

Transcript of Lecture Delivered by  
Reverend John Ames February 28, 1998 *Leading the Way: Political Force of the Revs.  
James, Huntting, Buell and  
Beecher Leading the Way  
The Public Life of the First Four Ministers  
Thomas James, Nathanael Huntting, Samuel Buell, and Lyman Beecher*

My first visit to East Hampton came almost exactly three years ago this week, in early March, 1995. That is quite possibly a disqualification for participating in this distinguished lecture series, for I am in no sense an expert in East Hampton history. And I am very aware that many of you are. A third of this afternoon's audience probably knows more than I do about the Trustees' records, about the sites and locations of the old buildings, and about the quirks, foibles, and eccentricities of the early ministers. You'd think that at my age I would have more sense than to get involved in a subject about which so many others know so much – and care so much.

But maybe I've been bitten by the bug - the bug of East Hampton history that seems more omnipresent than the deer ticks which nobody can see, but which everybody knows about. And maybe the bite came on that first visit, sponsored, as you can guess, by the Pastor Nominating Committee of the First Presbyterian Church. As I was being shown through the church sanctuary, the portrait of Nathanael Huntting was pointed out to me; and the person leading the tour told me that the first three ministers in East Hampton served about 50 years each. I made appropriate noises - actually I think I said: "I'm afraid I don't have fifty years left" - but, as a matter of fact, I simply believed that my guide was mistaken.

Presbyterians - like the ancient Hebrews, and, it must be said, like many in East Hampton - are inclined to allow their faith to shape their history. I assumed that this was simply an example of that kind of hyperbole. I was wrong, of course. The story is true.

East Hampton was served in the first century and a half of its existence by a remarkable trio of ministers - Thomas James, the feisty Puritan pioneer; Nathanael Huntting, the scholarly frontier pastor; and Samuel Buell, the revivalist, the educator, the political conciliator who would have been on the winning side whoever won the Revolutionary War. Lyman Beecher, who served only here eleven years, is included because there are lots of good stories about him and because he is the only East Hampton minister who ever had a national reputation. Only I must tell you at the outset that it was established after he left here.

East Hampton was settled by Puritans - originally from Connecticut, augmented later by immigrants who came directly from England. It remained Puritan throughout the period under discussion today. That is the most important single thing that one needs to know about these people in order to understand how they lived; how they organized their community and conducted its affairs; how they related to each other and to the indigenous inhabitants who lived here before them; and, of course, how they understood their relationship to their God. Puritanism was a theology. It was a particular way of

understanding the Christian faith. That is of critical importance, but that is not the only thing we need to know about Puritanism in order to understand it.

For though Puritanism was a theological movement, it was also a political movement and a social movement. It regulated the relationships between persons of various social and economic classes. It determined how political decisions would be made and how the economy of the community would be organized.

Puritanism has gotten a very bad reputation in the modern age, because it is almost totally misunderstood. Our ancestors are believed - even by us - to be censorious busy-bodies, preaching a legalistic religion which we equate with modern fundamentalism. H. L. Mencken - more of a wit than a historian - is famous for describing Puritanism as the "horror that someone, somewhere, may be enjoying themselves." Nothing could be further from the truth. You cannot understand 17th or 18th century Puritanism by reference to any modern religious movement or to 19th century prohibitionists or blue nosed prudes. That simply is not who they were.

Puritanism in New England also cannot be understood by reference to the Mayflower settlers who founded the Plymouth Colony. They were Puritans, to be sure, but they were Separatists - radicals - political and religious extremists - who did come to these shores to find freedom in the wilderness. Because they have captured the popular imagination of American folklore, they have become better known than the much larger, and much more important, settlements that began ten years later with the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Puritanism was a third generation development of the Protestant Reformation in England which established the Church of England as independent from Rome. Unlike the continent, in which the reformation was a religious revival, in England it was an act of state. Henry VIII, who was given the title "Defender of the Faith" by the Pope in gratitude for a tract he wrote against Martin Luther, established a church which was simply independent - not necessarily protestant.

Under Henry's three children: the protestant Edward, the Catholic Mary, and the politically astute Elizabeth - the circumstances of whose birth required that she be a protestant - the Church of England was buffeted by theological and liturgical change for a generation until it reached a compromise accommodation, called the Elizabethan settlement. The original Puritans were those who flocked back to England at Elizabeth's accession - having breathed the heady wind of Calvinism during the Marian exile - determined to continue the religious reform in England in a more protestant direction.

