

Moments in Our History

(Excerpts from the Dissenting Church of Christ at St. John's 1775 - 1975)

Opposition (Part 1)

The little congregation had been in the Meeting House but a few weeks when Governor Montague returned. John Jones tells us that "in a great rage and with many bitter oaths" (the Governor was after all a sailor) he declared that "he would pull it down 'Stick and Stone' but finding the ground lease good, he came to a resolution to send Jones to Placentia."

The Governors of Newfoundland had the right to order torn down all buildings constructed during their absence without their written permission. This was usually done; the main reasons given that such buildings were "detrimental to the Fishery" or that they interfered in some way with the defence of the harbour. Their despatches are full of such orders. The fact that the ground lease was good does not seem sufficient reason to restrain the hand of the Governor, though it suggests that the Meeting House was situated at some distance from the harbour. Jones had allies among the military and, as we have seen, some respectable citizens of the town had joined the congregation. Furthermore, the Governor may have felt that the destruction of "a place of worship" might not sit well with his superiors in the Colonial Office. Most likely, the reason given by John Jones was the right one. Montague felt that with the transfer of Jones to Placentia, the congregation would collapse. But here too the plans of the Governor were frustrated. Greatheed suggests that Jones was an invaluable non-commissioned officer. The military probably did not relish the loss of Jones any more than the infant congregation. John Jones, in his picturesque language, has another explanation:- "however, the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of all and who says unto the proud waves 'hitherto shall ye go and no further' permitted him to go so far and then put His Hook in his Nose and turned him back by the way he came."

Greatheed, who may have been an eye-witness to all of this, records that hereafter "Jones continued to preach in the Meeting House regularly till the next year, when the company of Artillery was ordered to England, and he was under the necessity of leaving his little flock." In his journal, Jones feels that the opposition of the Governor did his cause no harm "but rather good in as much as it made them fast and pray and live humbly before the Lord and dependent upon Him, the Lord was pleased to bless and increase them."