

**South Church: Founding History and Abolitionism:
An Essay Regarding New Facts**
Charlotte Lyons, March 2011

A few well-known facts about Andover stand out: 1) Early Andover had slaves and our first two ministers owned slaves. 2) Forty-four people in 1846 from four Andover churches formed Free Christian Church as a statement that abolitionism was a Christian responsibility, where inaction or voicing concern over keeping the Union together was an institutional and personal endorsement for slavery. By implication, the current popular history is that the other churches, including South Church, passively did not do anything for or against abolitionism. What *was* South Church's role?

I became interested in this after giving a tour of our cemetery of the slave/abolitionist/Civil War graves with the Andover Historical Society in 2003, and I felt there was more to it than the popular anecdotes and facts, begging many questions. Considering that only 3 percent of our community churches' membership left to form this new church, it simply does not define the character, attitude, and actions toward slavery by the majority in this town or of our churches.

In this essay, I offer new thoughts regarding our role with slavery and abolitionism. I will show the old implications inaccurate or at least incomplete, which will hopefully update Andover's and South Church's current popular history.

In the beginning...

In 1711, The Church of the South Parish in Andover was established by 35 members as a daughter church to the original Andover church, now North Andover's Unitarian Church. Our first pastor, Rev. Samuel Phillips, who served for 60 years, had slaves; this was common. When he died in 1771, I think Mrs. Phillips gave the slaves, Salem and Remy, to Rev. Jonathan French at the parsonage, but took their grown children with her to North Andover. However, the little evidence which exists does not explain the exchange. Rev. French had the out-grown school building at the corner of School and Central Streets moved next to the parsonage across the street for the family of Salem and Remy.

The first slave ship came to Boston in 1638, eight years before Andover incorporated. Slavery in early America was widely accepted as the British regarded it as a normal human condition, believing the poor souls should be converted to Christianity. In 1754, 42 slaves lived in Andover (28 male, 14 female) and probably all born into slavery in this country. (According to the first Federal census in 1790, 119 "people of color" were living in Andover.) Rose Coburn's gravestone (1859) tells us she was the last slave to die who was "born into that condition" in Andover, and lived to 99.

When slavery was abolished in Massachusetts in 1783, most slaves remained in Andover as hired help. Those who fought in the American Revolution also received a veteran's pension including Pomp Lovejoy (died 1826), who lived to 102, and Titus

Coburn (died 1821), Rose's husband. A total of 30 black men from Andover fought in the Revolution, and eight at Bunker Hill, the most from any community. Phillip Abbot was killed there. Parishioner Samuel Cogswell freed his slave, Caesar, after 'rendering creditable service' in the battle at Bunker Hill in Boston. Caesar fought as a free man for the duration of the war.

While our early parishioners regarded slave ownership as a matter of economics and not a social issue, they were passionate patriots, including the aforementioned slaves. In the 1770s Andover was considered a cultural center, with well educated and well behaved citizens. The Town/Church (Parish system) dealt with the pre-Revolution turmoil by dictating the standards for behavior, decorum, and discipline. At many Town Meetings held in our building (our Annual Meeting of the present), the minutes noted (paraphrased), "That all members of our community will act without riot to the practices of the British Government and the followers. As long as members of this Parish are of Good Standing, no action or offense will be taken." This set a precedent of dictating decorum which influenced our role in abolitionism in the 1800s.

Into the 1830s... Rev. Phillips' grandson, Samuel Phillips, founded Phillips Academy (1778), and with his cousin, Samuel Abbot, the Andover Theological Seminary (1807). Sarah Abbot established The Abbot Female Academy in 1828. Like all town folk, the students attended South Parish, too. West Parish was the last Congregational Church to be established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1826. Many societies (Baptist, Methodist, etc.) met for worship but were not recognized as official religious institutions under Massachusetts law. The separation of church and state finally was effected here in 1834, and the Baptist, Episcopal/Church of England, and Methodist Churches were founded in Andover soon after.

