

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF PEPPERELL
Commemorating 100 Years
Historical Moment

Reverend Charles Babbidge

This morning I would like to continue our series of historical moments commemorating the 100th anniversary of the incorporation of the Community Church. Previously, Mike Resch presented a historical timeline of the Community Church and its two predecessors, the First Parish Unitarian Church and the Evangelical Congregational Church. I covered the split of the First Parish Church into the Unitarian First Parish Church and the Trinitarian Evangelical Congregational Church. Last week Richard Parker acquainted us with Reverend Joseph Emerson, the first pastor of the First Parish Church. Today let me introduce the longest serving pastor of the First Parish Unitarian Church, Reverend Charles Babbidge. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts on October 27, 1806 and graduated from Harvard College with the class of 1828. He then attended Harvard Divinity School and received his Divinity Degree in 1831.

In 1832, after Reverend James Howe and many parishioners of the First Parish Church left to establish the Evangelical Congregational Church, the First Parish Church found itself without a pastor. On January 19, 1833 Reverend Babbidge was invited to become pastor of First Parish Unitarian Church. He accepted the offer and on February 13, 1833 he was ordained as the first pastor of the First Parish Unitarian Church. For the next 53 years, until resigning in February 1886, he served as the Pastor of the Unitarian Church.

He quickly gained the respect and affection of his congregation as a hard hitting preacher with a dramatic flair. He was kind and gentle with his own parishioners, but was a willing warrior against evil, and especially critical of the rival Evangelical Congregational Church and its membership. He never missed an opportunity to chastise what he considered their poor religious choices. During his tenure, relations between the two churches were not exactly cordial.

Not just a pastor, Reverend Babbidge served the community in other ways. He was a member of the school Board for 40 years and represented the district in the legislature in 1859. Of particular note, he was the first pastor in the country to enlist in the Civil War. He served as chaplain of the 6th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, and his medals and sword are in the possession of our church. After his Civil War service he returned to his ministry in Pepperell. Upon his retirement in 1886, the First Parish Unitarian Church bestowed the title of Pastor Emeritus upon him. Reverend Babbidge passed away at the age of 91 on May 5, 1898. Both a memorial plaque in his honor and his picture may be viewed in the vestibule of our church. The plaque was rescued from the First Parish Church where it originally was placed. Our next historical moment will provide some insight about the history of our organ.

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