

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Second Parish Orthodox Church of Portland, Maine

1788-2015

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American Christianity

by

Erik DiVietro

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The Second Parish of Portland (1788-1877)

In 1788, Maine was still a part of the state of Massachusetts, and the city of Portland was only two years removed from its own founding. During the early stages of the American Revolution, the town of Falmouth, Maine, had been burned to the ground during a nine-day bombardment by British vessels. When the inhabitants rebuilt, they established a new port on “The Neck” and in 1786, this new port was separated from Falmouth to form the town of Portland.¹

At the time, Maine was still a part of Massachusetts and congregationalism was deeply integrated into the state government. As a rule, each community had a single Congregationalist church although dissenters such as the Baptists were a growing minority and other creeds had a significant presence. Portland’s congregational church was struggling, primarily because it did not have the financial wherewithal to support its incumbent minister Thomas Smith while supporting another minister who did all the work.

In 1788, Elijah Kellogg and a group of dissenters received permission from the Massachusetts General Court to form, “a distinct and separate religious society...with all the privileges, powers and immunities which any parish in this Commonwealth is entitled to by law.”² This “second parish” as it is first called in the court’s ruling, was meant to have a congregational polity and was actually required to pay a portion of the salary of Thomas Smith, the pastor of the congregation they were leaving. This was a common practice under Massachusetts law.

¹ William Willis, *The History of Portland from 1632 to 1864: With a Notice of Previous Settlements, Colonial Grants, and Changes of Government in Maine*, 2nd ed. (Portland, ME: Bailey & Sons, 1865), 580.

² An Act For Incorporating A Number Of The Inhabitants Of The Town Of Portland, In The County Of Cumberland, Into A Distinct And Seperate Religious Society, 1788, Public. Mass. Gen. Court, Feb. 6 Session, accessed October 22, 2015, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/104398>.

A third parish “society” was formed in 1812, but eventually it was reabsorbed into the second parish.³ The joined congregation expanded the Second Parish’s building on Congress Street, which stood until 1866 when it was burned down in a city-wide fire. A new granite and brick building was built in its place which became known as the Payson Memorial building, as indeed the congregation was often known as “Payson Memorial Church.”⁴

The nineteenth century was a period of growth for Portland. It swelled from its original population of 2,240 in 1790 to 36,425 a century later.⁵ Second Parish was very active during the 19th century although it remained without a creed until 1831. A creed was made necessary by the increasing number of congregations in the city, as will be seen below. The ministry grew steadily and birthed a number of other congregations as well.⁶ The most significant minister of this period was J. J. Carruthers who served 1846-1877, a tenure that remains the longest in Second Parish’s history.

Merger with Park Street Presbyterian Church (1885-1923)

While Massachusetts maintained religious restrictions until 1833, when Maine separated from Massachusetts in 1820, the new state constitution clearly articulated freedom of religion.⁷ As a result, Portland went from having four congregations – First Parish, Second Parish, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, and a Baptist “society” on Federal Street – to being home to several

³ Willis, *The History of Portland*, 669-670.

⁴ General Conference of the Congregational Church in Maine, *Minutes and Reports: General Conference of the Congregational Church in Maine, and Maine Missionary Society* (Bangor, ME: Benjamin A. Burr, 1883), 192.

⁵ “Census of Population and Housing,” United States Census Bureau, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.

⁶ Chapel Congregational Church (1811), Third Church (1825), High Street Church (1831), Fourth (Abyssinian) Church (1837), State Street Church, St. Lawrence Street Church (1846).

⁷ Constitution of the State of Maine, 1820. Article 1, Section 3, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://legislature.maine.gov/const/>

churches including a Methodist church in 1828, a small Roman Catholic congregation in the same year, a Unitarian congregation in 1830, and a Free Baptist Society in 1836.⁸ Eventually, this congregation relocated and their building on Park Street was purchased by Portland's Presbyterian congregation, which had been formed in Portland in 1885.

Financial difficulties in the early twentieth century brought First Presbyterian Church (also known as Park Street) and Second Parish Congregational Church together. In 1922, the pastor of Second Parish, Marshall E. Bartholomew, resigned; and the congregation had all but ceased operations.⁹ Daniel Nicholson, the pastor of First Presbyterian, stepped in and led the congregation through a merger. He then became the pastor of a merged congregation to be known as Second Parish Presbyterian Church. They sold the Park Street building to Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church and reopened the Payson Memorial building.¹⁰

The adoption of the Presbyterian model meant a shift in polity. As a Presbyterian congregation, Second Parish became a confessional church meaning that they agree with the Westminster Standards. They adopted the elder session leadership model and came under the authority of the presbytery. Some vestiges of the congregationalist model remained in their polity and structure well into the 1980's, including the model of the parish owning property distinct from the congregation and the Sunday School functioning as a separate ministry.¹¹

⁸ Willis, *The History of Portland*, 639-700.

