mather, Tufts, and others. Yet Eliot repeatedly emphasizes that it

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer*, 21.

³⁷ Thacher, *An Essay, By Several Ministers of the Gospel*, 15-16.

is a “duty incumbent on all the People of God” to regularly participate in the singing of psalms. He also makes it clear that “Singing Implies Harmony and Melody” and states that “Every Pleasant Noise or Voice is not singing in this sense” thereby suggesting that some within the congregation were remaining silent. True “Concord, Harmony, and good Melody” was impossible without the participation of all who have it within their power to do so, according to Eliot.³⁸

Thanks to the efforts of the Bay area clergy, true harmony and good melody began to prevail in more and more churches so that by the mid-1740s, most—though not all—congregations sang by note in three parts as originally recommended by Tufts. The flurry of ministerial essays, sermons, and instructional booklets that were published in Boston, beginning with Symmes’s *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing*, came to a halt with the publication of a sermon by Connecticut minister, the Reverend Josiah Dwight titled *An Essay to Silence the Outcry That has been made in some Places against Regular Singing* (1725) suggesting that further ministerial persuasion proved unnecessary. The clergymen had disseminated their message and it had been received in the majority of congregations. Based in part on the lack of persuasive material published on the singing controversy after 1725, it can be assumed that women, as well as men, began learning to read music through participation in the singing schools and societies which sprang up in and around Boston. As noted in the *New England Courant* of March 5, 1722:

On Thursday last in the Afternoon, a Lecture was held at the New Brick Church, by the Society for Promoting Regular Singing in the Worship of God. The Rev. Thomas Walter of Roxbury preach’d an excellent Sermon on that Occasion, *The Sweet Psalmist of Israel*. The Singing was perform’d in Three Parts (according to

³⁸ *A Brief Discourse*, 2, 4.

Rule) by about Ninety Persons skill'd in that Science, to the great Satisfaction of a Numerous Assembly there Present.³⁹

In short, by the end of the 1720s, regular singing had taken firm root in greater Boston and was spreading throughout New England. Groups such as the Society for the Promotion of Regular Singing had been organized. Psalms sung in three part harmonies would henceforth “reverberate extensively” in the high vaulted ceiling of churches such as Hingham, Massachusetts’s second, or “Old Ship,” meetinghouse.⁴⁰

Conclusion

As the extant sermons, essays, and instructional pamphlets quoted in this chapter demonstrate, over the course of the seventeenth century women’s singing voices had largely gone silent within the meeting house. By 1720 the Handmaids of the Lord were not participating in worship singing to the extent that they were commanded to in scripture according to Boston’s clergy. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, nonparticipation by women in worship singing during the seventeenth century was not intentional. Rather, it was an unintended consequence of two intertwined occurrences: the adoption of the *Bay Psalm Book* by congregations beginning in 1640 and the turn toward the disorderly noise of lining-out that resulted. As lining-out evolved and as

³⁹ *The New England Courant* (Boston, Massachusetts) March 5, 1722. Elsewhere in New England, efforts to replace lining-out with regular singing were not successful until late in the century, according to Irwin, “The Theology of ‘Regular Singing,’” 190.

⁴⁰ As pointed out by Chase, *America’s Music*, 34, singing schools continued into the twentieth century in all parts of the ever-expanding United States; In Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 110, Rath describes the congregants’ response to the minister’s utterances as “carry[ing] up to the ceiling and reverberate[ing] extensively.” Although Rath’s comments do not pertain specifically to musical “utterances,” his description of sound would apply to music as well as to the spoken word. Hingham’s “Old Ship” meetinghouse, built in 1681, is the only surviving New England meetinghouse from the seventeenth century.

memory for particular tunes faded over time, male voices began to dominate singing to the extent that by 1700, it was evident that worship singing was in need of reform.

The desire on the part of the clergy to move away from lining-out and return to the method of singing known as “regular singing” was about more than creating pleasing musical aesthetics, however. Regular singing with its three part harmonies contained implicit messages about the place of women in the congregation, a place that was still in flux in some congregations after almost one hundred years of settlement in the Massachusetts Bay, especially in some of the more rural churches outside of Boston proper where much of the opposition to regular singing occurred. As part of their response to those who opposed regular singing, ministers were compelled to answer questions about whether or not women should sing, questions they answered in the affirmative. At a time when some women within Boston were acting independently and voting with their feet over which church to attend—as demonstrated in chapter five—ministers chose to confront the questions about women’s participation through a direct appeal for women’s participation in singing.

