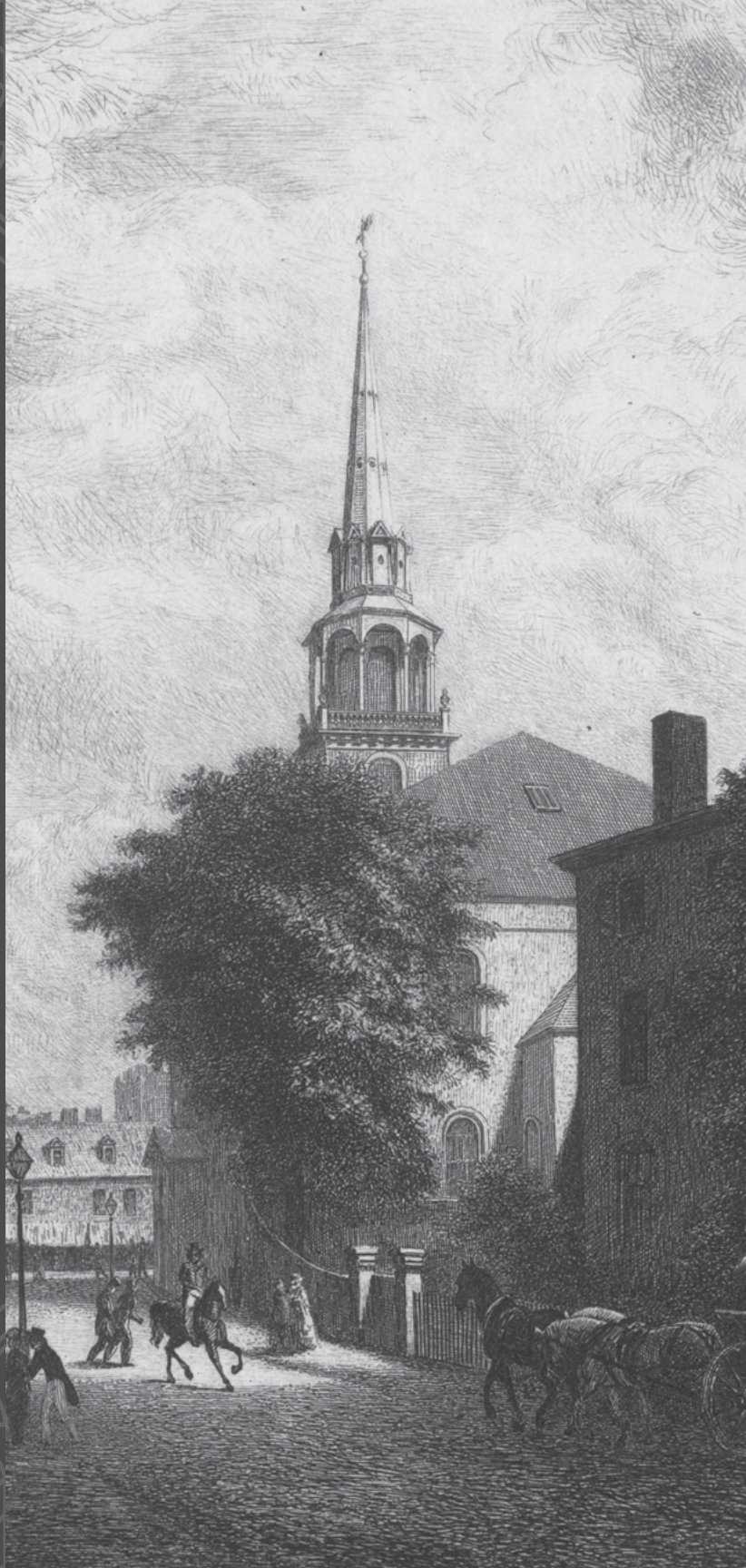


The
Really Useful Guide
to the
**SENIOR
MINISTERS**
of
**OLD SOUTH
CHURCH**
in Boston

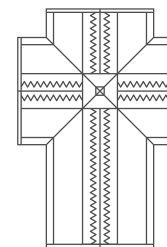
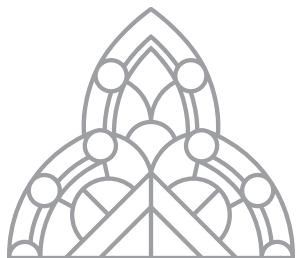
FOREWORD & TEXT

By
Kate Silfen
OSC Historian





*Dedicated to Old South's
20th Senior Pastor, who revered
Old South's past while boldly
moving it into the future.*



The Really Useful Guide to the
SENIOR MINISTERS
of
OLD SOUTH CHURCH
in Boston

FOREWORD & TEXT

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DESIGN & LAYOUT *By* JOSHUA CLEAVER

FIRST PRINTED IN 2022 BY PURITAN CAPITAL, HOLLIS, NEW HAMPSHIRE

SENIOR MINISTERS
of
OLD SOUTH CHURCH

- 1 Thomas Thacher 1669–1678
- 2 Samuel Willard 1678–1707
- 3 Ebenezer Pemberton 1700–1717
- 4 Joseph Sewall 1713–1769
- 5 Thomas Prince 1718–1758
- 6 Alexander Cumming 1761–1763
- 7 Samuel Blair 1766–1769
- 8 & 9 John Bacon & John Hunt 1771–1775
- 10 Joseph Eckley 1779–1811
- 11 Joshua Huntington 1808–1819
- 12 Benjamin Wisner 1821–1832
- 13 Samuel H. Stearns 1834–1836
- 14 George W. Blagden 1836–1872
- 15 Jacob M. Manning 1857–1882
- 16 George Angier Gordon 1884–1927
- 17 Russell Henry Stafford 1927–1945
- 18 Frederick M. Meek 1946–1973
- 19 James W. Crawford 1974–2002
- 20 Nancy S. Taylor 2005–2022

FOREWORD

The idea for *The Really Useful Guide to the Senior Ministers of Old South Church in Boston* came to me one evening when I was browsing through a special souvenir booklet that I bought when I visited London in the summer of 2018. Titled *The Really Useful Guide to Kings and Queens of England* (Historic Royal Places, 2016), this booklet features brief profiles of each King and Queen of England dating back to Edward the Confessor and ending with the present Queen Elizabeth II. As the title suggests, each profile of a king or queen has a whimsical touch. For example, Queen Elizabeth II's profile mentions her dry sense of humor and love of corgis. While this booklet has a light-hearted tone, I was also impressed by its reverence for each royal figure. The writers of *The Really Useful Guide* did a superb job of capturing each Monarch's key achievements and unique ability to serve as a powerful national symbol for the people of Great Britain.

As I flipped through my souvenir, it occurred to me that it would be fun to write a similar booklet for Old South's twenty senior pastors. More importantly, I wanted to undertake a project that celebrates the leadership and ministry of the Reverend Dr. Nancy Taylor, and writing *The Really Useful Guide to the Senior Ministers of the Old South Church in Boston* seemed like a fitting way to do that. Dr. Taylor honors Old South's storied past and has often referenced it as a source of inspiration to fuel Old South's mission in the 21st century. I also thought that adding a light touch to this booklet would be an apt way to applaud the humor that Dr. Taylor so often brings to her ministry. I hope that this commemorative booklet has mirrored the funny, yet respectful and informative tone that characterizes *The Really Useful Guide to Kings and Queens of England*.

The writing and printing of *The Really Useful Guide to the Senior Ministers of Old South Church in Boston* was a group effort, and I have many people to thank for their invaluable assistance. I want to begin by thanking all the authors who contributed entries on senior pastors to *Old South Church in Boston, 1669-2019: A Concise Theological, Historical, and Whimsical Encyclopaedia*. These writers include Emily Ross, Nancy Taylor, Rebecca Bowler Pasipanodya, John Stainton, Aron Boros, Betsy Ragan, Larry Bowers, Megan Stephan, and Ashton Goodfield. Your work helped make this project possible. Kathy Wade, Liz Morgan, and Lois Corman did the crucial work of editing and proofreading my writing. Rob Gabler brought his sparkling sense of humor and flair for writing to the task of livening up the ministerial profiles that I wrote. I want to thank designer Joshua Cleaver who lent his artistic expertise to this booklet.

Finally, I want to thank the Reverend Dr. Nancy Taylor for her enthusiastic support throughout the course of this project. Leading a historic, urban congregation is a momentous feat by itself, but she has done this while managing the Church's response to a pandemic. Somehow, in the midst of this work, she found the time to review my writing, meet with me and Joshua, and make the project more dynamic. I am proud to dedicate *The Really Useful Guide to the Senior Ministers of Old South Church in Boston* to Dr. Taylor in honor of her history-making ministry.

Kate Silfen
OSC Historian
JANUARY 2022

Thomas Thacher

1st Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1669 – 1678

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. Thomas Thacher was one of the members who broke with First Church because they wanted a more liberal approach to infant baptism. During his nine-year tenure at the newly-formed congregation, Thacher oversaw a dramatic increase in the church's membership. Old South (known at the time as “Third Church”) began with a membership of 28 in 1669 and had expanded to 217 members by 1678. Well-known for his sermons, prayers, and his role as an educator for young people, Thacher was schooled in multiple languages, including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac. A physician as well as a pastor, he authored what is believed to be the first medical tract published in America, *A Brief Rule to Guide the Common People of New England How to Order Themselves and Theirs in the Small Pocks, or Measles*. (1676)

Rebellious Adolescent Thacher’s father wanted his son to attend Cambridge or Oxford. But young Thacher, a non-conformist, refused to take the religious examinations required for entrance. Instead, at age 15, he sailed to this continent with his uncle.

Favorite Hobby When he was not busy pastoring or healing, Thacher found time to build and repair clocks.

Prescribed an Early Version of the BRAT Diet
In his medical tract, Thacher advised smallpox patients to restrict their diet to beer, porridge, toast, and boiled apples.

Regrettable Facts The early Puritan settlers of Boston were not tolerant of Quaker beliefs and practices, and Thacher was no exception. He was known to have seized books and other materials that Quakers distributed to the public. This mistreatment led to the famous interruption of Old South’s Sunday services by Quaker Margaret Brewster.

His estate referenced the fact that he had enslaved two Africans, Nan and Franke.