Under Elizabeth's Stuart successors in the next century, these Puritans rose to increasing prominence in both church and state. They dominated the commercial and business life of the nation, especially in the city of London. They controlled one of the two universities, Cambridge. Many were middle class farmers, especially in East Anglia and Southwest England. They were opposed by the large rural landowners, the aristocracy, and the peasants who were beholden to them.

And as the foolishness of the Stuart kings required more and more money, which could be raised only by Parliament, the economic interests of the aristocratic landowners and the urban merchants naturally clashed. Throughout the early 17th century Puritanism dominated the political life of England; and by 1640, despite a very unfair electoral system that gave is proportionate political influence to the large landowners and the aristocracy, it controlled the government. This, of course, gave them control of the established church.

The English Puritans were thus not an oppressed and harassed underclass; many were artisans, farmers, merchants, university graduates. Beginning with John Winthrop and the establishment of Massachusetts Bay in 1630, many hundreds of Puritans flocked to these shores during the decades preceding the English Civil War. They established here a society based on a Calvinistic understanding of Christianity. This included a political theory in which governmental authority is given - by God - to "the people" - not to the king.

Exactly who comprised "the people" has been a subject of continuing dialogue in American history. Originally, of course, it did mean "white males," and our history has been the sometimes uneven story of the expansion of that definition. Sometimes other restrictions, such as land ownership or church membership, were included. But at least it did not mean that power came from the top down, but from the bottom up. The bedrock political principle of Puritanism was that governmental power belonged to "the people;" that free people had a right - a right given them by God - to self-government.

Thus the "Holy Commonwealth" that the Puritans established in New England was - at least according to the definition of the time - democratic, anti-aristocratic. Because the Bishops in England were their enemies, the religious equivalent of aristocracy, they established independent churches, knowing no authority higher than those persons elected by each congregation - lay elders and a minister.

But they were not inherently opposed to church organization and to a system of religious connectionalism. Nor were they inherently opposed to established state churches. They were simply opposed to the kind of church organization and church establishment with which they were familiar in England. They wanted to establish their own, more to their liking.

As they spread through southern New England, they perhaps inevitably came to eastern Long Island and established a community here. And the church was as integral a part of their community as was any other part. They also started a school, dug a pond and fenced in a sheep fold, established procedures for sharing common grazing land and conducting whale watches, built wind-mills which were shared communally, and did a great many other things. The church was simply a normal and essential part of the community's life.

The first individual in East Hampton to be paid out of communal funds was the minister,

Thomas James. He came here in 1651 at a salary of forty five pounds a year, plus a house. This sum was promised by the General Court and paid by an assessment on all freeholders; what we would call a property tax. The first church building was also erected by the General Court and paid for by public funds. This situation lasted in East Hampton until the 1840's – as late as the ministry of Samuel Ely, ministers were called and paid by the Town Trustees.

The church was called simply "the meeting house." They were not conscious of being affiliated with any denomination, and for us to attribute any denominational label to them is incorrect. Later, in the 18th century as America became much more religiously pluralistic, the Puritan movement became denominational. In fact it divided into two denominations, Presbyterian and Congregational and the churches in Long Island became Presbyterian, but that is another story. It is incorrect to describe the church in East Hampton in its early days as "Congregationalist". It was simply "the meeting house."

In April of 1649, Lion Gardiner wrote to Governor Winthrop of Connecticut asking him to assist in finding a "suitable minister" for East Hampton.

As concerning the young Man you writ of, this is our determination, not to have above twelve families, and we know that we can pay as much as twenty-four in other places . . . . At present we are able to give this man your writ of Twenty Pounds a year, with such diet as I myself eat, till we see what the Lord will do with us; and being he is but a young man, happily he hath not many books, therefore let him know what I have.

And Gardiner proceeded to include a list of his small, but select, theological library, some of which are still to be found in our marvelous library across the street with Thomas James' notes in the margins. Thus the Proprietor and the Minister were immediately established as soul-mates - supporting, encouraging and befriending each other to the very end.

It was, in fact, not until August, 1651 that Thomas James arrived in East Hampton - at a salary more than twice what Gardiner had first offered. In addition to forty-five pounds a year, James was given twelve acres, including enough woodland to provide for his fuel needs, and the first grain to be ground at the mill each Monday.

The villagers were still worshipping in Thomas Baker's "ordinary" but in the fall of 1651 they decided to build a meeting house. It was built on a site in what is now the South Burying Ground. Lion Gardiner's home was directly across the street, and Thomas James lived next to Gardiner.

