

# HISTORY OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HADLEY

Congregationalism in America dates from 1620 when the Mayflower with the first settlers arrived at Plymouth. Among those first Congregationalists were such notable Americans as John Hancock and John Adams. In the early years of our country, Harvard and Yale were founded to educate ministers. In 1957, many congregational churches, including First Church, joined another denomination to become the United Church of Christ in order to form a regional and national presence along with the worldwide outreach and mission ministries.

Our church was founded in 1659 by two groups of "withdrawers" from organized churches in Connecticut. They joined with others to form a "company", which pledged on April 18, 1659: "If God permit, to transplant ourselves and families to the plantation purchased on the East side of the river Connecticut." Today our rich heritage provides the foundation for our continuing growth in grace and mission.

## First Congregational Church Historical Notes

From [Historic Hadley](#) by Alice Morehouse Walker, 1906

On November 3, 1806, a vote was taken to build a new meeting house. Right from the start there was discussions about where to locate the building, to keep it on what is now West Street, or move it to what is now Middle Street. Keeping it on West Street prevailed. The new meeting-house was dedicated on November 8, 1808. "No hats were to be hung in the building, and stringent rules for behavior were made and posted by the selectmen." (Pg 69). It cost \$8,413 and was paid for by selling seventy-eight pews for \$7,031 with the balance borrowed by the town.

From [Historic Hadley](#) by Alice Morehouse Walker, 1906

When planning the new meetinghouse in the early 1800s, "One thing the people had determined, and that was that there should be no room under the new meetinghouse for geese, or sheep, or mischievous boys. The Hadley geese had multiplied until almost every family owned a flock, and these ran the streets, huddling at night in front of the owner's houses, and on sunny days crowding under the meeting-house and making such a racket that the effect of the most eloquent preaching was entirely destroyed. The building committee, Charles Phelps, Lieutenant Caleb Smith, and

General Samuel Porter, was doubtless instructed as to this point and obeyed orders.” (Pg 68).

From [Historic Hadley](#) by Alice Morehouse Walker, 1906

"The meeting-house had been resingled, the bell recast and made heavier, and general repairs completed, when peaceful Hadley was invaded by another army, pursuing Daniel Shays and his adherents of rebellion fame. The snow was piled in drifts, and the roads almost impassable, when General Lincoln and his three thousand soldiers made their camp one memorable Sunday morning, January 13, 1787, on the broad street. Cannon were stationed north of the meeting-house, and preparations were made by which to keep the Sabbath after the good old fashion. Dr. Hopkins being in feeble health, a messenger was sent to Hatfield for Dr. Lyman, and there behind a pulpit built of snow, with the three thousand soldiers as his congregation, the eloquent divine exhorted, preached, and prayed. The shades of the regicides who lived and died in Parson Russell's house across the way may well have graced with their unseen presence this unique Sunday service" (pg 67).

\*A gift of Elms: \*In honor of Hadley's 350th anniversary and of Arbor Day, \*the Hadley Garden Center\* donated three Princeton Elms to the Town of Hadley. These are disease resistant elms, which hopefully can be a substitute for the American Elm. The American Elm (*ulmus americana*) once lined the streets of Hadley, including the Town Common. Attached is a postcard showing the town common lined with elms around 1900. Most American Elms in town were devastated by the Dutch Elm Disease, a fungal disease spread primarily by beetles. Many of the trees killed were several hundred years old.

The American Elms in Hadley were beautiful to look at, and they were also a benefit to wildlife. Their fruit and seed were eaten by mice, squirrels, woodchucks and opossums. The trees were home to squirrels, raccoons and many birds, including woodpeckers and chickadees. The wood could be used for furniture, baskets and paneling.

Several references were made to the stately elms in the speeches given at the town's anniversary celebrations in 1859 and 1909. Here is a poem that Julia Taft Bayne wrote for the 1909 celebration.

## **THE HADLEY ELMS**

by Julia Taft Brown

(from [Hadley Ballads](#))

The Hadley elms! In what forgotten year

Men planted them to make our village fair  
We cannot know. The sun and earth and air  
Have fostered them, and those who set them here  
Have fled so far beyond, even history's ear  
Scarce knows their footfall. Lasting, precious, rare -  
This gift they left. What glory shalt thou wear,  
Oh Hadley - Hadley, that we hold so dear  
From this our generation? These gifts, these,  
Would we leave with thee for thy joy and praise,  
For the Republic's need in bitter days,  
True men, good women, beneath the Hadley trees -  
When danger threatens, and sorrow overwhelms,  
To stand strong, beautiful as Hadley elms!