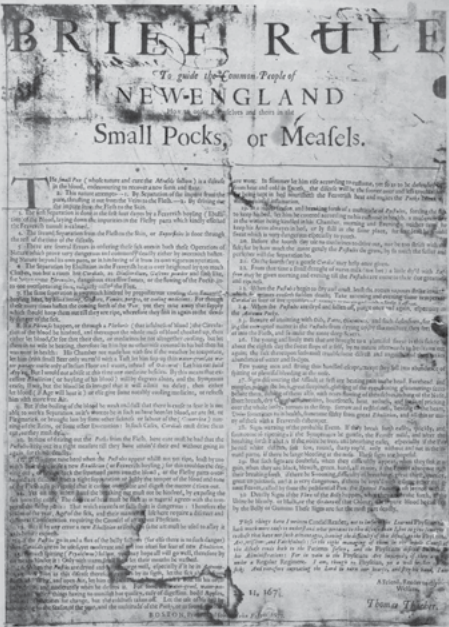
Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth: May 1, 1620
in Milton Clevedon, Somerset, England

Arrival in Boston: June 4, 1635

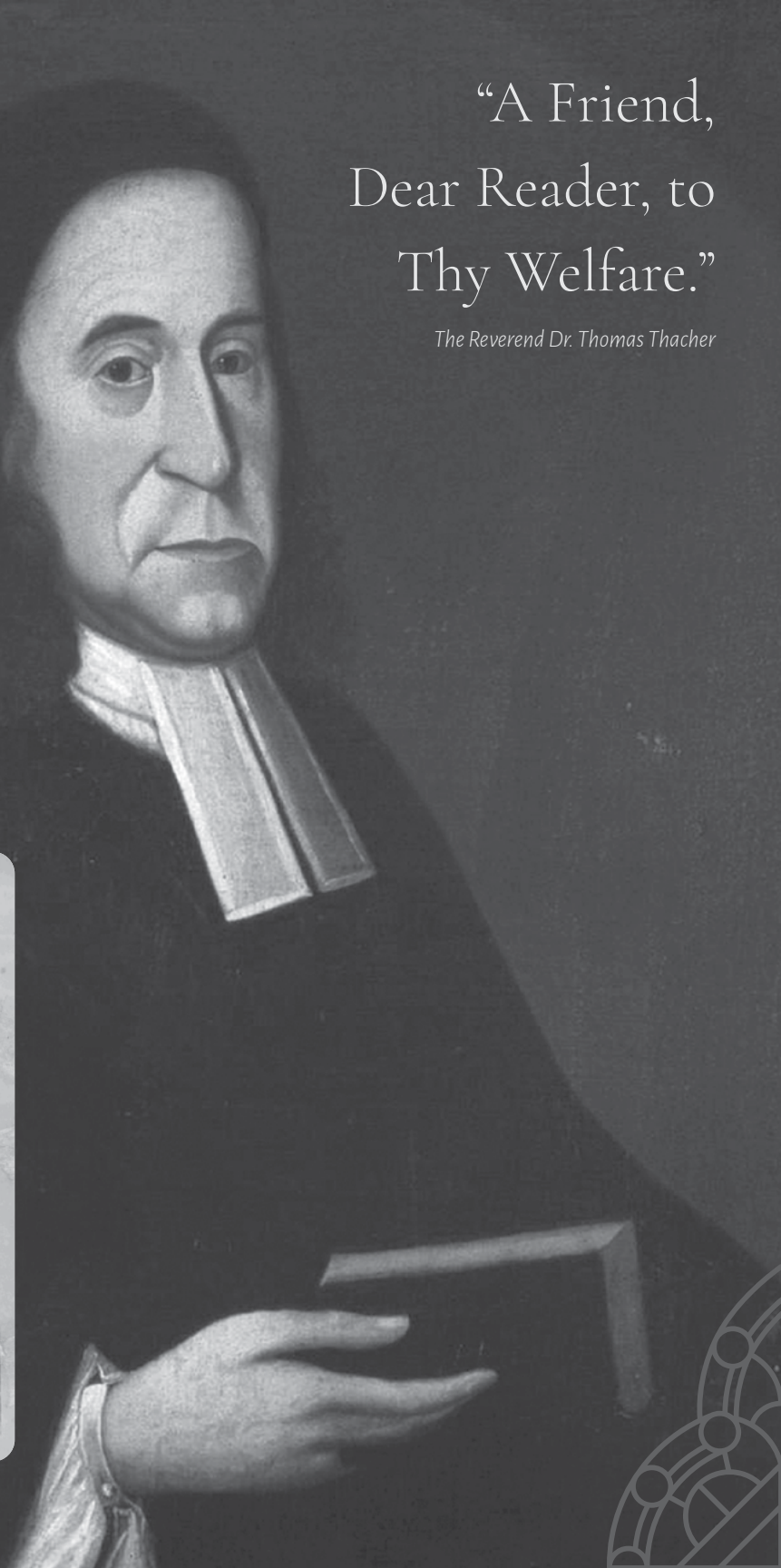
Education: Tutored in theology, medicine, logic, mathematics, and rhetorical mechanics by the Reverend Charles Chauncy, who was the minister of the Scituate Church, and later the second president of Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church: Pastor in Weymouth and practicing physician



“A Friend,
Dear Reader, to
Thy Welfare.”

The Reverend Dr. Thomas Thacher



Samuel Willard

2nd Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1678 – 1707

02

Ministerial Highlights

Religious historians regard the Reverend Samuel Willard as one of the outstanding preachers and speakers of his time. A prolific writer, his extensive lectures and sermons were published after his death in a volume called *A Compleat Body of Divinity*. Scholars cite this volume as an excellent synthesis of seventeenth century Puritan thought. Willard played a key role in ending the Salem “witch trials” of 1692. While his theology was orthodox, he made decisions that helped pave the way for a more liberal direction at Old South. Under Willard’s watch, new members no longer had to read a written testimony of their faith in order to join the church.

A Famous Baptism Willard had the unique honor of baptizing Benjamin Franklin on the day of Franklin’s birth.

Extraordinary Courage Under cover of darkness, and at great personal peril, Willard executed a jailbreak. He helped free Old South member Capt. John Alden, after Alden was jailed for so-called “witchcraft.”

Worked Overtime While maintaining his ministry at Old South Church, Willard found time to serve as vice-president and then acting president of Harvard College.

Productive Pastor Prolific in more ways than one, he fathered six children with his first wife and fourteen with his second wife.

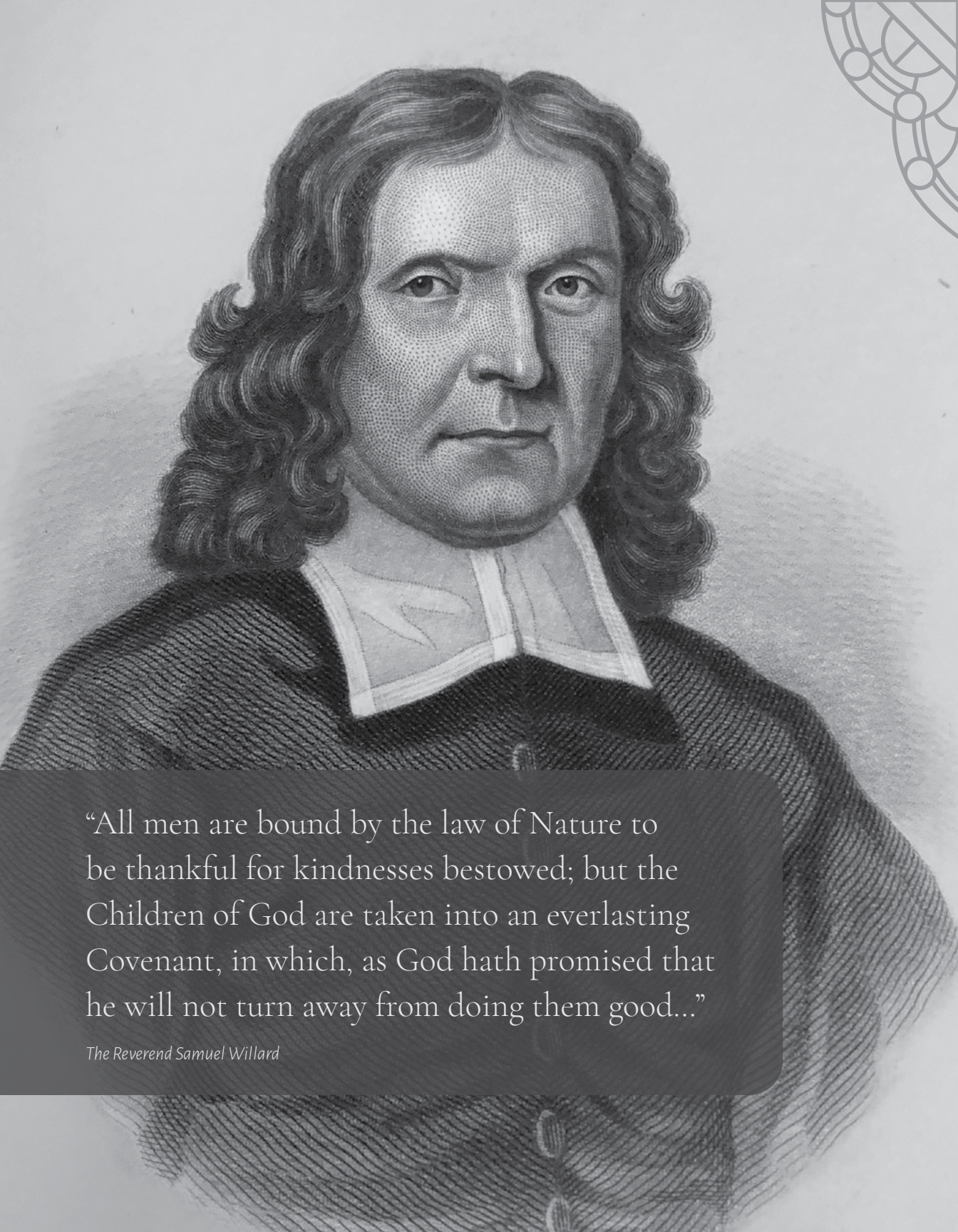
A Mischievous Streak Willard’s son-in-law was also a preacher. When they switched pulpits one Sunday, the congregation objected to the dull sermon delivered by Willard’s son-in-law. Two years later, Willard delivered this same sermon to the congregation, and it was greeted with much enthusiasm!

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
January 31, 1640 in
Concord, Massachusetts

Education: Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Pastor in Groton, Massachusetts



“All men are bound by the law of Nature to be thankful for kindnesses bestowed; but the Children of God are taken into an everlasting Covenant, in which, as God hath promised that he will not turn away from doing them good...”

The Reverend Samuel Willard

Ebenezer Pemberton

03

3rd Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1700 – 1717

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Ebenezer Pemberton was the son of James Pemberton, one of the founding members of the Old South Church. He was baptized by the Reverend Thomas Thacher, the first senior minister of the Old South Church. The youngest of eleven children, he attended Harvard College, graduating in 1691. Harvard's president, Increase Mather, noted Pemberton had "a Pregnant Wit, and Strong Memory, and was a hard Student." He would remain associated with the college during his career in the ministry. He was the college's librarian from 1693 to 1697 and in 1697 chosen to be a tutor. He held both positions again from 1707 to 1717 and was also elected a fellow in 1707. He was a member of the Cambridge Association, a group of clergymen who met in the Harvard College library.

At Old South Church Pemberton initially served as the Reverend Samuel Willard's colleague. Known to be a gifted preacher, a colleague called Pemberton's sermons "Practical, Pathetical, and very moving; Illuminating, Affecting, Convincing." He favored a more open communion table than many of his contemporaries and believed that the congregation should have more of a say in calling ministers to serve the church. Pemberton was an active and generous member

of the broader community. During his tenure, a fire consumed the meeting house of First Church, and Pemberton invited the congregation to worship with Old South for the year. During Pemberton's tenure, Third Church was renamed Old South Church in Boston.

Endured a Rather Long Call Process In 1698, the congregation took a vote as to whether to call Pemberton or Mr. Jabez Fitch as a colleague pastor to the Reverend Samuel Willard. The congregation was divided, and, consequently, the Reverend Pemberton did not begin his ministry at Old South until 22 months later!