Orators frequented Andover due to the Seminary and the Academy. Abolitionists Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, George Thompson, and Wendell Phillips led fiery discussions. Very early on, Andover was quietly very abolitionist. Discreetly, town folk became factors in the Abolitionist movement. For instance, our members, the William Poor family, built wagons with false bottoms and ran a stop on the Underground Railway through Frye Village for years. William Jenkins' home on Douglas Lane (named for Frederick Douglas) was a safe house with false walls. He ran a series of mills and when they suspected being detected, the runaway slaves took up positions working the mill. Societies sprang up all over town, meeting in homes. Women sowed quilts with the pattern of maps to safe houses which were hung off their often unsuspecting husbands' carts.

Meanwhile, at South Parish, missions and missionaries from the congregation and the Seminary were strongly and passionately supported. Temperance, Sabbath School education, the women's prayer groups, music and an organ (many people considered it an instrument of the devil and withheld their taxes in protest) were the issues for the Deacons. Also, when North, South, and West Parishes were established by the state, they held the legal welfare responsibility of all persons in each parish, contributing to the plate of each church's duties.

As Abolitionism in Andover gathered momentum in the latter 1830s, the town's institutions felt the affect of political division. After a dramatic speech, a riot almost broke out because many of the young men felt called to action, and Phillips Academy

expelled a student for being so out of order. He was later given a full scholarship to Oberlin College by John Smith for his passion. Rev. Leonard Woods of the Seminary stated that when one was at school, one studied, and politics were not a part of the curriculum. Phillips Academy echoed the same sentiment but there is speculation that the Academy also was under pressure from their Southern graduates and parents to quell the topic. Southerners had sent their sons to Phillips to aid entry to Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth for decades.

West Parish's minister, Rev. Samuel Jackson, agonized over the turmoil in his church, and admonished his congregation from the pulpit as unruly behavior invaded worship and meetings, scolding all parishioners, forbidding further controversy. Abolitionists wanted their ministers to refuse pews to pro-slavers. John Smith refused to pay his church taxes and resigned as Deacon and church treasurer because the majority at West Parish considered it uncharitable to deny worship to any who might be pro-union. Somehow, if you wanted to keep the Union together, you could not be anti-slavery as well. The implication was that keeping the Union together could only be done by accepting slavery. Radical abolitionists used the rhetoric to push political and social buttons to keep slavery the issue. It is no wonder that race remains a hot button topic today by using these same techniques.

Slavery was not in our backyard in the 1830-40s. People's daily lives were affected more by the disruptions in their institutions than by the institution of slavery itself. Many stood by the U.S. Constitution, believing that preserving the Union was the more important issue. Would forming a new church in town directly help the plight of the slave? Forty-four persons thought so.

In 1846, 14 members from South Parish, 17 from West Parish, 10 Methodists, and three Baptists formed the Free Christian Church. The name came from the Scottish movement to separate from the persecuting Presbyterian Church in Scotland as many Scots had relocated to Andover. They advertised, "All are cordially invited to unite with us believing that slave holders and apologists do not honor Christ, they are NOT included in this invitation." Slavery was a moral and political issue which needed Christian support, prayer, and action; inaction equaled an endorsement. Founder John Smith first came to America via the South, and saw the separation of families, the poor living conditions, and the inhumanity of slavery first hand, something he could never shake from his thoughts.

In the 1840s – 1860s... What role did South Church play?

South Church maintained the same practice established in the 1700s. All opinions were honored, but church was a place for worship. The congregation was by far the largest and most diverse in town by ethnicity, color, heritage, education, financial circumstance, and vocation, mostly because it was one of the three town churches where one went by default. Political talk or action in church was walking the fence on acceptable behavior. Noted abolitionists found the new wave of evangelical style preaching a crucial vehicle to the movement. Converting the heathens included the pro-slavers. Boston abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison called Rev. Samuel Jackson a "pro-slave and Union minister" because of Jackson's attempts to keep his West Parish sanctuary a holy place of worship. The accusations stung as unjustified, let alone improper, and at worst, irreverent.

At the South Church Annual Meeting, Feb. 17, 1840, four wordy paragraphs regarding slavery were voted into the “Church Order.” The first two paragraphs denounce slavery as an evil in America and to God, declaring it an “inexcusable wrong to those whom it holds in bondage.” The third paragraph acknowledges that all Christians must be accepted, but denounces our brethren who “countenance this sin.” No apology will be made for them, and “sympathy [will be given] for all who are made to suffer by it.” The fourth paragraph notes, “That, though we differ – some of us, widely,” on how to act on these beliefs that slavery is a sin, there is a duty to oblige to the mutual agreement that, “[as long as one does not] violate the precept of our common faith,” one shall not be denied the opportunity to worship fully in accordance with the Covenant, to which all members professed upon admission to the congregation of South Church since 1711.

