

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF PEPPERELL

Commemorating 100 Years

Historical Moment

History and Anecdotes of the Sunday School Program

In keeping with the theme of Children's Sunday, today's 100th Anniversary Moment focuses on the history of the Church's Sunday School program. Like so many other facets of our Church, Sunday School has a long and rich history. And even after spending several hours researching our historical documents downstairs, I feel like I've just scratched the surface of the history of our church's program to provide Christian education to our children.

First I'll go over a couple historical documents that mention our Sunday School program. The oldest was a small book I located downstairs entitled "Juvenile Harmony: Appropriate Hymns and Music for Sabbath Schools". This is basically a Sunday School hymnal. Handwritten on the title page is "Sabbath School of the First Parish, Pepperell". This book was dated 1836.

Next is a large framed document hanging in the copier room likely dating to about 1890. It is called the "Roll of Honor" detailing the 4-year Sunday School attendance record of some 150 teachers and students. People must have been much smarter back then because it is one of the most complex, and at least for me, most confusing ways to track attendance I've ever seen.

Hanging next to that document is a 1922 certificate from the International Sunday School Association certifying that our church had met the requirements for an "Organized Intermediate Bible Class".

And now for a couple financial anecdotes - In the annual financial summary of the Church from 1917 I found an entry for the annual expenses for the Sunday School of exactly \$6.00. And then on January 29, 1936 there is an entry in the Church's record book detailing that the Sunday School transferred a sum of \$2,436.67 to the permanent fund of the Community Church Society. That would be nearly \$45,000 today. This donation included 2 shares of New England Power - today a subsidiary of National Grid - and 4 shares of "American Tel and Tel" - short for American Telephone and Telegraph or AT&T as we know it today. I guess the Sunday Schoolers of the day were shrewd investors. And frugal too!

And now moving on to more recent history of Sunday School - I located a document prepared in 1995 entitled "Brief History of Sunday School - 1956-1995". Notable events included 1967 when the Parish House was "completed", likely being the date when Sunday School classes were first held next door. And in 1969 an entry stating "discussed having Church School during Church" which apparently resulted in the present timing of Sunday School classes. And then there is a collection of photos from the 1973 Christmas Pageant hanging downstairs. Included in one of those photos is Charlotte Parker, the Choir Director at the time; a role she held from 1938 to 1976.

Allow me to close with this quote - "We must note that erratic attendance continues to be a problem. We face the challenge of competing with all the myriad of conflicts - sports, extracurricular activities, greater school pressures on our youth, and greater demands on parents - the answer lies within each of us as we struggle to prioritize our lives." Although we could have written that quote today, it was actually from 1995. Sunday School leaders at the time included Lois Pentland as Superintendent, Melissa Ribaud as Director, and Jan Colburn as Co-Director. In that year there were over 100 students and 12 teachers, with 8 additional families joining the church during the year - we only wish we had those kinds of numbers today. Little did Lois, Melissa, and Jan know that this same issue would continue to this day, with impacts even greater than those felt some 25 years ago.

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