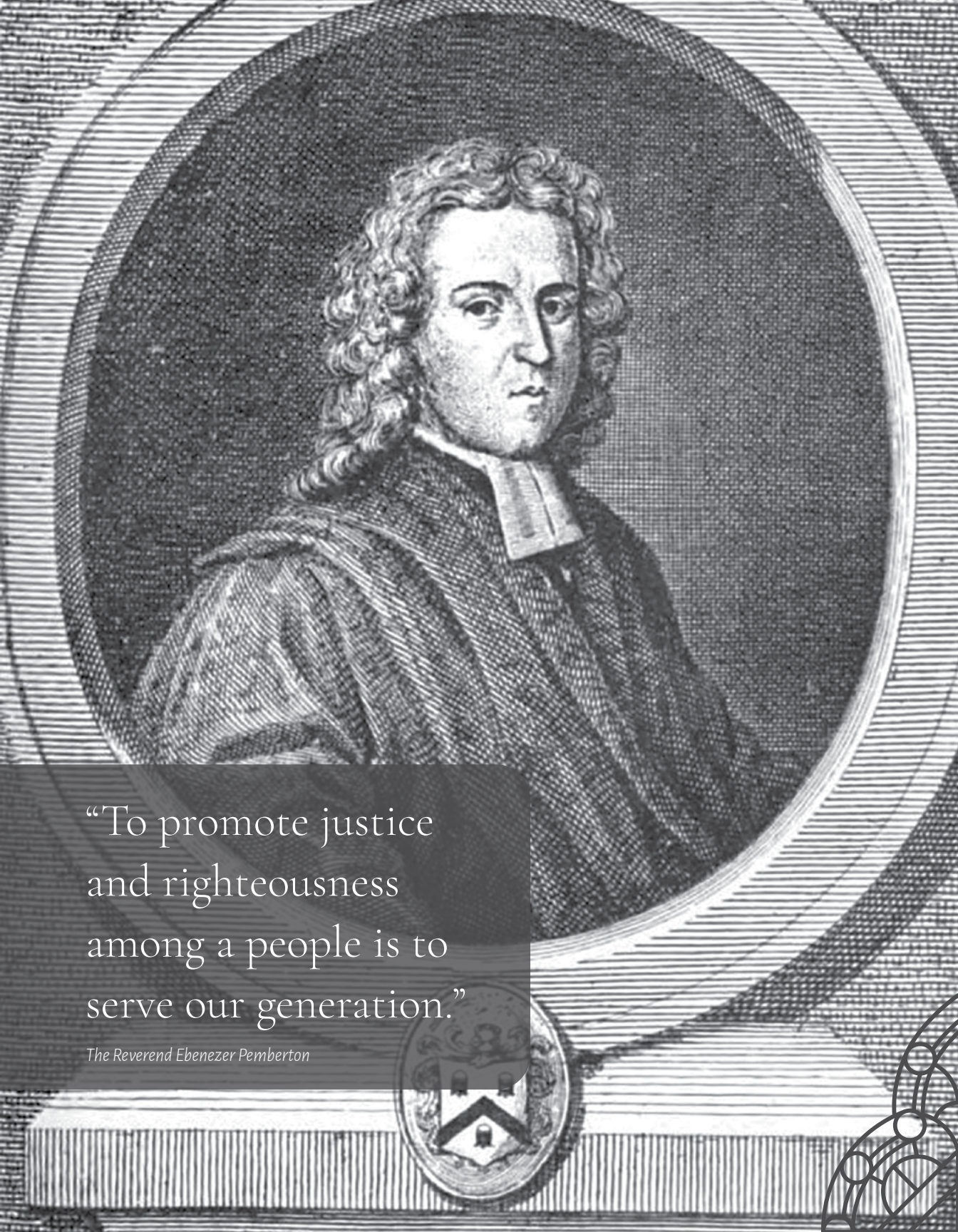
A Lot of Books A bibliophile, Pemberton's collection of 1,000 volumes was sold at auction after his death.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
February 3, 1672 in Boston,
Massachusetts

Education: Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Tutor at Harvard College

A large, circular, engraved portrait of Ebenezer Pemberton, a man with long, curly hair, wearing a clerical collar and a dark robe. The portrait is set against a background of concentric circles and a textured, stippled pattern. Below the portrait, there is a small, circular seal or emblem featuring a building and some text.

"To promote justice
and righteousness
among a people is to
serve our generation."

The Reverend Ebenezer Pemberton

Joseph Sewall

4th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1713 – 1769

04

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Joseph Sewall holds the record for being Old South’s longest serving senior minister. His tenure was notable for his fruitful partnership with his colleague Thomas Prince. Overseeing a period of growth and prosperity, he led the congregation through a vote to raze the Cedar Meeting House and replace it with the Old South Meeting House that is now on Washington Street. Sewall was so dedicated to the congregation that he declined an offer to become president of Harvard College in 1724. He did become a fellow of the College and gifted several books to the library after it burned down. Deeply loved by his congregation and colleagues, one observer noted that Sewall “seemed to breathe the air of heaven while here upon earth.” Sewall’s pioussness and long ministry led him to be regarded as the “father of the clergy” and Old South became known as “Mr. Sewall’s Church.”

Regrettable Fact He and his family enslaved a Native American woman named Jane Way and an African woman named Rose.

Strong Family Ties The Reverend Joseph Sewall was son of Judge Samuel Sewall and the grandson of John Hull, one of the founders of the church.

A Blessing Equal to His Long Ministry The Reverend Cotton Mather offered a one-hour long prayer at Sewall’s ordination service.

Father & Son Drama Judge Samuel Sewall had fond memories of the Cedar Meeting House and initially opposed the building of a new larger church.

Quick Facts

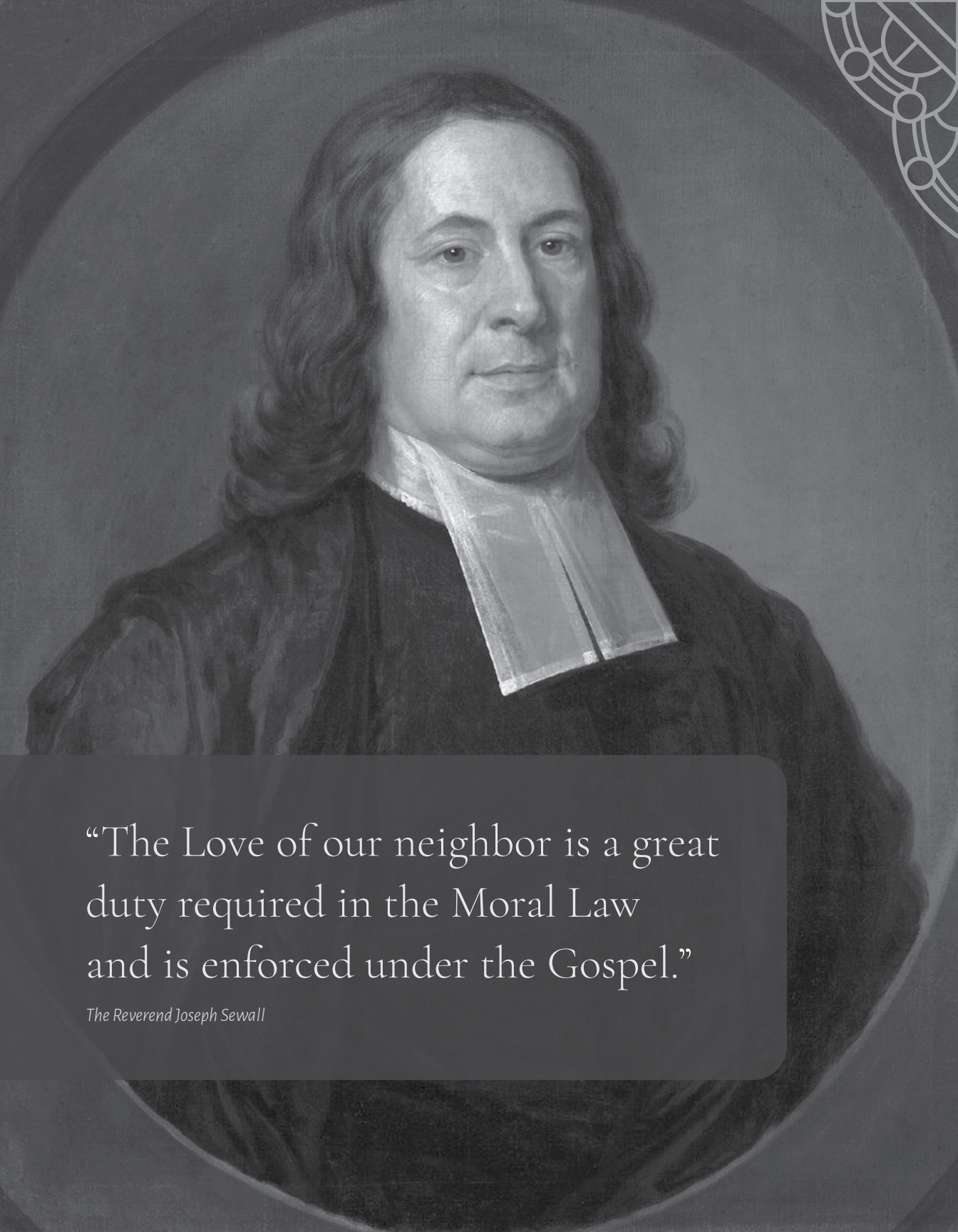
Date and Place of Birth:

August 15, 1688 in Boston, Massachusetts

Education: Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:

Received a call to serve in Salem, but he followed the advice of several colleagues and declined it. Until his call at Old South, he preached at the North Church and churches in Cambridge, Charlestown, and Watertown



“The Love of our neighbor is a great duty required in the Moral Law and is enforced under the Gospel.”

The Reverend Joseph Sewall

Thomas Prince

5th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1718 – 1758

05

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Prince served as a co-pastor of Old South Church with the Reverend Sewall for forty years. Prince was a strong advocate for the Great Awakening, a time of religious revival in the 1730s and 1740s. In order to support this religious revival, he founded *A Christian History*, a weekly journal that was the first successful religious periodical in America. A prolific writer and scholar, he has been recognized as a leading historian of early New England. In 1728, Prince began writing *A Chronological History of New England in the form of Annals*; a work that traced the history of New England from the sixth day of creation to 1633. An avid collector, Prince began collecting books, manuscripts, pamphlets, and maps while he was a student at Harvard. He left this extensive library to Old South in his will, and this collection is now known as the Prince Library. Housed in the Boston Public Library, this collection has played an essential role in providing historians with a history of early New England.

Regrettable Fact Historical records suggest that Prince and his wife Deborah enslaved a woman named Lucy Manoel.

Unusual Expertise An earthquake rattled Boston on November 18, 1755. This event prompted Prince to deliver two sermons on the earthquake and to write a book on the history of earthquakes titled *Earthquakes: the Works of God & Tokens of His Just Displeasure*.

Reverend, just where did all those books come from? According to the Reverend George Gordon, Prince did not disclose whether he borrowed or purchased his vast book collection.

A Mighty Pray-er There is more than one account of Prince's prayer of deliverance when a French Fleet was expected to launch an attack on Boston. Prince offered his prayer from the pulpit of the Old South Meeting House. Historian Catherine Drinker Bowen related that as he finished praying, the sky darkened, winds shrieked and church bells rang "a wild, uneven sound... though no man was in the steeple."

Prince paused and then prayed that this same wind would keep the fleet from attacking. A hurricane subsequently sank and scattered the entire French fleet.