East Hampton was isolated, but it maintained economic, social and political connections with Connecticut. The Connecticut Colony had been established in 1634 under the leadership of Thomas Hooker who rebelled against the extreme theological rigidity of John Cotton and the Boston establishment. From the beginning the New England Puritans were less monolithic theologically than is commonly assumed, and Hooker was more evangelical, less legalistic, than the Bostonians.

Although the desire for more land was also a reason for their exodus, Hooker put more

reliance on God's grace and less on the unconditional nature of God's election than Cotton did, and he had a much less restrictive conception of church membership. The precise issue at controversy here was whether a child could be baptized whose parents could not - or did not wish to - testify to an "experience of grace."

A more important issue was that this "experience" was, in Boston, a qualification for church membership; and church membership was a qualification for eligibility to vote. Thus this extremely scholastic version of Calvinism also gave the ministers and elders in Boston the right to control the voting franchise for the first two generations. That was not true in the Connecticut Colony - though it was in the New Haven Colony - and it was never true in East Hampton.

Thomas James immediately became an indispensable member of the tiny village of East Hampton. It was normal for the minister, as one of the few educated members of the community, to be the teacher, to be everybody's secretary, to witness wills and arbitrate minor disputes. James repeatedly served as a trustee of the town, and often as secretary of the board. He also watched over and defended their political rights. He learned the Algonquin language of the Montaukets and was frequently called upon to be an interpreter between the settlers and the indigenous inhabitants of this peninsula.

For the first several years the villagers had no sort of written laws, they simply lived together under the tacit and implied common law with which they were familiar. In 1654 however, Thomas James wrote Governor Winthrop and secured a copy of the Connecticut Combination - or Charter - and in October of that year they adopted a version of that document as the charter of the town. It was their minister, Thomas James, who drafted the document and wrote the copy which the thirty male freeholders in East Hampton signed.

It is a stereotypic statement of Puritan political theory:

Forasmuch as it hath Pleas'd the Almighty God by the wise dispensation of his providence, so to Order and Dispose of things that we, the Inhabitants of East Hampton are now dwelling together; the word of God requires that to maintain the Peace and Union of such a people there should be an Orderly and Decent Government established according to God . . . to maintain and pre of such Gospel, as now practiced among us. As also in our civil affairs to be guided and Governed by such Laws and Order as shall be made according to God, and which by vote of the Major Part shall be in force among us. You will note that there is no reference to the authority of the King. Like the Mayflower Compact, divine authority is given to the people to govern themselves - in this case "the major part" meaning majority.

In 1660 the Puritan experiment in government failed in England, owing to its radical excesses, and the Stuart Charles II was restored to the throne. Governor Winthrop hastened to London to pledge loyalty to the new government and came back with a Charter for the Connecticut Colony - including the "island adjacent" - which among other things guaranteed freedom of worship to protestant dissenters. This was the legal basis on which the East Hampton Church continued to practice its Puritan theology and liturgy,

even after it was forcibly incorporated into the Royal Colony of New York a few years later when the English expelled the Dutch from New Amsterdam.

The Puritans of the East End strenuously protested against becoming part of New York, but to no avail. There then began constant problems with royal governors and their representatives and streams of petitions and protests over taxes and other matters. An "Address" to the Governor, written October 1, 1685 protests that a representative assembly which had formerly met at Hempstead had been abrogated. The letter, which was written by Thomas James, claimed that such representation was "a fundamental privilege of our English nation." It goes on to express the fear that "by denial of such privilege, our freedom should be turned into bondage and our ancient privileges so infringed yt they will never arrive at our posterity.

The next year a much more serious incident occurred involving a land dispute. Skipping the details of this controversy, which are well documented and not particularly relevant, eleven prominent citizens of East Hampton were ordered arrested on the grounds that a petition they had presented to the governor was libelous.

The next Sunday, October 17, 1686, Thomas James preached a fiery sermon supporting his parishioners. His text, wrenched absolutely out of its context, was from the Book of Job, "some remove the landmark." Josiah Hubbert, the Sheriff of Suffolk County, described the sermon in a letter to the Royal Council:

. . . the whole subject of his sermon was to show the evill and pronounce the Curses against those who removed their Neighbor's Land Markers and in his applicacon he brought it to the present Matter of this Towne . . . /He said that/ this order for it was noe excuse through it were an Edict from the King himself.

The next morning a warrant for James' arrest was issued, and he was taken to jail where he spent the next three weeks until he petitioned the Governor to release him on the grounds that he was a loyal subject of King James II.