As early as 1840, South Church did take a stand against slavery. Differing opinions on how to uphold this stand led to tolerance for all opinions. Any institution could defend a separation from politics by arguing that individuals could advance abolitionism (or not) in their own way via local associations such as the Essex County Anti-Slavery League, without any consequence to a parishioner’s good standing. I want to draw out the point that South Church did endorse slavery as a sin, but left individuals free to their own activities as they had local opportunity to participate, as long as they honored worship for all, deferring to the original Covenant of 1711.

We endorsed abolitionism as an institution, leaving the responsibility of action to individuals. We also made a stand for tolerance and acceptance, defending the character of our members, respecting different voices, ways for all to worship meaningfully before God, and to partake in a peaceful service where the doors closed on the noise outside, leaving one with God and neighbors.

Unfortunately, Andover history has gone for the story of “if you aren’t for, you’re against” regarding the role of the churches and slavery. After 1834, the town saw new churches established every year, so North, South, and West Parish people were free to join other denominations to their liking. Free Christian Church formed because the first members were so affronted by anyone not an abolitionist, they did not want to join in Communion or worship, or dare say, sit next to them in church. A handful of women went to Free Christian without their husbands in a statement which spoke to women being closer to the negro help in the house. Their husbands’ commitments to their churches spoke to the gaffs of the outspoken parishioners in defending the rules of civility in church toward one another and defending business ties when they were called names.

In Free Christian’s 50th year manual, a member is quoted as saying, “No one wanted us, and we were cast out.” The memory was not accurate, and unfortunately, Andover history thinks this is the way it was. The four churches all discharged their members in good standing to form a new church. As noted above, after the establishmentarianism law was revoked, new churches were formed regularly, drawing from the three town churches. Free Christian was not seen as an outlaw church, as it was where anyone could participate in the abolitionist movement’s meetings without other problems regarding worship.

When Free Christian built its church building in 1851, South Church’s Rev. John Taylor helped with the dedication, as did the other area pastors. Rev. Taylor was an

Andover Theological Seminary graduate, and after serving at South Church went back to the Seminary to teach and lead. He took the responsibility of pastoring to a church which had the legal responsibility to be for everyone. Yet Rev. Taylor was at the dedication, as were the other ministers, and obviously not in the tone of “nobody wanted us.” It was probably more of a good story later than reality, but it is what has been gleaned for more of a good history story while, unfortunately, leaving out many other facts.

Could one use ‘tolerance’ as an excuse for not taking a stand? Absolutely. Could one be outspoken in town and still be of good standing? Yes. Our cemetery hosts many abolitionists from South Church. An ardent abolitionist, Isaac Abbott, aged 53, died in 1858, before he saw the slaves freed. His epitaph reads, “Here lies the remains of a true reformer; but his spirit is free and will live forever, fulfilling his mission on earth and in Heaven.” Also, I have found no evidence of segregation in the cemetery. We have many slave and free black people buried here. We have two slaves’ headstones erected by local benefactors to ensure their memories, another testament to equality.

The rich history of the Congregational Church shows many Congregationalists were anti-slavery leaders in their churches and wider communities. There were individual churches which did make abolition their business from their pulpits, pocket books, and actions. Think of the congregation in Connecticut and the *Amistad* ship. Though South Church did not have an *Amistad* experience to learn from personally, 40 percent of the missions’ dollars collected between 1840 and 1859 went to at least three different Congregational-based Abolitionism/Anti-Slavery/ Missionary Societies, including the American Missionary Association (1846) formed to educate emancipated slaves. This fact and the 1840 “Church Orders” statements indicate at least internal, committee level discussion and financial support.

In February, 2004, Julie Mofford, Director of Education and Research at the Andover Historical Society, found a line in a Phillips student’s diary about attending an anti-slavery meeting at The Old South Church, led by a runaway slave, dated January 16, 1848. Julie notes, “This is also the first documentation I’ve discovered of an actual anti-slavery gathering held at South Church.”