Quick Facts

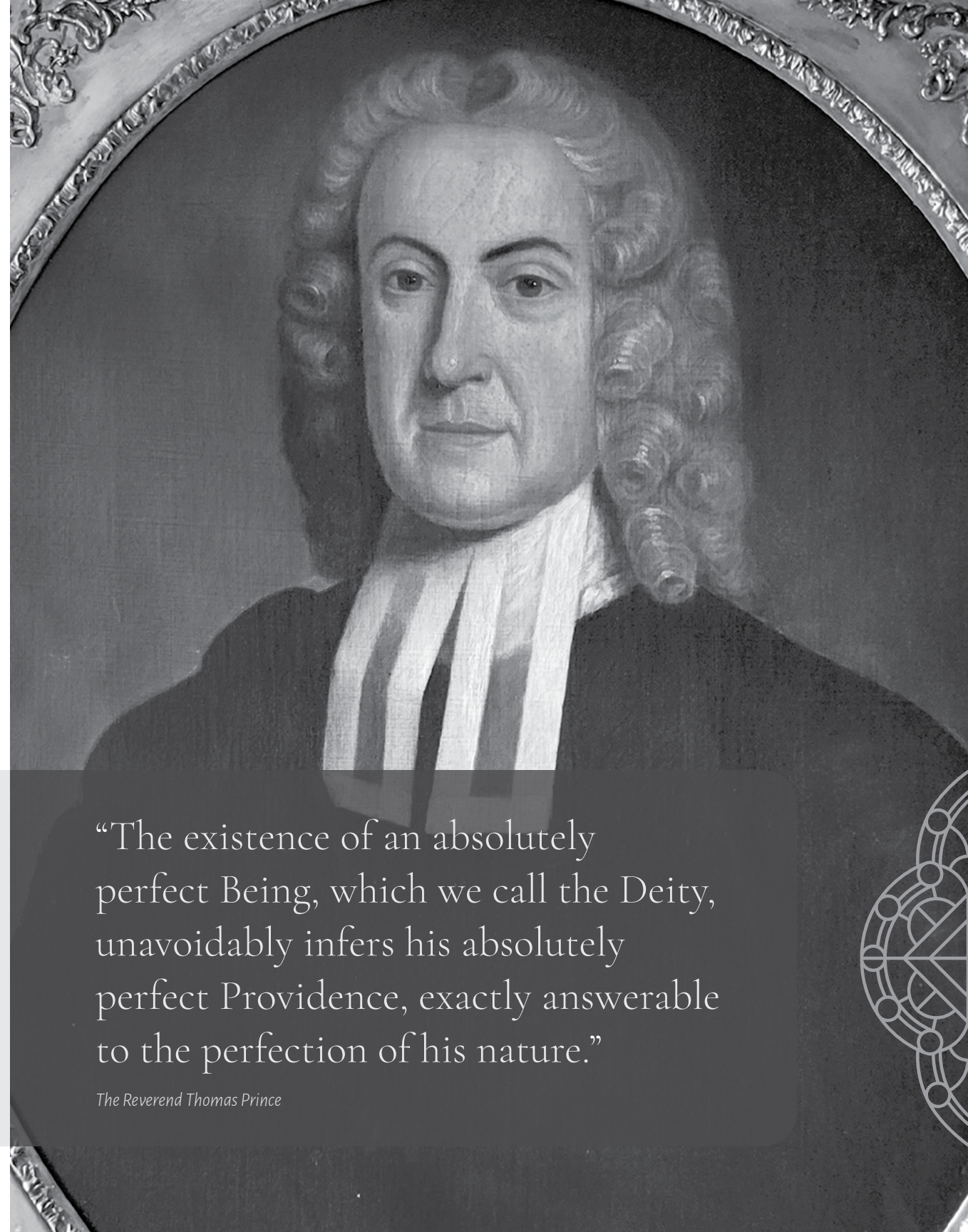
Date and Place of Birth:
1687 in Sandwich, Massachusetts

Education: Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Traveled throughout the West Indies, Europe, and England. While he was in England, he preached for several years at a congregation in Combs, England

"The existence of an absolutely perfect Being, which we call the Deity, unavoidably infers his absolutely perfect Providence, exactly answerable to the perfection of his nature."

The Reverend Thomas Prince



Alexander Cumming 06

6th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1761 – 1763

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Alexander Cumming served as a colleague to the Reverend Joseph Sewell. While his ministry was brief due to ill health, the Reverend Joseph Sewell praised him as a minister who “showed his zeal for the Lord of Hosts, and against the prevailing errors and corruptions of the times wherein he lived.” Cumming’s two years at Old South were not without controversy. His sermons reflected his belief that the repentance of sins was a requirement for Christian conversion, and that these individuals must accept that “it would be righteous of God to cast them off forever.” This view was not shared by many of his contemporaries, and the Reverend Cumming exchanged some heated, public letters with another pastor in the Boston area.

The Talk of the Town Cumming’s installation as the senior minister was quite the affair. Distinguished guests included the governor, lieutenant-governor, and the judges of the Superior Court. For the post-installation meal, it was necessary to lay tables in three houses; the greatest concourse was at Dr. Sewall’s, where the governor dined. It was all set forth somewhat sensationally in the newspapers.

Special Perk Not Enjoyed by 21st Century Senior Ministers The leaders of Old South agreed to grant the Reverend Cumming a yearly stipend to pay for firewood.

“For a sinner to believe in Christ, while he is not sensible of the justice of God in his destruction, while he is full of heart-risings against God on this account, is impossible.”

The Reverend Alexander Cumming

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
1726 in Freehold, New Jersey

Education: Schooled in theology by his uncle, the Reverend Samuel Blair.

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Served with the Reverend Ebenezer Pemberton at the First Presbyterian Church in New York



Samuel Blair

7th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1766 – 1769

07

Ministerial Lowlights

After accepting his call to Old South, the Reverend Samuel Blair got shipwrecked on the way to Boston. After narrowly escaping death, Blair lost his wardrobe and his writings. Worse, the experience caused him to suffer from fragile health during his brief time at Old South. While Blair was a gifted preacher, his short ministry at Old South was dominated by theological conflict. Originally ordained as a Presbyterian minister, Blair was at odds with Old South over his beliefs about qualifications for baptism, communion, and membership in the church. In particular, Blair did not subscribe to the Halfway Covenant that Old South and other congregational churches had followed since 1662. In May of 1769, Blair took a leave of absence to try to reconcile his beliefs with the members of Old South. While he was on leave, the Reverend Joseph Sewall died in June of 1769. Blair wrote to the leaders of Old South from Philadelphia in September to express his sorrow at the passing of the Reverend Sewall and to resign from his position as pastor of the church due to ill health and his doctrinal

differences with the congregation. Angry at his sudden resignation and “left Destitute and as sheep without a shepherd” since the death of the Reverend Sewall, the church leaders requested that the Reverend Blair reimburse the salary he had received since taking a leave of absence in May.

Ministerial Highlight After exchanging a series of heated letters with the church leadership, Blair eventually refunded his salary and made a trip to Boston in 1771 to reconcile with the church. The reconciliation was successful.

Quick Facts

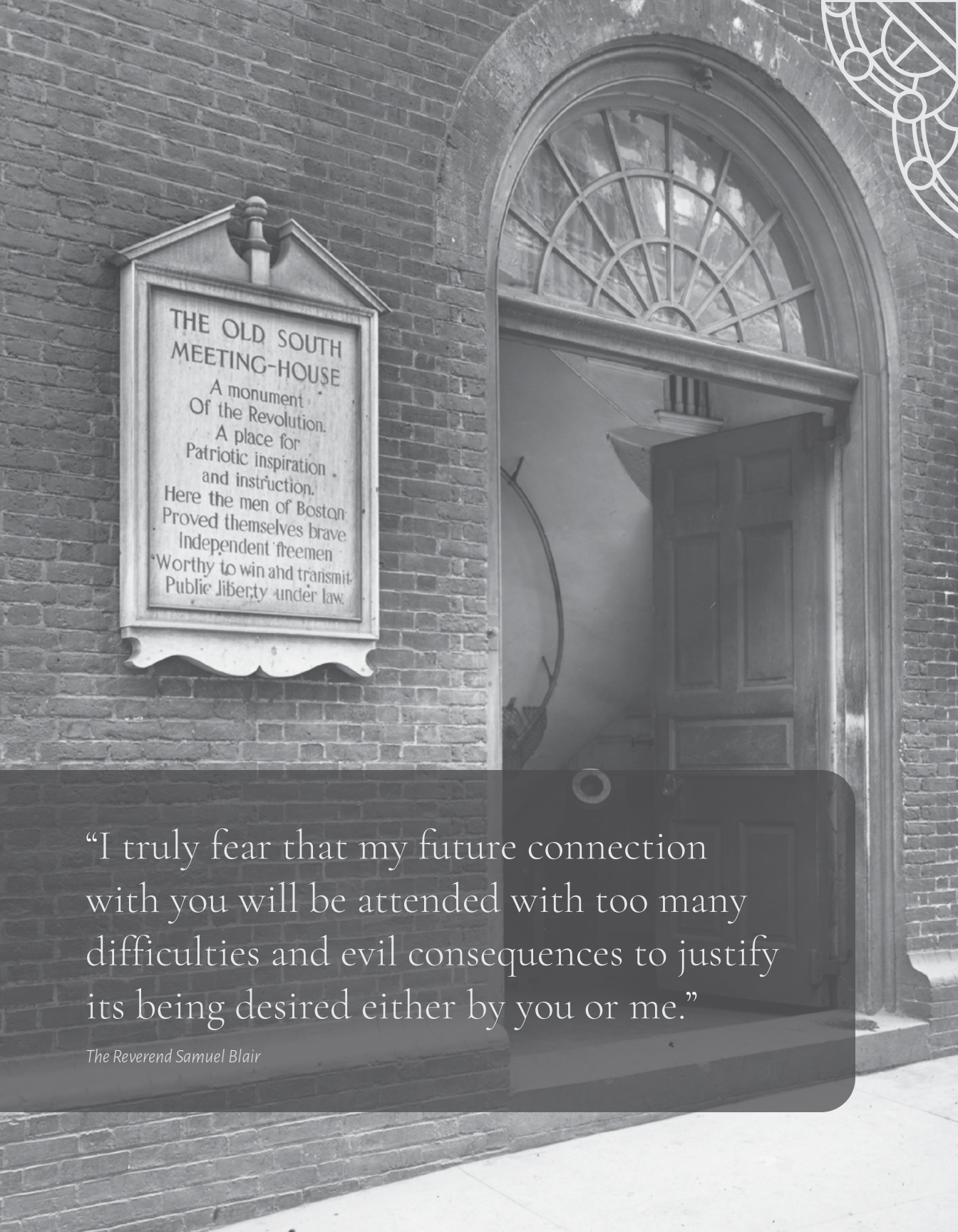
Date and Place of Birth:
1741 in Fagg’s Manor, Pennsylvania

Education: Princeton University (then known as The College of New Jersey)

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Tutor at Princeton University

“I truly fear that my future connection with you will be attended with too many difficulties and evil consequences to justify its being desired either by you or me.”

The Reverend Samuel Blair



John Bacon & John Hunt

8th & 9th Senior Ministers | Years of Ministry: 1771 – 1775

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverends Bacon and Hunt served as co-senior pastors during this brief, yet eventful period in Boston. Bacon’s ministry was marked by controversy from the very beginning. A month after his installation, Bacon read aloud the Thanksgiving Proclamation of Governor Hutchinson during worship. Hutchinson, a British loyalist, had fallen out of favor with the patriots at Old South. Later, it became clear that Bacon’s conservative views on baptism, communion and atonement clashed with the congregation at large. Members of Old South were not fans of Bacon’s preaching style, which they found to be harsh and argumentative. After participating in no fewer than twenty meetings debating doctrinal differences with the congregation, Reverend Bacon resigned from his ministry in February of 1775.