As Henry Hedges, the first historian of East Hampton wrote in 1849:

East Hampton was happy in its choice of minister. For nearly half a century he had been an able and devout minister to his people, intelligent in the understanding of their rights as free-born Englishmen, fearless in their defence. Only with his last breath went out his watchful regard as their minister. In attestation of his conscious discharge of duty, his intrepid soul prompted the desire to be so buried as to rise facing his people on the resurrection morn. The same tradition also assumes - with perhaps more dubious validity - that the congregation, or at least a quorum of it, will be in place to rise, facing the minister.

One of the interim supplies engaged during James' last years was Nathanael Huntting, then a twenty-one year old Harvard graduate, who came to East Hampton in 1696 to "assist" Mr. James, though he was not ordained and installed as pastor until three years later.

Huntting had graduated from Harvard College in 1693 and received an M.A. degree, which was extremely unusual in the 17th century, in 1696. He was secured for East Hampton by the redoubtable Samuel Mulford who journeyed to Massachusetts to make the choice and present the call. Huntting came to East Hampton with his bride, Mary, and occupied the house which the Town: "by unanimous vote: Doe freely give and grant unto him . . . and his heirs . . . forever." This house, as you know, was operated after his death by the Huntting family as "a common publick house," as it was derisively called, until quite recent times. Huntting's salary was sixty pounds a year, plus firewood. According to the records the salary and the firewood were granted "by a Major vote" while the house grant unanimous. Does this mean that there was controversy over the salary? I do not know.

By the beginning of the 18th century, the Puritan movement was running out of steam, especially in Boston and at Harvard College. The idea of a Holy Commonwealth, standing in a national covenant with its Lord, was fading. By the third generation, Puritan theology had frequently degenerated into scholasticism and the national covenant, once a mainstay of Puritan thought, was yielding to moralistic individualism.

Cotton Mather, the grandson of the great Boston divine John Cotton and Nathanael Huntting's teacher at Harvard, documents this decline in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, published in 1702, a vast biographical and historical record which purports to be a history of "Christ's great deeds in America." It is generally thought to be the high-water mark of Puritan scholasticism; but because it is so tedious and so difficult, no one has, in fact, ever read it. Here as Mather surveys the religious scene in southern New England - which is what he thought American consisted of - he finds little to praise. *Religio peperit Divitias, Filia devoravit Matrem* Religion brought forth prosperity, and the daughter has destroyed the mother.

The so-called "Half Way Covenant," which permitted baptized persons who had not themselves become church members to present their children for baptism, increased the numbers, but not the zeal, of the church. The best known stories of the third and fourth generation concern witch-craft trials, fanatical intolerance of dissent, and a static quality to religion. Though the records do not say this, of course, the absence of any evidence to the contrary suggests that the same thing was happening in East Hampton.

Certainly by the beginning of Huntting's ministry the "Half Way Covenant" was in effect here, though whether it was instituted by James or Huntting cannot be determined. Skipping the theological details, it is simply a liberalization of Puritan theology, a watering down of the previous zeal. It is both a recognition of and a cause of the decline of vital religion among the New England Puritans around the turn of the 18th century.

East Hampton genealogists and historians can, however, be eternally grateful to Nathanael Huntting for his meticulous habits of record-keeping. His book of baptisms, marriages and deaths is an invaluable source, and the oldest such record in the town. Huntting's scholarship is also impressive. He copied a theological textbook, Willard's *Body of Divinity* and there are hundreds and hundreds of his sermon manuscripts in the East Hampton library. Anyone who reads these - and I have, at least, glanced at a few of

them - would be impressed with the accuracy of Hunting's reputation as a man of profound scholarship.

Controversy with the royal governors continued and increased, and though the right of dissenters to worship legally was no longer contested, East Hampton residents objected vociferously to the requirement that they pay taxes to support the established Anglican Church. In fact, in the long series of controversies between Samuel Mulford, whom East Hampton regularly elected to the General Assembly of the colony, and Lord Cornbury, the fanatically High Church royal governor, the payment of church taxes was routinely included among Mulford's protests against "encroachments of our Liberties."

In 1728 the East Hampton Trustees voted that "right or wrong, the town money shall go to ye payment of Mr. Hunting's taxes," meaning his support, though whether this protest was successful is not recorded.

Toward the end of Hunting's active career in East Hampton, the malaise which had affected religion in this country came to a more or less sudden end with what is called the "Great Awakening." It began as early as 1734 when a revival of religion occurred under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts. The revival itself, however, should be neither surprising nor accidental. Puritanism was itself, by expressed intent, a religious reform movement which carried the seeds of its own reform within it.