All 44 Free Christian Church members were from Andover, not other communities, not even from the North Parish Church (North Andover), nor Christ Church. No new churches popped up in neighboring communities denouncing slavery. Were these 44 simply radicals and malcontents in their churches? Or were they visionaries and “immediatists”? Were our members too comfortable in our heritage and so slow to change that they stayed? What role did our pastors, moderators, and deacons play through these 30 years? Was the need or precedence for individual worship and tolerance greater than any one issue, even one as divisive as slavery?

There was skepticism regarding the forming of another church. When Abraham Marland, owner of Marland Mills, founded Christ Church (1835), those of Episcopal heritage joined, but also many of his employees followed to curry favor. Was the community suspicious of John Smith? He was one of the 44, and owner of the Smith & Dove Mill who employed the Scots. The new church began as another Congregational Church, and did attract the Scottish population. It was an uncharacteristic move as most Northern mill owners and workers relied on the cheap cotton from slavery for their livelihoods. Everyone knew Mr. Smith helped bring the railroad through town

right next to his mills. Did our parishioners wonder if the intentions were pure? Was this a class and ethnic division primed by abolitionism? History supports the sincerity and passion of the original formers. Obituaries for Mr. Smith and Mr. Dove cite tremendous benevolence and selfless acts of charity. I do feel a responsibility to offer these doubts when I am questioning our parishioners' actions in that same period. I apologize for the implications.

In hindsight, it is the dynamics of Andover and of several of the founders which make the establishment of Free Christian Church stand out. They were all part visionaries, radicals, and uncharacteristic business persons who were 20-30 years ahead of everybody else, mostly because many were Scottish. Slavery had been abolished in Great Britain. They grew up with anti-slavery in their churches, and probably were frustrated by our old, tradition-bound American institutions. I think Andover and South Church simply hadn't yet experienced the transition and the revelation that they had. Some mill owners and workers denounced slavery even when they directly benefited from it, because they already believed in anti-slavery as a Christ centered belief, placing them well ahead of their American counterparts, other Christians, and especially mill owners and workers.

A truly odd coincidence...

A truly odd coincidence is that our 16th President, Franklin Pierce, was a frequent visitor to Andover well before he was elected. And to where did he have ties and to which church?

Judge John and Mary Means Appleton Aiken joined South Church in 1850. Mary's sister and brother-in-law were Jane Means Appleton and Franklin Pierce from New Hampshire. The Aikens were tremendous contributors to South Church, Phillips, and the Seminary. In 1852, Franklin Pierce was elected as our 16th President. The Pierces enjoyed the holidays here, resting before the move to Washington. Their third and only surviving child, Benjamin, age 13, was to start at Phillips in 1853. On their way home to New Hampshire in January, the President-Elect and Mrs. Pierce witnessed Benjamin killed in a train accident a mile from the Andover Depot near today's Arundel and Rock O'Dundee Roads. Benny was taken first to the Alms house near the accident, which was the sight of the home of our original member Christopher Osgood. The funeral was held at the Aiken home. Mary and Franklin were never the same. Mary spent as little time in Washington as possible, otherwise living here with her sister.

The Aiken home at 48 Central St. was known as the Summer White House during the Pierce administration. President Pierce's staff stayed across the street in the home that Samuel Abbot built, which was later bought by Deacon Mark Newman, and was occupied at that time by a minister at the Seminary.

When President Pierce and Interim Phillips President Aiken walked the grounds of the schools, the students were most impressed, even after Mr. Pierce's disastrous term in office which led to the Civil War because he let slavery proceed in new states and he backed down to any threats of secession by the Southern states. Mr. Pierce routinely enjoyed the company of his friend from Bowdoin College, Rev. Calvin Stowe. Regardless of friendships, however, Harriet Beecher Stowe refused tea with President Pierce due to his actions acquiescing to the South to support a Pro-Union stance at the

expense of Anti-Slavery actions. That stance fueled the anti-slave argument that wanting the Union to stay together meant one was for slavery. What a tricky time.