While the Reverend John Hunt was considerably more popular than his colleague, his tenure was no less dramatic. In the spring of 1775, Hunt briefly left Boston to visit Brookline. While he was in Brookline, the siege of Boston had begun and the city’s gates were barred. Hunt would only be permitted back into the city if he pledged never

to leave it. He chose not to make that pledge, and returned to Northampton, where he died of “consumption” only a few months later.

Regrettable Fact John Bacon had enslaved a man named John and his wife Elizabeth.

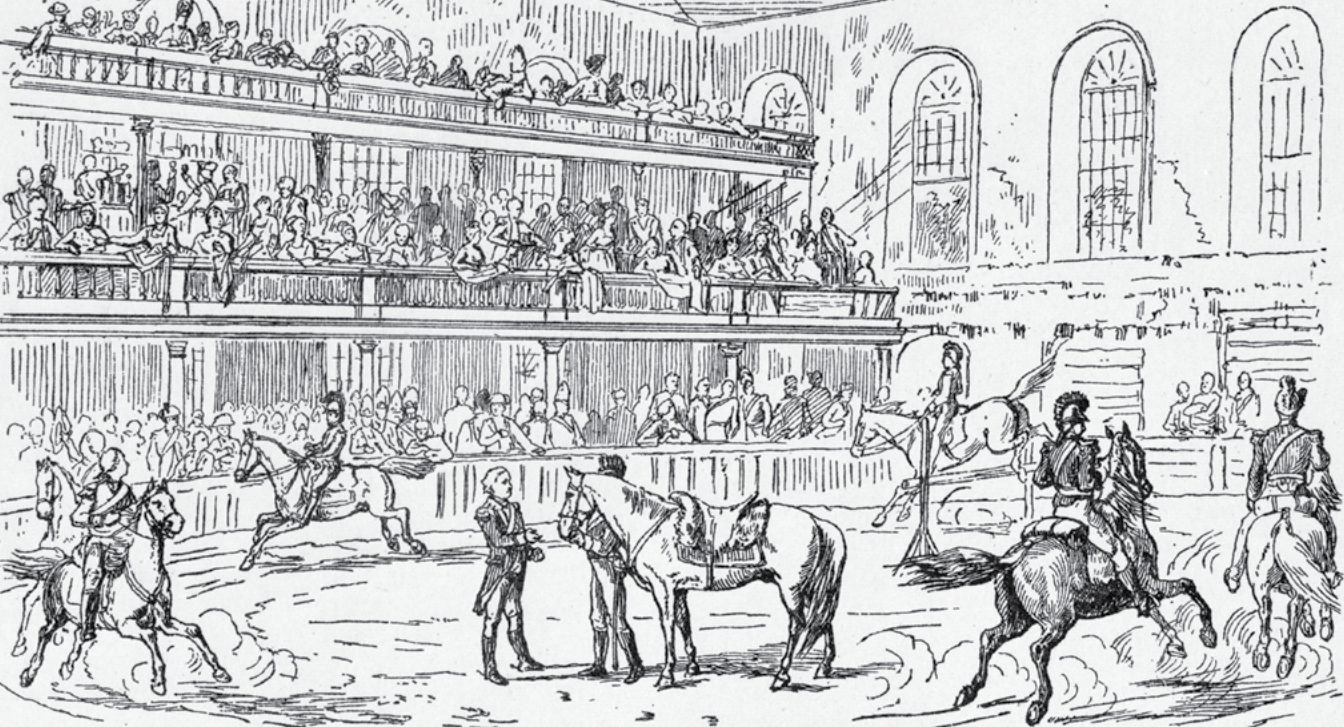
A Most Famous Tea Party During these years, a special meeting took place at the Old South Meeting House. Samuel Adams and other rabble-rousing leaders fomented and planned the Boston Tea Party.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
Connecticut, 1738 (Bacon);
& Northampton, Massachusetts,
1744 (Hunt)

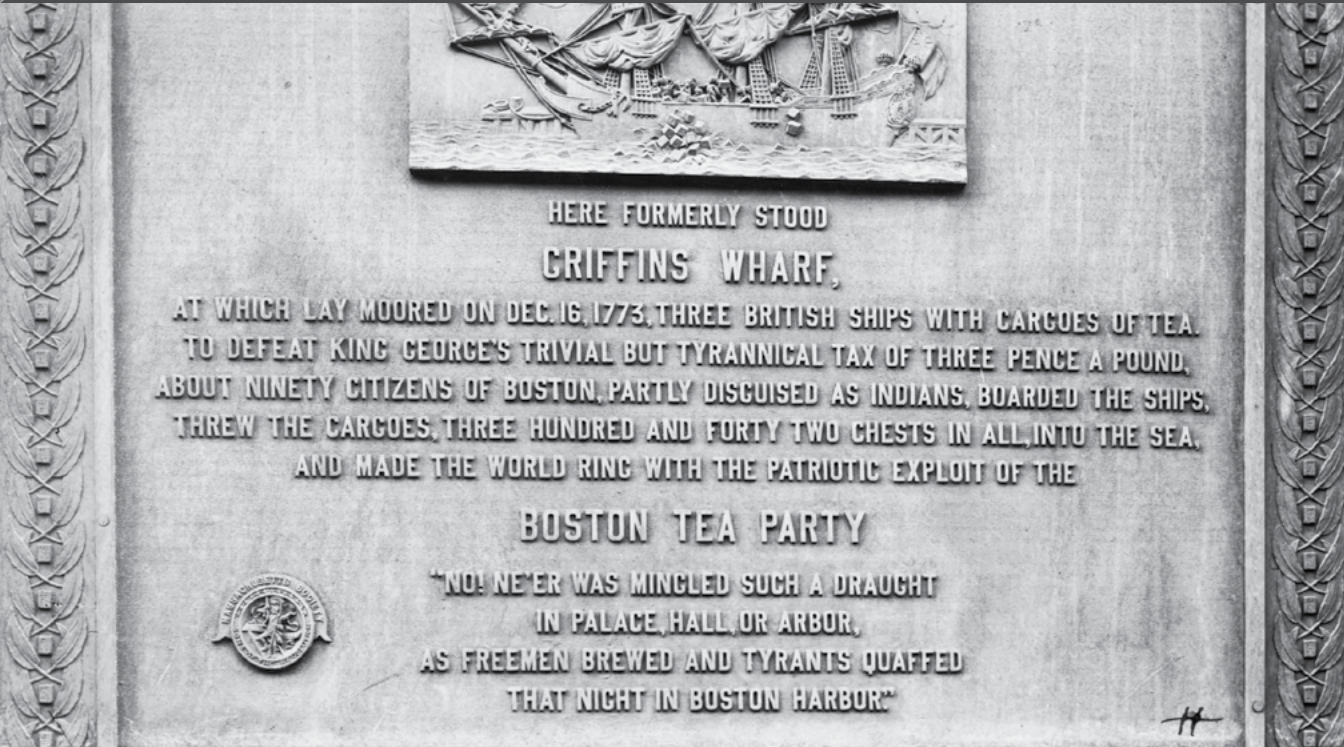
Education: Harvard College (Bacon);
The College of New Jersey (Hunt)

08
– & –
09



“How weighty and pungent, how energetic as well as copious is the language of scripture.”

The Reverend John Hunt



Joseph Eckley

10th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1779 – 1811

10

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Eckley’s ministry was notable because he took the helm after a period of tumult and instability for the Old South Church. His two predecessors, the Reverends John Bacon and John Hunt had short tenures due to the former’s dismissal and the latter’s premature death, both in 1775. During the siege of Boston, the Old South Meeting House was seized and used as a riding school by Burgoyne’s regiment. Following the siege of Boston, with the meeting house in ruins, the congregation worshipped at nearby King’s Chapel until 1783. While Eckley was a respected leader, many members were uncomfortable with his conservative theology, and, consequently, the church’s growth was quite slow during this period. Nevertheless, Eckley did the crucial work of overseeing the physical and administrative restoration of the congregation and its meeting house.

Regrettable Fact While Eckley was an abolitionist, we regret his feelings toward Native Americans. In an 1805 speech to the Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and others in North America, he praised the Society for their message of “salvation among a people who have not the means of providing it for themselves.”

Worked Overtime While restoring Old South, the Reverend Eckley found time to serve as a chaplain of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and as a state senator in 1784. He was a Federalist and an abolitionist.

A Taxing Issue, Part I During Eckley’s tenure, the “pew taxes” increased by 100%.

Post Mortem During his lifetime Eckley acquired a good amount of property which he left to his heirs—his seven children from his marriage to Sally Jefferies.

“I seek for a plan which exalts the personal character of the Son of God in the highest possible degree.”

The Reverend Joseph Eckley

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
October 11, 1750 in London

Education: The College of New Jersey, (Princeton) BA and DD

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Preached in Albany, New York

Permission to reproduce the image of Reverend Eckley’s Discourse to the Boston Female Asylum was obtained from the IUPUI University Library Special Collection and Archives: <https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/PRO/id/41760>

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE

Boston Female Asylum,

SEPTEMBER 24, 1802,

BEING THEIR *SECOND* ANNIVERSARY.

BY Joseph Eckley, D. D.

Minister of the Old-South Church in Boston.

Preached and Published by Desire.



BOSTON:

PRINTED AT THE ORNAMENTAL PRINTING-OFFICE,
UNDER THE COLUMBIAN MUSEUM.

Joshua Huntington

11th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1808 – 1819

11

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Joshua Huntington was called to Old South at the tender age of twenty-two. The senior pastor, the Reverend Eckley, was a theological conservative. The church called Huntington as a colleague pastor to bring a more liberal voice to the pulpit. He helped preserve the extensive library of the Reverend Thomas Prince by having it rebound and relocated to the Massachusetts Historical Society. A minister with a passion for mission work, Huntington helped form the American Educational Society as well as the Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor, which is now known as City Mission Boston. Huntington served Old South Church as the “Unitarian Controversy” swept through Boston. Opposing Unitarianism, he kept Old South firmly in the Trinitarian camp. His fragile health forced him to take periodic breaks from his ministry, and he passed away at the age of thirty-four.

Regrettable Fact (Heathens, Beware) The Reverend Huntington’s missionary zeal stemmed from his belief in the “irrevocable doom of the heathen who die without a knowledge of the Gospel.”

A Taxing Issue, Part II Much to the congregation’s relief, the pew tax was reduced by one-third — but only in certain sections.

“The happiness of each is the happiness of all; one bond unites, one sentiment pervades the whole.”

The Reverend Joshua Huntington

Quick Facts

- Date and Place of Birth:** January 31, 1786 in Norwich, Connecticut
- Education:** Yale College
- Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:** Preached in Connecticut and Charlestown, Massachusetts



Benjamin Wisner

12th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1821 – 1832

12

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Benjamin Wisner presided over a peaceful period that brought an increase in church membership. Described by a colleague as a man of “unwearied diligence,” Wisner was known to be devoted to both Old South and the wider community. During his tenure, Old South celebrated 100 years in the meeting house on Washington Street. To celebrate this milestone, the Reverend Wisner wrote and delivered four historical sermons, later published and cited in subsequent histories of the church, including Ola Winslow’s book and Hamilton Hill’s two-volume work.

Worked Overtime While serving as minister at Old South, Wisner found time to be on the boards of the American Education Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and was a trustee of Andover Theological Seminary.

Some Rather Unusual Concessions Wisner’s call to Old South was offered with three conditions: 1) that he accept the installation of a pipe organ in the meeting house, 2) that he agree to wear a preaching gown, and 3) that he adopt the discipline of reading his sermon from a manuscript rather than preaching extemporaneously.