Led by a remarkable series of ministers, the revival spread quickly throughout western Massachusetts and Connecticut. Yale College, founded in 1701, became a center of revival influence; while Harvard, which opposed it, gradually drifted into liberal Unitarianism. It is interesting to note in passing that evangelicalism and Unitarianism are the twin children of Puritanism - equal heirs.

The revival occurred simultaneously throughout the English colonies, from Georgia to New Hampshire. In 1740 George Whitefield, the English disciple of John Wesley though Calvinist in his theology, came to New England on his second visit to America. Whitefield attracted thousands of people wherever he preached - 8,000 in Boston Commons, for example, in 1740. Whitefield took a dim view of the religious situation in New England: I am verily persuaded the Generality of Preachers talk of an unknown, unfelt, Christ. And the Reason why Congregations have been so dead, is because dead Men preach to them.

One of Whitefield's followers was John Davenport, a young Yale graduate, in fact the grandson of Yale's founder, who became minister of the church in Southhold in 1738. After spending a summer with Whitefield in New England, he came to East Hampton. According to the historian, "everywhere he aroused resentment and opposition by his fanatical harangues and his arrogant attacks on 'unconverted' ministers."

The local historians simply record that there was a great religious revival in the winter of 1740-41 and mention that owing to Hunting's advanced age and infirmity "the controversial Mr. Davenport" was the preacher. What undoubtedly happened was that the

itinerant revivalist came to town and the minister was torn between a wish to prevent the unseemly excesses which had accompanied Davenport's preaching elsewhere and the fact that the fiery young preacher was both very popular and very effective.

My guess is that Huntting would have tried, unsuccessfully, it turned out, to prevent Davenport from preaching in the East Hampton Church. It is apparent that at least some of the congregation liked the radicalism of the itinerant revivalist and began to attend the services he conducted rather than those conducted by Mr. Huntting. The records of both church and town are silent as to how this irregular situation was dealt with, but it must certainly have caused grief for the elderly and somewhat old fashioned minister. One of Huntting's successors, and my predecessors, Earnest Eels, quotes Davenport as calling Huntting "a carnal old Pharisee," "a blind guide" and saying that the venerable old man, who had been a faithful pastor here for forty-four years was "unconverted." This kind of thing, especially as it was apparently supported by at least some of the congregation, must have torn the church apart.

After leaving East Hampton in the spring of 1741, Davenport began an assault on the southern coast of Connecticut and Rhode Island. He was arrested in Stamford under Connecticut's law against itinerant preaching, tried by the General Assembly at Hartford, judged mentally disturbed, and deported under guard to Long Island. His excesses continued unabated, however, and he was arrested at least twice more in Connecticut and Massachusetts, where he was declared by the court to be non compos mentis and expelled; but he apparently continued to be the pastor in Southhold, and preach occasionally in East Hampton throughout the remainder of Huntting's tenure here.

In 1745, with the congregation seriously divided, some in East Hampton began to look around for another minister to assist Mr. Huntting and to succeed him after his death. An invitation was extended to the Rev. David Brainard, a very famous missionary to the Indians in Massachusetts and Long Island whose diary, which I have in my possession, is a wonderful account of that work. There was opposition in the congregation to this invitation, however, and Brainard declined it.

Just at that time, as the Town Council was lamenting the cost of searching for another minister, Samuel Buell appeared in East Hampton with a letter of introduction from the Rev. Aaron Burr, Sr. a Presbyterian minister in Newark, New Jersey. Dear Sir, These come by Mr. Buell whom we have prevailed with to make you a visit. It seems a very kind Providence yt sent him into these parts at this time.

He appears to me to be the most likely person to unite your people. He is a pious, judicious, and ingenuous young man, and an excellent preacher.

You will be pleased with him, and find occasion to bless God yt he is sent among you. Mr. Tennent joins with me in recommending him to you, in ye fullness of ye blessings of the Gospel of Peace. We should not have stopped his designed journey to Virginia for any other place . . .

All the available local records indicate that Mr. Huntting retired voluntarily, owing to his advanced age and infirmity. But I cannot help but wonder if the old gentlemen was perhaps eased into retirement by the controversy in the church stirred up by John Davenport and by the availability of a much younger and more dynamic successor. In any case, Huntting did retire in 1746, at the age of seventy one, after serving as the minister in East Hampton for forty nine years. He lived in retirement for seven years and died in 1753.

Samuel Buell was, in fact, an excellent choice as the third minister in East Hampton, a worthy advocate of the revival who exhibited none of the excessive emotionalism which had characterized the extremists such as Davenport. During Buell's early ministry there were several periods of revival in the church, in which large numbers of new members were received, but the controversy seems to have dissipated. Buell published several accounts of these revivals, and it is evident that the church did experience a significant renewal and revitalization in his early ministry.

