

Moments in Our History

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

Persecution and Peace (Part 1)

The new Governor Richard Edwards arrived in St. John's on 23 July 1779 and the Reverend Edward Langman wasted no time in laying his complaint against the Dissenters. On Sunday, 1 August, in the middle of the afternoon service, Constable Peagum entered the Meeting House and presented John Jones with an Order from the Governor "to desist from your proceeding in preaching and holding such unauthorized Meetings and Assemblies in this Harbour" or "expect to answer the consequence attending your bold and unlicensed proceedings." Not unexpectedly, the Order was signed by the Reverend Edward Langman, Justice of the Peace. The constable was most probably one, T. William Peagum, a native of Farrington, Devon, and a Blacksmith by trade. William Peagum died in 1786, leaving a very careful Will in the hands of Andrew Barnes Boatkeeper, his executor. The bulk of his estate went to a brother in Devon, but to his "beloved wife, Elizabeth" in addition to one third of his money and effects—"the Bed and Bedding I now lay on and her wearing apparel"!

John Jones read the Order to the congregation and immediately left off preaching. They then retired to his Lodgings "where they ended the devotion of the day."

On 21 August, Jones, together with the elders, Wallis Lang and Nathan Parker, presented a petition to the Governor. They carefully rehearsed the circumstances of their case and Jones' instant obedience to his Order "notwithstanding his unspeakable reluctance at being prohibited." They felt that their minister had perhaps been represented "in an untrue and undeserving light" and promised to furnish His Excellency with character references from Major Williams of the Artillery (in whose Company Jones had served) John Lees, the Barrackmaster, and "some principal persons residing here." Finally, Jones assured the Governor that his only intention in preaching was "to convince sinners of their errors and convert them to a state of grace."

The Governor promised to consider their petition and this they took as a favourable sign. But as time went on and no answer was received, they concluded "the matter was dubious" owing to the influence of Edward Langman, whom Jones compared with Amaziah, the High Priest and adversary of the prophet Amos. A further petition was prepared and presented by Messrs. Jones, Lang and Parker to the Governor on 14 September. They were sorry to trouble his Excellency again but feared lest "the multiplicity of business which has since intervened may very probably have occasioned their entreaty to slip the Governor's memory."