Even though Pierce was an ineffectual president, why isn't it recorded where the Pierces attended church while visiting in Andover? I think after the train accident, everyone gave the family a pass regardless of the President's platform. Jane and Mary were daughters of a Congregationalist minister, making South Church just up the street a natural, not to mention the Aikens were members here. However, given the connections to the Seminary, worshipping at Bartlett Chapel would be logical as well, given it was the esteemed seminary where dignitaries visited during the Pierces time here. Regardless, the President and Mrs. Pierce were sufficiently insulated while in Andover.

Perhaps the Pierces had been visitors often enough that it wasn't news. Before being elected President, he was only a person visiting family, and after the train accident, the family was probably regarded with sympathy. His political policy was known here while in office, but his legacy was only revealed later with the onset of the Civil War. Regardless, one does wonder why there is absolutely no reference to where the Pierces worshipped.

The Civil War years...

Not until April, 1861, did secession and slavery bring war into our daily lives, into our backyard. After Fort Sumter was attacked, men of Andover enlisted in the Union Army; over 700 in all served. The Women's Society of South Church made bandages and opened it to the community to help. We also financially supported the men's needs in the field and their families here.

A total of 55 men from Andover rest in mass graves in Georgia, Virginia, and Pennsylvania., of which 26 men from South Church died in battle, from wounds or in captivity. Robert Rollings (died 1879), a black soldier from the courageous 54th Regiment lies in our cemetery as well as two 16-year-old white boys, the first Andover deaths from disease in 1862, and 127 veterans. Our town held the memorial service for President Lincoln in our sanctuary, as our 4th Meeting House of the South Parish was built in 1860.

Though evidence indicates support by South Church, it appears little was of public knowledge, not even an anti-slavery meeting. I believe the attitude of tolerance overshadowed any known facts as well, to our historical detriment. Some local historians opine that South Church avoided controversy historically regardless of the issue going back to the 1700s. With Free Christian forming, by default, it appeared to be the only abolitionist institution in town. However, it was the individuals in town, regardless of their institutional association, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, who led the movement.

Free Christian was a place of worship for Christians who wanted a distinction in their Church Orders which held parishioners accountable to one another in order to worship fully. They used their building and pulpit for meetings, fairs, projects, their people and resources to provide for runaway slaves, and publicly they protected the outspoken abolitionist from harm. That is a legacy that the churches in the North, South, and West

Parishes were not afforded by law, but led to tolerance and later acceptance within them.

Though South Church did support abolitionism as previously noted, no apologies were made for one's individual responsibility and tolerance. Free Christian provided a choice for one's house of worship. If Free Christian Church hadn't formed, I wonder how South and the other churches would have changed in the 1850s as tensions rose, especially after the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, which forced more people to take a stand? Do Andover Baptist or Christ Church wonder about their role in this time? Was slavery another social issue until war? Was the church a refuge for ignoring a problem or controversy, or was it a place for tolerance? So many questions, so few answers.

In Conclusion...

The 1859 Historical Manual of South Church, "Rule of Order, 11" states, "This Church has had and still has occasion to condemn the holding of men in slavery, and the defense of the system of American slavery." We now know that South Church definitely rebuked slavery. Our members certainly were driven by their own judgments. For a town with a lot of abolitionists and definitely anti-slave, 97 percent of the people stayed with their original churches. Maybe they just didn't want to leave their church, standing by their oath that all could worship here. Perhaps they simply stuck together through the fray, still worshipping as one, serving and sponsoring the many projects and persons of the congregation and parish, and attending to abolition in their own way. Perhaps they stayed simply objecting to the protagonist style of aggressive abolitionists.

I began this essay noting two well-known facts about Andover and their implications. I hope these previously hidden facts will help us all better understand the intermingling history of South Church in influencing our past, present, and future issues. With insight into our history, I can honor the actions taken regarding slavery. Maybe the evils of slavery were preached, but after so many decades, perhaps it became an accepted topic without consequence and not noteworthy. However, we simply do not know, at least not yet.

I recognize the good and bad effects of our historical influences. I belabor the questions because I find the role South Church played not as simple as action versus inaction or judgment by degree of action. I do not support the implication that institutional inaction was an endorsement of slavery. In this case, I accept the words of Jesus, "Whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40)

I am grateful for this forum to give you my thoughts about our past. I feel blessed to be part of a congregation which works on so many levels of faith where tolerance, acceptance, action or inaction is far more involved than yes or no. May we grow with our history.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Lyons, March, 2011