Buell was ordained in East Hampton on September 19, 1746. His ordination sermon was preached by the greatest and most renowned minister in America, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards, like Buell, is typical of the best of the revival ministers. These are not ranting TV preachers or sawdust hucksterers who in this century have demeaned the name revivalist; these were fervent, effective, and scholarly evangelical ministers who were always dignified and sober in demeanor. Edward's ordination sermon, "The Church's Marriage to her Sons and to her God," which is in our library, amply demonstrates this. It is a scholarly work of thirty seven octavo pages, with carefully crafted arguments and skilled use of language.

You have now heard, Reverend Sir, the great Importance, and high Ends of the Office of evangelical Pastor, and the glorious Priviledges of such as are faithful to this Office, . . . May God grant that your Union with this People, this Day, as their Pastor, may be such that God's People here may have the great Promise God makes to the Church in this Text, now fulfilled unto them. . . .

He concludes, thirty five pages later: Let me take Occasion, dear Brethren, from what has been said, to exhort you, not forgetting the Respect, Honour, and Reverence, that will ever be due from you to your former Pastor, that has served you so long in that Work, but by Reason of Age and growing Infirmities, and the Prospects of his Place being so happily supplied by a Successor, has seen met to relinquish this Burden of the Pastoral Charge over you.

One of the characteristics of the revival was the establishment of schools, and New England is still peppered by academies and colleges which were begun under the auspices of the "New Light" ministers. The names Dartmouth, Brown, Amherst, Andover and Hamilton are familiar. To them can be added "Clinton Academy," which is one of Buell's most enduring legacies. In 1753 Buell established the first library in East Hampton when he wrote in the front of his own books, "This book belongs to the Philogrammatican Library in East Hampton, 1753." Many of these books are still

available to you this afternoon - or Monday morning.

At about the same time as Buell became its minister, the East Hampton Church became Presbyterian. Buell was, in fact, one of the charter members of Suffolk Presbytery which was organized in April, 1747 in Southampton. Seven ministers were present: Buell, and the pastors from Southampton, Bridgehampton, Brookhaven, Mattituck, Cutchogue, and Huntington.

Suffolk Presbytery affiliated itself with the Synod of New York which was the "New Side" branch of the Presbyterian Church - the church having divided in 1745 over the revival. The New Side, which was pro-revival, was attractive to the Puritan churches in New York and New Jersey. They brought a dimension of theological and liturgical freedom into a Presbyterian denomination, then largely Scottish and Scot-Irish and mostly confined to the Middle Colonies. Suffolk Presbytery, which became Long Island Presbytery a few years later, was only very loosely Presbyterian in the early days. The local congregations continued to order their affairs much as they always had. When the two branches of the Presbyterian Church reunited in 1757, this Puritan influence became a permanent feature of American Presbyterianism - causing it to be significantly different, in some ways, from the established church in Scotland.

Like both his predecessors, Buell was actively involved in the public affairs of this community. In May of 1756 a large contingent of Suffolk County men assembled in East Hampton before leaving for Lake George to fight in the French and Indian war. The day before they left, the church service was devoted to their send-off. Buell preached from I Chronicles 19:13 Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God, and let the Lord do that which is good in his sight."

His sermon is a classic exposition of the "just war" theory which was first articulated by St. Augustine in the 5th century. Making the point that a defensive war is frequently necessary as well as lawful and an offensive war sometimes so, he then asserted that 'tis so notorious a cause that we wage in war at this time, none need scruple the lawfulness of it - 'tis in defence of our own people, and the cities of our God - 'tis for a land that is ours by the first discovery and priority of possession, which is allow'd to give title among civilized nations . . . 'tis . . . for the good of prosperity as well as our own that we now wage in war.

We learn by experience 'tis impossible to live by such blood thirsty neighbors as the French and their allies in America. They have broken the most solemn treaties, made most unjust encroachments and committed the most horrid barbarities in a time of professed peace. By their line of forts, surrounding our frontiers by land, they design we shall have but a garden spot in America - and as soon as possibly strong enough, to drive us all into sea - or, subject us to popish tyranny and superstition worse than death . . . while villainy secures all - our lives, our liberties, our religion.

The growing controversy with the Royal Governors, and resentment against British colonial policies affected East Hampton, of course, as they did all of British North

America. These controversies, and the story of East Hampton during the Revolutionary War are well documented. One cannot support Judge Hedges' comment, however, made in 1849, that there was not a single Tory in East Hampton. While hundreds of supporters of the revolutionary cause - including scores from East Hampton - fled eastern Long Island for Connecticut in the fall of 1776, after the British victory at the Battle of Long Island, most of the residents remained here and acquiesced to the British occupation of the area as best they could.