Quick Facts

- Date and Place of Birth:** September 29, 1794 in Goshen, New York
- Education:** Union College and Princeton University
- Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:** A brief ministry at a Presbyterian church in New Brunswick
- Buried:** Wisner’s remains are held in a large tomb in Phillips Academy Cemetery, Andover MA



“From this spot has gone forth, for a hundred and sixty years, an influence, that has blessed surrounding multitudes, and diffused itself over the earth. And this influence, we are permitted to believe, is still to go forth, with increasing power, and sending back richer blessings, till the dominion of truth and holiness shall be established in every nation and in every heart.”

The Reverend Benjamin Wisner



Samuel H. Stearns

13th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1834–1836

13

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Samuel Stearns had struggled with ill health all his life, and this impediment limited his ministry at Old South to just two years (on paper). In actuality, his ill health further limited his preaching to a total of three Sundays. Despite this very brief tenure, Stearns was much loved by his congregation. One colleague described him as having “an insatiable thirst, which even the dying of his physical frame could not quench for all that is ‘true, beautiful and good’ — indeed by the daily weakening of his body, he seemed to be etherealized, and to grow in spiritual vigor.”

A Caring Congregation The leaders of the Old South Church continued to support the Reverend Stearns during his long absence, and continued to consider him their pastor.

Posthumous Memoir Following the pastor's death, Stearns' devoted brother, W. A. Stearns, published *The Life of Rev. Samuel H. Stearns: Late Minister of the Old South Church in Boston*.

Quick Facts

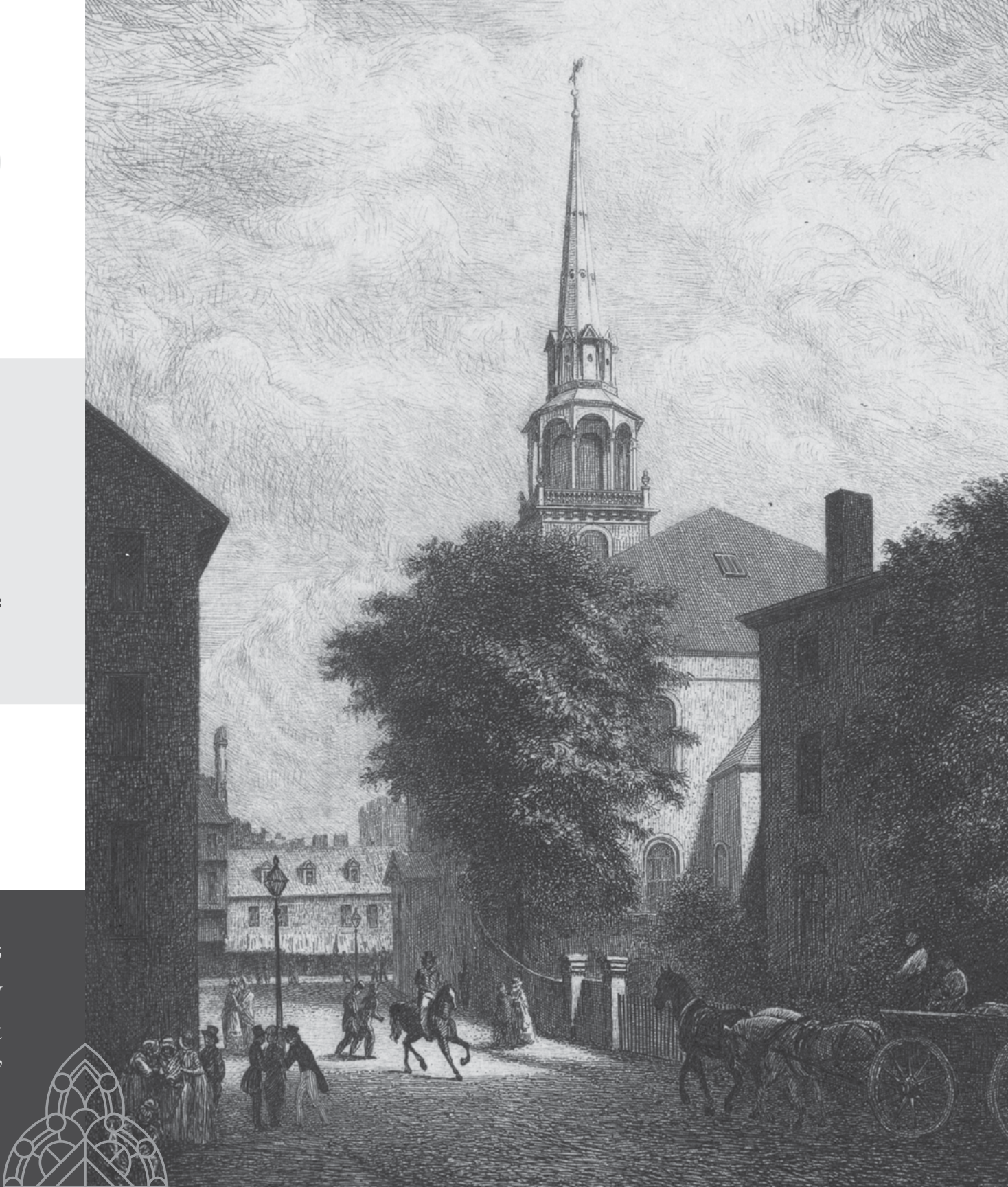
Date and Place of Birth:
September 12, 1801 in
Bedford, Massachusetts

Education: Phillips Academy
and Harvard College

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Teacher at Phillips Academy, pulpit
supply preacher at Tabernacle Church

“I come to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. It is only some humble trust in Him, the joy of whom may be made my strength, and a full confidence in your candor and kindness, that now sustains me. With this I give myself, mind, heart, to the work.”

The Reverend Samuel H. Stearns



George Washington Blagden

14th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1836–1872

14

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. Blagden’s tenure was marked by many “firsts” for Old South. He was Old South’s first minister to have been a settled pastor at another church when he became a candidate for the position at Old South. Blagden was the first Old South pastor to call an associate minister, the Reverend Jacob Manning. Finally, Blagden was the first senior minister to be named pastor emeritus upon his retirement. He was widely respected in his congregation and the Boston area for his dedicated service. A colleague described Blagden’s sermons as “remarkable for clearness and precision of statement, purity of style, and wealth of scriptural illustrations.” Blagden’s tenure was notable for a large increase in membership and the expansion of the church school. With the help of Associate Pastor Jacob Manning, he kept the congregation together at a time when members were divided over the Civil War.

Worked Overtime Dr. Blagden was a member of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention and served on the Harvard University Board of Overseers. He received honorary doctorate degrees in divinity from Union College and Harvard University.

Regrettable Fact Blagden was not an abolitionist. In his *Discourse on Slavery*, he stated, “The position that the connection of master and slave is necessarily a sinful one is unscriptural.”

Wine Was Medicinal While the Reverend Thomas Thacher was known to prescribe beer (for smallpox), the Reverend Dr. Blagden recited the Bible, saying, “Take a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine infirmities.” (1 Tim 5.23) Oh, and apparently he was “very attractive in his personal appearance...” (Hamilton Hill)

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
October 3, 1802 in Washington, D.C.

Education: Yale College and
Andover Theological Seminary

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
The first pastor of the Evangelical
Congregational Church in Brighton
(1827-1830) and served the Salem
Street Church in Boston (1830-1836)



“We are to condemn the sins with the utmost faithfulness, whether the sin be oppression or the breaking up of the family state, or the marriage tie...But in doing this, we are to let all outward distinctions recognized by human law, whether that of king or subject, or master and slave, alone.”

The Reverend Dr. George Blagden



Jacob Merrill Manning

15th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1857–1882

15

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Manning served as associate pastor for his first 25 years at Old South and became senior pastor when Reverend Blagden retired in 1872. He was a radical abolitionist while the Reverend Blagden took a more conservative stance, but together these two pastors maintained a unified church and saw its membership grow. With a deep patriotic commitment, the Reverend Manning opened the meeting house to become a recruiting station for the Union Army. Over 1,000 men signed up and then urged Manning to join them in the field; he accepted an appointment as chaplain of the 43rd Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, stationed in North Carolina, from 1862-1863. During his time as chaplain, Manning turned his tent into a lending library for members of his regiment. His letters from the field were published in *The Boston Daily Journal* and signed, *Old South*. He returned to Boston and Old South soon after he contracted malaria. The respect that the Reverend Manning earned from Old South's members served him well as he led the congregation through the divisive and legally complex process of abandoning the Old South Meeting House and moving the Church to its current Boylston Street location. Manning was a stirring speaker and preacher.

Worked Overtime He was a member of the Boston school board, overseer at Harvard College, and chaplain to the Massachusetts State Senate.

Teetotaler The Reverend Manning disagreed with the Reverend Blagden in more ways than one. He favored temperance while the Reverend Blagden promoted the healing properties of wine.

Quick Facts

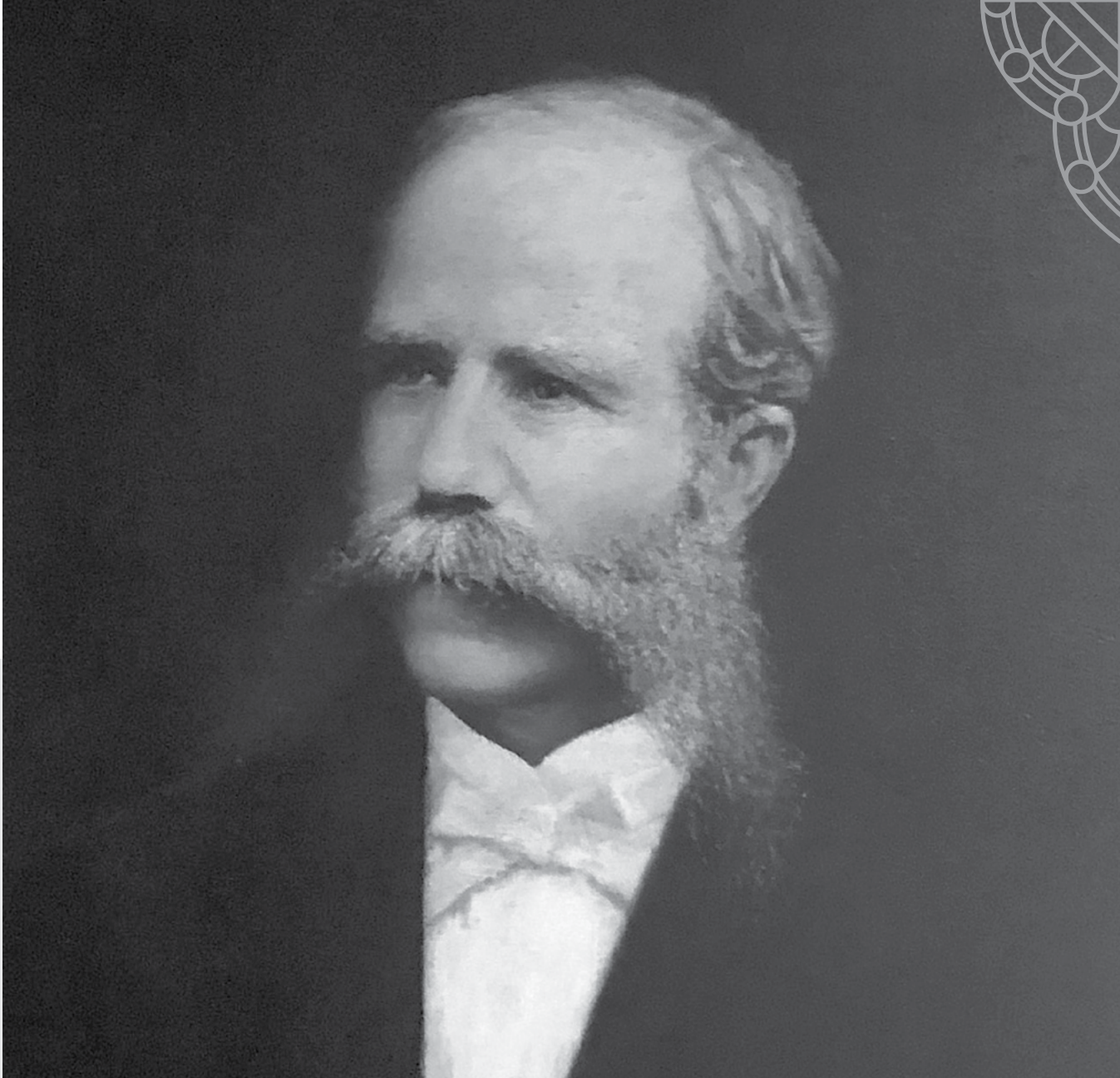
Date and Place of Birth:

December 31, 1824 in
Greenwood, New York

Education: Amherst College
and Andover Newton Seminary

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:

Pastor at Mystic Congregational
Church in Medford, Massachusetts



“Slavery was unchristian and for this reason the conscience of the nation declared that it should not stand. Could there be a clearer proof that the law of Christ is recognized as supreme even in civil relations?”