The singing essays, instructional manuals, and sermons published beginning in 1720 by ministers such as Tufts, Mather, Symmes, Thacher, Eliot, Danforth and others both appealed to women to practice melodious singing and served to reaffirm the place of women’s unique voice, both literally and figuratively, within the meeting house. In person and in print, ministers sought to appeal to both country folk and urban elites in arguing for the inclusion of women in worship singing. They answered questions straightforwardly and unequivocally about whether or not women should sing in church. In justifying women’s participation, the clergy referenced biblical practice and by

inference, lifted the status of all women within the congregation. The extant documents pertaining to the singing controversy reflect ministerial sensitivity to the increasing preponderance of women in attendance at worship services at the same time that they enabled the clergy to showcase their leadership of the singing “Reformation,” something that was the rightful role of “the Heads or Rulers of a people,” according to one minister. Most importantly, the questions that emerged with the singing controversy of 1720 about whether or not women should sing settled permanently the issue of women’s participation in this part of the worship service. By 1740, The Handmaids of the Lord, in the tradition of biblical prophetesses Miriam and Deborah, were silent no more. Moving into the middle and later decades of the eighteenth century, women would continue to lift their voice in song as part of both church congregations and as members of the church choirs which developed during this era.⁴¹

⁴¹ *A Brief Discourse*, 14.

Epilogue

In a church of between three or four hundred communicants there are but few more than one hundred men; all the rest are women.

Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*

Long before the Reverend Cotton Mather observed that more women than men filled the pews of the typical Congregational church, average Puritan women had been making a place for themselves within the meeting house by claiming full church membership in numbers that equaled and later exceeded those of their male brethren. Although they were expected to sit quietly in the pews during the worship service and were not permitted to ask questions following the sermon as men were allowed to do, they were recognized as having spiritual authority which expressed itself in their personal relationships and in society at large. As we have seen, they were both key participants in and patrons of their individual congregations and shapers of both their and their family's religious experience. Extant seventeenth-century church records repeatedly tell the same story, that once the seven male pillars of a new church had been chosen, women frequently outnumbered men in claiming membership during the first few years of a given church's existence, a phenomenon that would grow more pronounced as the century advanced.

Little in the way of changes to the political, theological, or institutional structure of the church accounts for women's continued prominence in membership over the course of the century. Although the Brattle Street church allowed women as well as men to vote on the selection of the pastor, in 1730 as in 1630, women were still denied access to the pulpit and to leadership positions as elders and deacons. The doors of Harvard

University, which trained young men for the ministry, were still closed to women. Efforts promoted by the clergy aimed at bringing more souls into the church via the halfway covenant did not change the gendered ratio of male and female membership; nor did eliminating the requirement for a public confession of faith, as at the Brattle Street church, result in large numbers of women suddenly clamoring to embrace church membership. Nonetheless, from the first decades of settlement when full church membership required public confession from both men and women, women willingly spoke of their experiences. They rose to the standard for membership required of both sexes, a standard that, as based on the number of men who sought full church membership, men were challenged to meet.

As part of the struggle within New England Congregationalism to define itself as a religious system, early debates about the literal place of women's voices in the meetinghouse, whether or not they should give their confession in public, for example, were left to individual congregations to determine. That fewer and fewer women over the course of the seventeenth century gave their confession in private should not be taken as a sign of decreasing status for women within the culture. Rather, the trend toward private confessions applied to men and women alike and was viewed by ministers as a pragmatic accommodation designed to prevent public confession from becoming a stumbling block to church membership. Women continued to give public confessions in those churches that upheld the practice until the religious revival of the Great Awakening once again made public narratives the primary evidence of spiritual new birth, at least for a time.¹ That women's voices were considered an essential component in the way that

¹ Per Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 151-52, in 1748 Jonathan Edwards, minister at Northampton, rejected membership

Puritans publicly worshipped God is made evident by the flurry of ministerial pamphlets that appeared in the 1720s decrying both the aesthetics of worship music and the lack of participation by women. Debates that initially emerged at Boston First church in the 1640s about whether or not women should sing during the worship service were settled once and for all in the 1720s in favor of women's inclusion. Thus, the singing controversy of the 1720s can be seen as a pivotal moment in both the reaffirmation of the importance of women's voices to the vitality of the congregation and as paving the way for the mixed-sex choirs that would follow, as in 1761 when Boston First church voted "That a number of our best Singers be desired to Sit together in some Convenient place in the meeting House."²