During the war and the British occupation of Long Island, Buell conducted a regular correspondence with leaders of both sides, especially the Patriot Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, and the Royal Governor, Lord Tryon, who for at least part of the war maintained his headquarters in Southampton. He complained to each about the other, especially the depredations which the armies of both sides wrought on the livestock of East Hampton. Though he protested to each his loyalty to their cause, he also fearlessly condemned soldiers of both sides who came here to steal cattle - as evidently both sides did.

Throughout the war - with General William Erskine headquartered in the Brown House on Main Street and British warships often anchored in Gardiner Bay - Buell, along with the townspeople who had not fled to Connecticut, maintained cordial relations with their military occupiers. He, along with most of the residents of East Hampton who remained here, took the oath of allegiance to George the Third which Colonial Abraham Gardiner required, and he routinely assured the Royal Governor of his loyalty to the British.

Tryon was not deceived, and described Buell to Lord Germain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, by saying: Rev'd Mr. Buell, Presbyterian Minister of East Hampton . . . a favorer of the Rebel Rank until converted by the victory of the 27th August. . . referring to the British victory at the Battle of Long Island.

In the third year of the war, Buell worked out a barter arrangement between Trumbull and Tryon by which commodities - "rum, sugar, molasses, tea - whatever may please the ladies. . . except salt and military goods . . ." could be exchanged between Long Island and Connecticut. Buell as a minister he was perhaps better able than others to maintain a relationship with both sides in the war, to the benefit of the people of the town.

Buell summed up his own credo in a letter written to Governor Trumbull in 1778: I cannot afford oil to those springs which seem to move and accelerate or retard the Wheels of State as on one Side or the Other . . . at whatever Bar of the Public I may stand - and perhaps stand impeached, for my conduct in the present Day - I am not anxiously concerned - if Wisdom sits at the helm of government and Justice tempered with clemency, holds the Balance of retribution . . . secure within myself . . . am incomparably more concerned for the Weal and Prosperity of my Native Country and the Public.

There is no doubt that under a military occupation, Buell, as a faithful pastor, did the best he could to preserve as much of normal life as was possible under extremely difficult circumstances. There is also no doubt that no matter who won the war, the minister

would have been on the winning side. Perhaps those of us who have never lived under military occupation should refrain from criticizing the conduct of those who do.

In 1783, with the ratification of the Treaty of Paris, the British evacuated New York City and Long Island, and the people of East Hampton proceeded to elect representatives to the New York State Assembly. Almost immediately Buell turned his attention to the establishment of a school in East Hampton, and on December 28, 1784 the "East Hampton Academy" was incorporated. Five days later the school opened in the Presbyterian Church, where it met until the building now known as Clinton Academy was constructed at a cost of \$5,000. Buell died on July 19, 1798.

For the third time in a row East Hampton called a very young minister, straight from the university, to succeed its elderly, venerable, but perhaps tired and feeble pastor. This time they may well have gotten more than they bargained for, for although the people of East Hampton must by now have become tolerant of ministerial eccentricities, peculiarities and outspoken involvement in public affairs, they were probably not prepared for Lyman Beecher. One writer comments that Beecher's five feet, seven inch statue "in no way indicated his strength when he battled for the Lord, and even less betrayed the formidable character of the resistance he could offer to the minions of hell."

The stories about Beecher's eccentricities, and the controversies between with the Trustees over his salary are well known and well documented. He did, after all, write an autobiography and there are numerous books and articles by and about the man who was without doubt the most famous minister in America in the 1830's and '40's. The best and most recent of them is by my professor at Duke, Stuart Henry, entitled Unvanquished Puritan. Beecher, called "the father of half the brains in America" had eleven children who survived infancy. The first five were born in East Hampton - including Catherine, an educator, feminist, and author of eighteen books. Harriet and Henry Ward, the most renowned of the children, were born in Litchfield.

Beecher graduated from Yale where he studied theology under Timothy Dwight - the great defender of orthodoxy against the depredations of deism and French rationalism. He tells in his autobiography of reading the obituary for Samuel Buell and of discussing with a friend the possibility that he might be called to succeed to what was quite a prestigious pulpit. His friend, Tudor Davis, came to East Hampton, where he apparently had connections, and returned to New Haven to report that the orthodox faction of the church were looking for a minister who could "stand his ground in argument and break the heads of the infidels."