The Reverend Jacob Merrill Manning

George Angier Gordon

16th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1884 – 1927

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. George Gordon had a more humble start to life than most of his predecessors. Born in Scotland, Gordon worked as a factory worker, house painter, and glazier before attending Bangor Theological Seminary. Gordon is regarded as one of the most influential preachers of his era. His theology (liberal, generous, progressive) was considered to be unorthodox for his time, so his call to Old South was the source of some initial controversy among the more conservative Old South members and local pastors. Under the Reverend Gordon’s watch, Old South’s Board of Deacons voted in favor of setting aside the Westminster Confession of Faith, a summary of Calvinistic doctrine that both shaped and represented Congregational theology up to that point. He would later write in his autobiography that his sense of mission arose from the desire to help move the Congregational faith away from the doctrine of what was then known as “Double Predestination.” Gordon became known for preaching a more optimistic vision of both God and humankind, and the sanctuary was often filled beyond seating capacity on Sunday mornings.

Worked Overtime The Reverend Gordon served on boards at Harvard University and Andover Theological Seminary. Like several of his predecessors, the Reverend Gordon wrote prolifically and published eight books and several influential articles.

Family Ties The Reverend Gordon married Susan Huntington Manning, the daughter of his predecessor, the Reverend Jacob Manning.

A Staggering Number of Honorary Degrees The Reverend Gordon was bestowed with honorary degrees from Bowdoin College, Yale University, Harvard University, Columbia University, Brown University, Williams College, Case Western Reserve, and Boston University.

A Dry Wit After patiently enduring over 100 questions from the Ecclesiastical Council prior to his installation, the Reverend Gordon would eventually write in his autobiography, “It was the fiercest Council I ever knew, but I have always been fond of it.”

An Athlete Every Friday, he went bowling with Old South member and lay leader, Samuel Johnson.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth: January 2, 1853 in Oyne, Abendeershire, Scotland

Education: Bangor Theological Seminary and Harvard University

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church: Pastor at the Second Congregational Church in Greenwich, Connecticut



“We must assert with the old Puritan the absoluteness of the Divine Will and with the New Puritan we must hold that there is but one predestination, that this predestination is to righteousness, that it is inclusive of every soul that God has made, and that every wicked man to the full-extent of his wickedness, is at cross-purposes with God.”

The Reverend Dr. George Angier Gordon

Russell Henry Stafford

17th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1927–1945

17

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. Russell Henry Stafford modernized Old South's governance and envisioned the active community it could become. He established a board of trustees and several committees. Stafford wanted members of the congregation to know one another, and, under his watch, the church began offering fellowship activities that extended beyond Sundays. He transformed the parsonage (today's Gordon House) into offices and meeting rooms and oversaw the construction of the Gordon Chapel, Mary Norton Hall, the Senior Minister's Study, the preschool rooms, the Guild Room, and the new tower. Stafford was the first senior pastor to appoint women to leadership positions in the church. The Old South Church at that time was quite class-conscious, and most pews were reserved for families and individuals who owned them. Stafford worked to make the pews open to everyone.

Worked Overtime Beyond Old South, Stafford served as a trustee of Anatolia College (Greece), the Church Peace Union, president of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, (1940-1950), as a fellow of American Academy Arts and Sciences, a member of the editorial board for the journal *Religion in Life*, and moderator of the International Congregational Council.

Preaching Pause Not everyone enjoyed his sermons, and Stafford humbly agreed that preaching was not his area of strength. In order to bring some pizzazz to his sermons, he asked one of the deacons to motivate him before worship by reporting all the complaints he heard from members of the congregation.

Overwhelmed Members One member, so overwhelmed by all the new fellowship and volunteer opportunities that Stafford introduced, asked tearfully, "Doctor, I couldn't possibly do all the things you have in the bulletin now...Why do we have to do so much?"

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth: Born on April 4, 1890 in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Education: University of California (BA), University of Minnesota (MA), Drew Theological Seminary (BD), and Chicago Theological Seminary (DD)

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church: Pilgrim Congregational Church in St. Louis, Missouri and First Lieutenant Chaplain in the United States Army in 1918

Ministry after Old South Church: President, Hartford Seminary



“Here we are humanized, not only within our own group, but so our kindness carries over into all our human associations and spreads out through the community.”

The Reverend Dr. Russell Stafford

Frederick M. Meek

18th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1946 – 1973

18

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. Meek became widely known for his prophetic preaching during his twenty-seven years of ministry at Old South Church. He received multiple awards for the sermons he preached at public events. Dr. Meek regularly preached about the social issues of the time, and his sermon on the importance of gun control after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was broadcast on CBS. During his tenure at Old South, Dr. Meek published collections of his sermons in books titled: *Monday to Friday is Not Enough* (1951), and *The Life to Live* (1955). He also wrote and published *The Bethlehem Inn, and Other Christmas Stories* (1972). The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King was inspired by Dr. Meek’s sermons, and he cited “Our God is Able” and “Strength in Adversity” in his own writings. Dr. Meek was dedicated to the promotion of civil rights, and, under his watch, Old South launched several initiatives to support the education of Black students. Recognizing that Boston was filled with college aged students, Dr. Meek supported thriving youth and young adult ministries at the church.

Worked Overtime Dr. Meek served the wider church by helping to foster the formation of the United Church of Christ (UCC). It is Meek who is singularly responsible for the UCC adopting the practice of local church autonomy.

A Bibliophile Dr. Meek was a fan of John Greenleaf Whittier and had one of the largest private collections of works by and about the Quaker poet.

A Rock & Roll Ministry Under Dr. Meek’s watch, Old South hosted a conference for 1,000 youth from all over New England. The conference ended with an evening worship service in which these young adults, perhaps inspired by First Daughter Luci B. Johnson, danced “The Frug” to rock music in the church’s main sanctuary. A photo of this event appeared in LIFE Magazine in 1966. For this, Meek was severely rebuked by conservative colleagues who felt the event made a laughing stock of the church.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
1902 in Audley, England

Education: Mount Allison University and Yale University

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Second Congregational Church in Biddeford, Maine (1932-1936), All Souls Church in Bangor, Maine (1936-1943), and Plymouth Church in Des Moines, Iowa (1943-1946)



“I am trying to persuade you to do the most important thing that you have ever done, to live believing that our God is able.”

The Reverend Dr. Frederick Meek

James W. Crawford

19th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 1974 – 2002

19

Ministerial Highlights

A dedication to preaching and a commitment to social justice and inclusion were hallmarks of Dr. Crawford’s ministry. A preacher’s preacher, he engaged with biblical commentary, history, biography, politics, and current events in his sermons. Twelve of his sermons were published in a volume titled, *Worthy to Raise Issues: Preaching and Public Responsibility* (1991). Under Dr. Crawford’s leadership, the Old South Church in Boston became an Open and Affirming congregation. Dr. Crawford worked with the congregation to develop a theological statement on Old South’s inclusivity. This statement “A Note on the Inclusive Dimensions of God’s Grace,” appears on the back of the church’s weekly bulletins. He brought his commitment to social justice to the national level when he served as chair of the UCC’s New Hymnal Committee to publish a new hymnal with inclusive language. This work resulted in the publication of *The New Century Hymnal*, and Dr. Crawford called this “the theological task of a lifetime.”

Dr. Crawford initiated and led the transformation that made Old South into the regal house of worship it is today. When he first arrived at Old South, the exterior of the Church was covered in soot, and the Sanctuary was, as Dr. Crawford said painted “battleship gray.” The Old South exterior

was cleaned, and, in 1985, the congregation was pleased to dedicate the decorative and brightly lit sanctuary that it now is. The E.M. Skinner organ that now graces the Sanctuary was brought from Minnesota that same year.

Hymn Writer Dr. Crawford authored a new hymn every Christmas and Easter, and occasionally wrote songs in honor of various members of the church. Annual meetings opened with humorous songs that he wrote to mark these occasions.

Worked Overtime Dr. Crawford taught courses on preaching and urban ministry at Union Theological Seminary and Andover Newton Theological School. Committed to racial equality and the desegregation of public schools, the six-foot-eight-inches tall Dr. Crawford demonstrated his solidarity by riding the school bus with children during the Boston busing crisis.

Baseball Fan Dr. Crawford is an ardent Red Sox fan. At his retirement, Tom Werner, chairman of the Boston Red Sox, kidded him for being the “unofficial minister of the Boston Red Sox.”