While acknowledging that women were able to exert "indirect" or limited influence as wives and church members, historians have tended to equate women's power and authority within the patriarchal social structure and system of religious belief with their ability to speak and be heard in the public square. In rightfully interpreting Puritan culture as oral, as elevating the "power of the spoken word," historians have frequently pointed to Anne Hutchinson as an example of the way that "female silence" had become "a cornerstone of social order" and of the way that "the voices of women are carefully restricted and their authority explicitly contained if not denied."³ To understand the way

via the halfway covenant, stating that he would only admit candidates to full communion with proof of saving grace.

² Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* (Boston: The Society, 1961), 1:223.

³ Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 80; Jane Kamensky, *The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5, 72; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality," in *The Religious History of American Women*

that power operated within patriarchal communities, however, we must also look at what women did, and what men sometimes did in support of women, not just at what women were able to say or what was said about them, something that is challenging to do given the paucity of source materials authored by women and the need to rely primarily on documents authored by men. We must carefully evaluate ministerial sermons and writings which not only reinforced patriarchal authority by admonishing women to “sin not” with thy “Tongue,” but also encouraged them to act by emulating the biblical example of Deborah—the biblical prophetess, judge, warrior, and psalm composer—as Cotton Mather did with the women of his congregation during the singing controversy.⁴

We can examine women’s actions and behavior, both as individuals and in groups, to gain a more accurate sense of how gendered power operated within Puritan culture. The study of women’s individual behavior, for example, reveals an increase in autonomy over the course of the seventeenth century within religious circles, an autonomy that was enabled in part by the sheer numerical population growth of Boston toward the end of the century. As more and more people settled in greater Boston and as more and more churches were gathered, an element of choice was injected into religious culture. For almost twenty years, Boston First church was the only church available for those who lived within a one mile radius of its meeting house, but by 1700, residents could attend one of four different Congregational churches. Prefiguring the consumer revolution of the early-eighteenth century in which colonists had a greater variety of

Reimagining the Past, ed., Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 65.

⁴ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978; reprint of the 3d ed., Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741), 54. Mather’s *Ornaments* was originally published in Boston in 1691; See page 230 for Cotton Mather speaking to his congregation on the duty of women to participate in worship singing.

goods—cloth, books, glassware, ceramics—to choose from than ever before, extant church records reveal that as early as 1675, women were exercising the power of religious choice, what they referred to as their “liberty,” by leaving one church in favor of another, sometimes leaving a spouse behind at the old church.⁵

In utilizing church membership records to trace the movement of individual women from one church to another, it also becomes evident that women were consciously creating community, communities that predated the female aid societies and moral reformers that historians typically associate with early-nineteenth-century women. In considering how women left one church in order to join their “sisters” at another we see the creation of communities in which women depended upon each other for spiritual exhortation and comfort during challenging times in their lives such as during marital strife. Within these religious communities women appropriated the political tools of their husbands and fathers, such as the petition, in the service of religious issues that were important to them such as their “liberty” to worship where their conscience dictated or their desire to retain a minister who was threatened with dismissal. Five years after eighty-six “persons” from the town of Northampton, Massachusetts petitioned the General Court to stop the government of Charles II from eliminating what they perceived as their “liberties and privileges, both in church and commonwealth” a group of women from Boston First church appropriated similar language in arguing for the “liberty,” to

⁵ In 1630 approximately 700 men, women, and children who arrived with the Winthrop fleet. By 1650 the town had grown to about 3,000, and by 1720, Boston’s population numbered roughly 10,000. See Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop’s Boston A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1965), especially p. 147, for statistics on early population growth; On the early eighteenth-century revolution in the availability of consumer goods see T.H. Breen, “Baubles of Britain’: the American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

choose which church they would attend.⁶ This example is not to suggest a direct causal link between the men of Hadley and the women of Boston First who lived one hundred miles away. Rather, the example illustrates that at a time in which religion and politics were inexorably linked, women utilized the prevailing language and political tactics of their era in arguing their case, a language that pervaded the culture and originated with the Massachusetts colony's first law code, the *Body of Liberties* (1641).

