

The Totoket Historical Society

Excerpts From The Records Of The North Branford Congregational Church

Volume 2, 1769-1805

**Transcribed and Digitized
by**

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Introduction:

In the early days of the Congregational Church members were required to sign a Covenant with the Church in which they promised to abide by the Gospels of the word of God and watch over and care for their brethren and Sisters in the church. As a member of the Church they were required to report on the transgressions of moral conduct of other members.

Below is a case of a woman member, who after divorcing her husband, entered into marital relations with another man. She then denied that the church had jurisdiction in the matter and removed herself from the Church. The pastor and the Church demanded a letter of confession from her and that she then remain in the Church. In this period according to English Law an adulterer was defined as “a married woman who fornicated with a man, married or single.”¹ The subject woman in this case appears to have been divorced. Apparently Church Law held a different view.

An interesting note here is that although the woman was accused of a “sin” and named in various documents, her male counterpart was never mentioned and never charged.

In all of the records that I have read no male was accused. Several women were accused of “Imbibing of spiritous liquors and intoxication.” I have found no record of a man being so charged. It is hard to believe that North Branford did not have its share of male alcoholics.

A Copy of the Covenant is shown below.

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¹ John Adams Under Fire, The Founding Father’s Fight for Justice in the Boston Massacre Murder Trial by Dan Abrams and David Fisher, Hanover Square Press, Toronto, Canada, 2020, page 117

Church Covenant

Under a humble sense of your own unworthiness with dependence on Divine assistance you do, in the presence of the great holy and every living God and before these his people, give yourself up to the God the Father in and through Jesus Christ the so Space him to be your guard into Christ is your redeemer, into the Holy Ghost is your site the fire, guide and benefactor, - you do also give yourself up to this church as a church of Christ, to walk together with that thankful attendance 20 the ordinances and duties that are to be attended, and in the enjoyment of all the privileges that are to be enjoyed in a particular visible church of Christ – promising to submit do the discipline of Christ in this church till regularly dismissed thereupon. This you covenant and promise as God shall help give by his grace.

We do there for receive you as a fellow member of this church into the enjoyment of all the privileges of God's house end promise, as God shall enable us by his grace, walk toward you as such in all things. This we covenant, and pray God to watch over him and us. Amen.

From the Church Records: Volume 2, Page 69-71

Church Notes

At a church meeting regularly called and sworn on the 29th day of February 1776 at the meeting house in North Branford. The meeting opened by prayer by the pastor. A complaint was read by deacons Barnabas Mulford and Ebenezer Russell against (name removed), a sister in full communion with the church setting forth that she, the said (name removed) had walked disorderly and dishonorably to the gospel and was guilty of the break of the seventh commandment in these holy dialogues. As appears by the complaint on file. The complaint was read and accepted by the church.

New evidence for the support of it were read and laid before the church, also a copy of the citation sent timely to the said (name removed) and to the pastor and church removing their communion and denying their jurisdiction etc., is approved by a letter dated February 28th, 1776 also by another letter dated January 6, 1776 was read to the church.

Whereupon the church taking into mature consideration the letters wrote by the said (name removed) removing our commission and Denying the Jurisdiction of the Church.

Voted.....That the voluntary denouncing of communion and denying the jurisdiction of this church by our sister in the church (name removed) is an open violation of her covenant with the church and what we cannot, consistent with the rules of the gospel and our duty to her, accept or approve----Voted in full----

And whereas this said (name removed) does not appear before this church to answer to the complaint proffered against her.—Therefore Voted—That this church willing to express Christian charity towards her, and desirous that she might have an opportunity to give reasons, if any, she has in said complaint, why she should not be found guilty of the crime alleged in said complaint. ----- Do for the present defer the examination of this complaint to another opportunity-Desiring our rev'd pastor to call us together at some suitable time

for this purpose. And to send a proper citation to said (name removed) to appear before this church, in the name of this church.....

The meeting was then concluded with Prayer and adjourned.

Samuel Eells Pastor

At a church meeting regularly called and warned on the 9th day of August 1776 at the Meeting house in North Branford. The meeting opened by a preparatory lecture and prayer by the pastor.

The case of (name removed) otherwise a sister in full communion with this Church was laid before the Church. And the decision of the Church in said case on the 29th of February 1776 was read. Thereupon the Church proceeded and adopted the following Confession.

I, the subscriber being a person do make a profession of the Christian Religion and one it hath joined myself in Christian bonds, fellowship and Communion with your 2nd Church of Christ in Branford to walk together with them in all the ordinances of the Gospel and having promised in this my Covenant relations with said church before God and the church to submit myself to their Discipline as a Church of God till regularly Disciplined therefrom do hereby, in this publik manner, Confess and Acknowledge that I have not paid that Christian regard to this my Covenant, Vow and promise to said church but have transgressed and violated the same. By an open declaration to said church in a case of grievous complaint proffered by said Church by two of ye members of said church against my moral conduct as a Christian professor with regard to my asking for a (?) by proffering after a divorce from (name removed) as my head and husband and entering into a marriage relation with another man. For which conduct of mine the complainers profess themselves aggrieved and have defined my giving certain satisfaction before the Church for said conduct in which case I have refused the trusted complainers, Church and pastor in an unbecoming manner. In certain letters wrote by me in which I denied the jurisdiction of the Church and professed a voluntary withdrawing of myself from a fellowship watch and communion, which I acknowledge is a violation of the Gospel rules and a breach of the covenant vow and obligation to the Church. I therefore humbly acknowledge myself guilty herein and after the forgiveness of this Church for this my conduct professing myself heartily sorry and therefore and that I did therefore give them just occasion of offence as (?) now for the satisfaction of the church in this case do acknowledge them right of justification inquiry into my moral conduct in said case. And that I am bound

by the laws of the Kingdom as well as my Covenant relation with this Church to give them all the light and satisfaction concerning my said conduct which lays in my power, which I promise upon their forgiveness of my breach of Covenant to do whenever again called upon for that purpose. Humbly asking your forgiveness of my conduct in this breach of Covenant with you and your prayers for me that I might obtain Forgiveness of God for this and all my other sins and have grace to enable me to walk more watchfully and circumspectly before God and his people.

Signed by me .

Notedthat the above acknowledgement and confession is satisfying to your Church upon said (name removed) otherwise (?) making and owning of it Before this Church and Congregation in a publik manner as to the censure she is already under by this Church.

Voted in full

Samuel Eells Pastor