⁹ Stanford Sutton, "History of Second Parish Orthodox Presbyterian Church," internal transcription of Second Parish historical documents provided to the author by Rev. Daniel Patterson.

¹⁰ "Second Congregational Parish Votes for Park Street Presbyterian Merger," *The Portland Press Herald*, December 1, 1923. (In constant dollars, the cost of construction in 2015 would be approximately \$1.7 million.)

¹¹ Daniel Patterson (Pastor of Second Parish Orthodox Presbyterian Church), interview by author, Portsmouth, NH, November 16, 2015.

The Fundamentalist Controversy (1936-1964)

At the height of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the early 20th century, Second Parish joined the dissenting fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA). In 1936 the congregation voted to leave the PCUSA.

Be it resolved that we, the Second Parish Presbyterian Church of Portland, Maine, do deplore the unpresbyterian actions of the 148th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Therefore, be it further resolved that this church does not desire to join in this departure from the faith of our Presbyterian forefathers; therefore we stand on the doctrinal basis on which this church has stood from its beginning...¹²

Second Parish first joined the Presbyterian Church of America, which changed its name to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1939.¹³ “[Second Parish] joined the new denomination in order to maintain their distinctive Christian witness and their steadfast belief in things like the resurrection of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.”¹⁴

The PCUSA condemned the actions, defrocked John Shilton (the pastor) and demanded that the congregation comply with their rulings or lose all its property and bequeaths. The legal wrangling continued until the Maine District Court ruled in favor of Second Parish in 1941 and made the separation between the congregation and the PCUSA complete. The case had ample legal precedence, as a number of congregation had dealt with the same matter when leaving denominations they felt were slipping into modernism, and so Second Parish was permitted to

¹² *Master v. Second Parish of Portland*, 1020 (D.ME. 1941), accessed October 22, 2015, <https://casetext.com/case/master-v-second-parish-of-portland>.

¹³ John P. Galbraith, *Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 1939), accessed November 14, 2015. <http://www.opc.org/cce/WhyOPC.html>.

¹⁴ “Our History,” Second Parish Church, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.2ndparish.org/index.php/about/visiting/>.

continue.

Modern Era (1964-Present)

In 1964, Second Parish reluctantly left the Payson Memorial building. The upkeep of the aging facility was prohibitive. The congregation relocated to a vacant facility on Neal Street, which had been constructed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The Payson Memorial building was demolished in 1965, and the Neal Street building was officially dedicated the following October.

John R. Hilbelink was called as pastor of Second Parish shortly before the congregation celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1988. Due to a number of factors, by the end of his tenure the congregation had shrunk to about sixty people.¹⁵ Hilbelink retired in 2008 and the congregation invited Rev. Daniel Patterson as pastor, a position he still holds. In the last seven years, the congregation has begun to recover.

¹⁵ Patterson, interview.

List of Pastors

Pastors of Second Parish Congregation Church Established 1788

1788-1811	Elijah Kellogg
1807-1827	Edward Payson, D.D.
1828-1834	Bennett Tyler, D.D.
1834-1837	Joseph Vaill, D.D.
1838-1845	Jonathan B. Condit, D.D.
1846-1878	John J. Carruthers, D.D.
1879-1882	Charles A. Dickinson, D.D.

Pastors of Second Parish Congregational (Continued)

1882-1888	Charles H. Daniels, D.D.
1889-1894	James G. Merrill, D.D.
1894-1904	Rollin T. Hack
1904-1908	Howard Mudie
1908-1912	William F. Slade
1912-1916	Charles H. Davis
1917-1920	Roger A. Dunlap
1920-1922	Marshall E. Bartholomew

Pastors of First Presbyterian Church, Established May 3, 1885

1885-1891	John R. Crosser
1891-1892	W. Courtland Robinson, D.D.
1892-1894	Sidney S. Conger
1894-1898	Henry McGilvray
1900-1905	French McAfee
1905-1908	Frank Willcock
1909-1911	Charles W. Dane
1912-1918	Alexander Jackson, Ph.D., D.D.
1918-1919	William Ellery Archibald, Ph.D., D.D.
1921-1923	Daniel Nicholson

Pastors of Second Parish Presbyterian Church

1923-1925	Daniel Nicholson
1926-1930	August Whitman Sonne, D.D.
1933-1939	John H. Skilton (split with PCUSA)
1940-1947	Arthur O. Olson
1948-1957	Calvin A. Busch
1957-1962	Herbert V. Du Mont, Jr.
1962-1972	Leslie A. Dunn
1974-1986	Stanford M. Suttom
1987-2008	John J. Hilbelink
2008-Present	Daniel Patterson

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