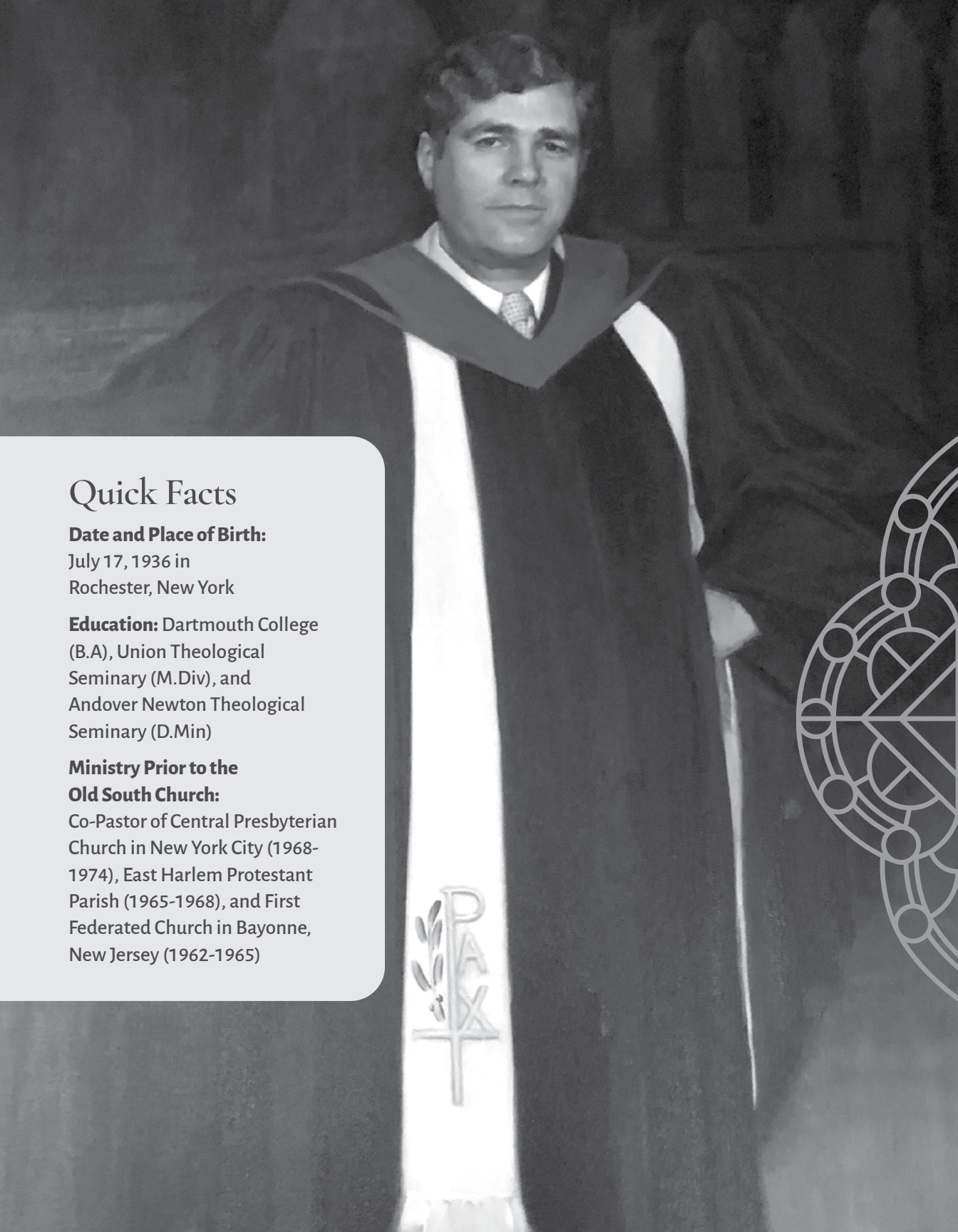
The Final Pew Owner By the time Dr. Crawford came to Old South, few families owned church pews. After the last pew owner died, the estate lawyer contacted Dr. Crawford to find out what the pew was worth. Not a penny, it turned out.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
July 17, 1936 in
Rochester, New York

Education: Dartmouth College
(B.A), Union Theological
Seminary (M.Div), and
Andover Newton Theological
Seminary (D.Min)

**Ministry Prior to the
Old South Church:**
Co-Pastor of Central Presbyterian
Church in New York City (1968-
1974), East Harlem Protestant
Parish (1965-1968), and First
Federated Church in Bayonne,
New Jersey (1962-1965)



“Living the Easter hope means building a community, a city, a nation, a world where locked doors became open doors, where human beings truly live in peace because they live with justice.”

The Reverend Dr. James W. Crawford

Nancy S. Taylor

20th Senior Minister | Years of Ministry: 2005 – 2022

20

Ministerial Highlights

The Reverend Dr. Nancy S. Taylor shattered the glass ceiling when she became the first woman to serve as senior pastor of the church. A powerful preacher, Dr. Taylor's sermons often honored Old South's rich past, and her broader ministry has helped assure Old South's relevance now and into the future. Within the first year of her historic ministry, Dr. Taylor launched a Thursday night Jazz Service and a 9:00 a.m. (First Worship) service. Collection plate contributions tripled. She substantially increased Old South's endowment by initiating the sale of Old South's beta copy of the *Bay Psalm Book* and overseeing the first capital campaign in at least two generations. These actions assured a secure financial future for Old South. Under Dr. Taylor's direction, Old South became a Teaching Church of the United Church of Christ and Associate Ministers Quinn Caldwell, John Edgerton, and Shawn Fiedler mentored young seminarians from Harvard University, Boston University, and Andover Newton Theological School. Dr. Taylor honored Old South's commitment to social justice and carried forth the discussion of racial reckoning by joining with members Deb Washington, Ruth Purtilo, and the Reverend June Cooper to form (G)race Speaks as a new standing committee. By fostering diversity and promoting sacred conversations around matters of race and social justice, Dr. Taylor has prioritized anti-racism. She led Old South through a celebration of its 350th anniversary with the design of permanent exhibitions and the writing of the hefty "concise" encyclopedia of its storied past, and an exuberant worship service featuring prominent speakers on May 12, 2019.

Dr. Taylor's final two years of ministry were marked by an unexpected challenge: the arrival of the Novel

Coronavirus (later known as COVID-19) in March of 2020. She rose to this challenge by making it clear that while the physical church was temporarily shutting down, our beloved community was not. With the help of a resourceful and dedicated ministerial staff, the church went virtual with the use of hybrid technologies and creative souls working their magic. Through the long pandemic, these technological talents enabled Old South to celebrate live-streaming worship services, remote baptisms, and virtual gatherings. It was a fitting capstone for a pastor who was enthusiastic about bringing Old South fearlessly into the twenty-first century, and a beautiful swan song heard by worshippers literally across the world.

Working Overtime While serving as Senior Minister of Old South Church, Dr. Taylor had prominent roles on a variety of boards, including: a trustee of Pax World Funds, co-chair of Yale Divinity School's Dean's Advisory Council, and chair of the board of trustees at Andover Newton Theological School. She also served as a member of the following boards: The Miller Center for Interreligious Leadership (Hebrew College), The Boisi Center for Religion in American Public Life (Boston College), Revolutionary Spaces, The Wassmuth Center for Human Rights Education, and the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology. Over her seventeen years at Old South, Dr. Taylor taught classes at Andover Newton Theological School, Yale Divinity School, Boston University School of Theology, Harvard Divinity School, and Hebrew College.

A First (and Last) In 2014, under the relatively progressive leadership of Imam William Suhaib Webb, then Imam of the Mosque in Roxbury (the largest Mosque in New England), Dr. Taylor became the first woman to speak at Friday Prayers.

Quick Facts

Date and Place of Birth:
December 23, 1955
in New York City

Education: Macalester College (B.A.), Yale Divinity School (M.Div), and Chicago Theological Seminary (D.Min)

Ministry Prior to the Old South Church:
Minister and President, Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ (2001-2005); Senior Minister, First Congregational Church, Boise, Idaho (1991-2001). Associate Minister, Immanuel Congregational Church, Hartford CT (1987-1991) Pastor, Oxford County United Parish, ME (1983-1987)



Following Imam Webb's departure, however, the leadership became more conservative. It is unlikely a woman will be speaking there again anytime soon.

Disasters In 2008, the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority undertook a project to install an elevator near the church's foundation. Pressure from the jet grouting created a massive crack in the church's east wall. The Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority took responsibility for repairing this at no cost to the church.

In April of 2013, Old South's building was within feet of the Boston Marathon bombing.

Eternal Rest Dr. Taylor increased Old South's role in this life and beyond by overseeing the establishment of the Robert C. and Coley K. Elder Columbarium in what was formerly the Children's Chapel, an underutilized but elegant alcove of the church.

No Comment Department A worker who had been installing a new fire suppression system throughout the building was on a ladder in the Senior Minister's Study while Dr. Taylor was at her desk. Turning to Nancy, he remarked: "I've been to most of the rooms in this building and this is the nicest. Who does that make you? The priest's secretary?"

"Warning: to enter into the life of this people of God is to encounter God's life-changing, soul-challenging, radicalizing love. Will you join us? Do you dare?"



The Reverend Dr. Nancy S. Taylor

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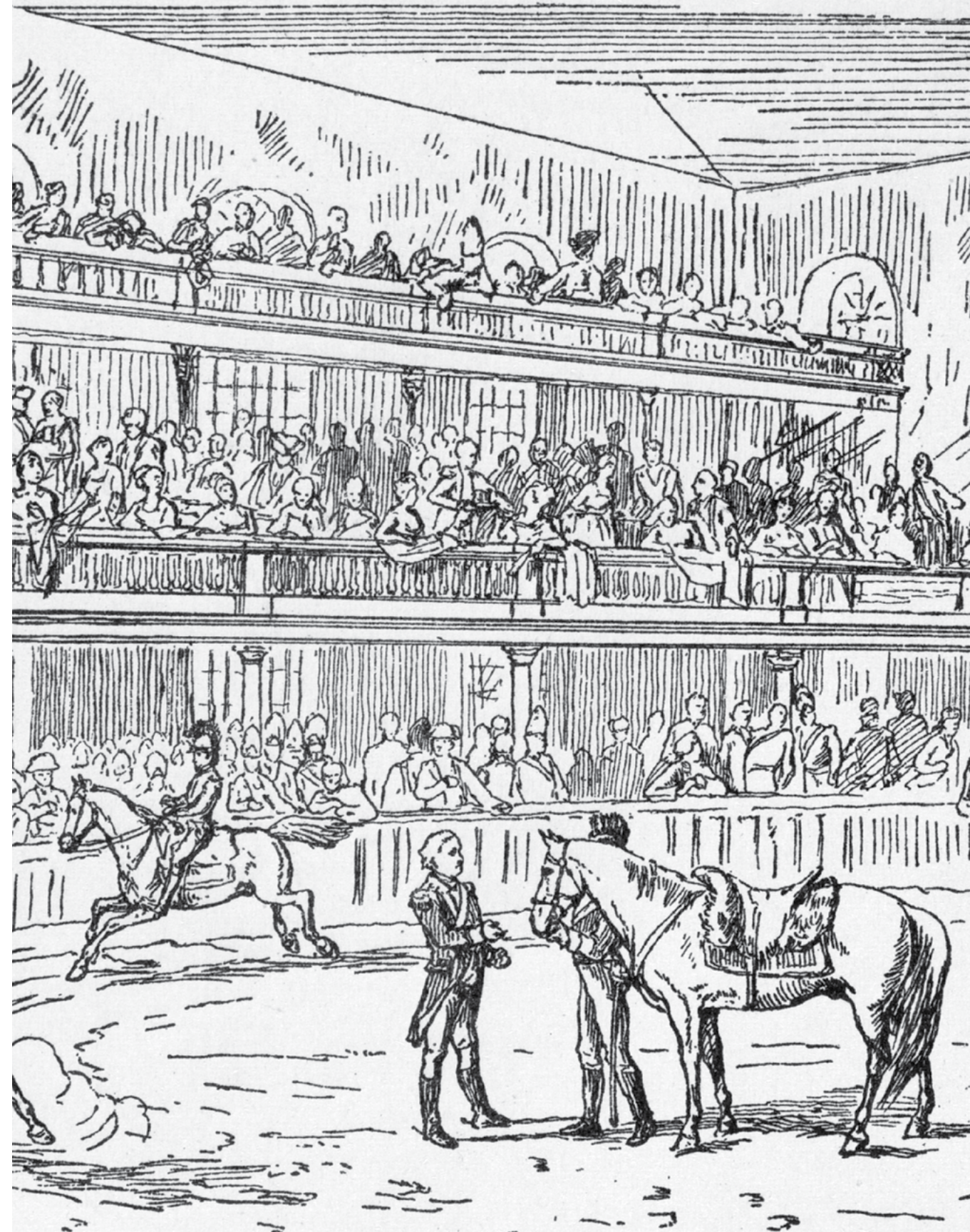
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“As only the twentieth senior minister of Old South Church since 1669, I am, with my nineteen predecessors, a member of an exceedingly small, invitation-only club. Just twenty of us over more than 350 years have steered this venerable ship of faith ... have captained this singular ancient vessel.”

The Reverend Dr. Nancy S. Taylor