

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

The First Meeting House (Part 3)

The infant society presented a petition to the magistrates for the use of the Court House during the winter months to hold meetings on Wednesday and Sunday evenings (purposely avoiding conflict with the morning service at Mr. Langman's church). The request was granted, perhaps due to the fact that Mr. Langman's name was ordered struck off the commission of peace for St. John's that year. Jones was "the mouth of the little society" and the services consisted of prayer, hymn singing and a sermon read by John Jones. Jones soon discovered that he was able to reach his audience better when he departed from the printed text. Finally, persuaded by others, he gave up reading other men's sermons and preached his own. He remembered the text for his first sermon "Brethren, suffer a word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13: 22). The services were well-attended. Many came out of curiosity and many, as Jones observed, "for diversion to hear what the Babbler had to say." Others joined the little society that winter, including the congregation's first elder, a New Englander and glazier of the town, Mr. Nathan Parker.

But it was all too good to last. In the spring of 1766, a new Governor or "fishing admiral" arrived in the person of Captain John Montague. Montague is remembered in history for the capture of St. Pierre and Miquelon from the French, but is not so kindly remembered in the annals of our congregation. The Society, by his order, was forbidden the use of the Court House. The Reverend Mr. Greatheed, in his account, blames "the influence of the Clergyman at St. John's" whose ministry he describes as "far from evangelical." Services continued in John Jones' room, attended by many from the town. But, writes Jones, "this privilege was soon taken from them and all Towns folks forbid his room." Undaunted, the little congregation met "the remaining part of the summer upon the Barrens every Lord's day when the weather would permit." That summer, Wallis F. Lang "the other present elder" joined them with one more. "We were indeed" wrote John Jones, "like partridges upon the mountains." (Cf. I Samuel 26:20" ... for the king of Israel has come out to seek my life, like one hunts a partridge in the mountains.")