A reappraisal of women's status within the church, one that bases its analysis on the behavior of average Puritan women, as this work has done, rather than the disciplining of "American Jezebels" such as Anne Hutchinson and others for their disorderly speech, shifts our point of view and reveals new insights about the gendered way that power operated within such patriarchal systems. In particular, women's actions in the later decades of the seventeenth century in changing churches independent of their husbands reveals a subtle yet quantifiable enlargement of autonomy and agency as compared with the earliest decades of settlement. A more in-depth and systematic analysis of church membership records than that undertaken for this dissertation would likely reveal numerous other women who moved from one church to another in search of independent spiritual fulfillment and could also bring to light examples of more men who were willing to follow their wives.⁷

⁶ Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley Including the Early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby, Massachusetts* (Northampton, Mass., Printed by Metcalf and Company, 1863), 81-83. Although Judd quotes from the Northampton petition, it is not reproduced in his *History of Hadley*. While he refers to its signers as "persons," it is likely that they were all male as was the case with a similar petition submitted six days later by the town of Hadley on the same issues and concerns as the Northampton petition. The Hadley petition is reproduced in Judd on pages 81-83.

⁷ Lyle Koehler, "The Case of the American Jezebels: Anne Hutchinson and Female Agitation during the Years of Antinomian Turmoil, 1636-1640," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan., 1974), pp. 55-78. The term "American Jezebels" originates with John Winthrop, "A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines," in *The Antinomian*

Historians can only speculate about why someone such as Isaiah Tay would request a dismissal to leave Boston First church where he held the respected position of deacon and follow his wife, Mary, into membership at the nearby Brattle Street church. The Tays had only been married for a year and a half when on May 14, 1721, Isaiah requested a dismissal from Boston First church, where he had been a member for almost twenty years, to join the Brattle Street church, where Mary had been a member for five years and where the couple was married. Thus, on June 4, 1721, Mary Tay did not join the church where her husband was a member; rather, Isaiah Tay joined his wife's church, something that would not have been possible in 1630. The Tays' story, and the story of thousands of other women such as Mary Watkins Tay, complicates the notion of women as the weaker vessel within Puritan society and replaces it with one in which women, while not equal to men in the eyes of civil society, might be seen as acting in ways that slowly but effectively transformed their culture. Patriarchal societies are not static entities. The behavior of religious lay women and men throughout the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries helped to subtly undermine earlier ideas about "women's modesty," or place in the public sphere, as expressed by the Reverend John Cotton who in 1633 objected to public confession for his wife. By 1766 the culture had changed such that Sarah Osborn, a fifty-two year old Congregationalist woman in Rhode Island, led mixed-sex prayer and Bible study meetings in her home. Although she faced criticism from some of her contemporaries, in large part because many of the participants in these meetings were black, Osborn did not fear that she would be excommunicated or banished for leading them, consequences that Anne Hutchinson experienced for holding mixed-sex

meetings just one-hundred years earlier.⁸ That Osborn was able to lead her meetings without fear of the kind of reprisals that Hutchinson faced can be seen as the result of a century of individual actions in which women took responsibility for their spiritual welfare, a century in which men sometimes followed and women such as Mary Tay sometimes led.

⁸ Mary Watkins joined the Brattle Street church on September 2, 1716. Three years later, on December 24, 1719, Watkins and Isaiah Tay were married by the Reverend Benjamin Colman of the Brattle Street church. A year and a half after their marriage, Isaiah received a dismissal from Boston First church, and three weeks after receiving his dismissal, on June 4, 1721, Isaiah Tay joined his wife in membership at the Brattle Street church. For the record of Isaiah Tay's membership and dismissal from Boston First church see Pierce ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston*, 1:93, 139. For the records of Tay and Watkins's membership and marriage at Brattle Street church see *The Church in Brattle Square* (Boston, Mass.), *The Manifesto Church: Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, with Lists of Communicants, Baptisms, Marriages, and Funerals 1699-1872* (Boston: The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, 1902), 98, 104, 237; John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, ed., Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 96; On Sarah Osborn see Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2013); Mary Beth Norton, "My Resting Reaping Times": Sarah Osborn's Defense of Her "Unfeminine" Activities, 1767, *Signs*, Vol. 2. No. 2 (Winter, 1976), pp. 515-29.

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