Beecher found here a church that was to some degree at least, divided by the "Age of Enlightenment" and influenced by deism. He blamed two faculty members at Clinton Academy for introducing "infidelity and French rationalism" into East Hampton. It is difficult to know at this remove how serious a threat this was, but there was a group in town called the "Infidel Club" - more of a drinking club than a theological discussion group would be my guess.

Beecher immediately became controversial. He was nick-named the "snow bird" - not because he went to Florida in the winter, but because neither storm nor season stopped his ceaseless movement. His attack on "The Infidel Club" can best be told - at least from his own perspective - in his own words:

I did not attack infidelity directly. Not at all. That would have been cracking a whip behind a runaway team . . . make them run faster. I always preached right to the conscience. Every sermon with my eye on the gun to hit somebody. Went through the doctrines; showed what they didn't mean; what they did; then the argument; knocked away objections, and drive home on the conscience. . . . At first there was winking and blinking from below to gallery, forty or fifty exchanging glances, smiling and watching. But when it was over, infidelity was ended.

It is obvious that Beecher appealed to at least some of the younger, more zealous members of the congregation. Equally obvious, he was an embarrassment to the older, more established, perhaps more dignified - shall we say stuffy? - parishioners. The controversy with the town authorities over his salary, therefore, conceals a larger controversy over the style of his ministry.

Beecher was one of the first persons to interest himself in East Hampton history. On New Year's Day, 1806, he delivered a sermon on the history of the church and town. Acknowledging the outstanding collection of records of which East Hampton is justly proud - at least I hope you are sufficiently proud of it - Beecher said about the early settlers: They would have abhorred the infidel maxim, that religion and politics have no connection . . . . They considered that the precepts of their religion as extending to the regulation of their civil as well as to the regulation of their moral conduct . . . .

The seeds for Beecher's national reputation - which centered around his controversy with the Unitarians in Boston, with the fundamentalists in Cincinnati, and over abolition everywhere - may have been laid in East Hampton by a sermon he preached here in 1804. Two of the most famous statesmen in America - Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr - met in a duel that was fatal to both. Hamilton lost his life, and Burr his reputation. Shocked over the death of Hamilton, the nation was scandalized by the behavior of Burr, who, under indictment for murder, appeared as Vice President to preside over the United States Senate.

In the midst of this intense national uproar, Beecher preached a sermon which, because of its wide circulation, became sensational. Blaming "infidelity" which many took to be a thinly veiled reference to Jeffersonian deism, Beecher said:

There is no way to deal with these men . . . but to take the punishment of their crimes into our own hands. Our conscience must be the judge, and we must ourselves convict, and fine, and disgrace them at the polls.

The anti-dueling movement became a national crusade, with Beecher as one of its main leaders; and a few years later, in Henry Clay's presidential campaign against Andrew Jackson, an alleged duelist, it was said that 40,000 copies of Beecher's sermon were

distributed around the country by the Whigs.

You may be interested in a brief summary of Beecher's career after he left East Hampton. Ordained in Connecticut as a Congregationalist, he became a Presbyterian in East Hampton. He then served Congregational Churches in Litchfield, Connecticut and Boston, where he became nationally known as the main opponent of the Unitarians. In 1832 he became a Presbyterian again when he accepted the Presidency of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. Immediately he became embroiled in the national controversy over abolition and at the same time he became the victim of attacks by Presbyterian fundamentalists - a breed he had never met in Long Island or New England. In 1835, in a sensational and nationally famous trial, he was narrowly acquitted of heresy charges by the Presbytery of Cincinnati.

Beecher, seven of whose sons became ministers, returned to East Hampton in 1843 with two of them - William and Edward - and all three preached here the same day. Judge Hedges, who was in the congregation, describes the marvelous event in great detail.

These four ministers were a truly remarkable quartet; the first three by virtue of their long tenure, and all four by the fervor and vigor of their ministry here. All four were brilliant, all four were eccentric, all four were men of tireless energy. All four engaged the issues of the day and thus stand in the best and most noble tradition of the Reformed branch of Christianity.

Thomas James was the clerk of the Town Trustees for many years and wrote - presumably he also drafted - petition after petition to the Royal Governors asserting the right of a free people to govern themselves - to levy taxes on themselves for the support of causes they favored, to meet in representative assemblies to make decisions about the community's affairs, to support only those religious institutions which were in accord with their understanding of the Word of God. When he believed these rights were imperiled, he was willing to go to jail on a charge of sedition in defense of them.

Nathanael Huntting, though more of a scholar than any of the others, was often thought a suitable choice, frequently along with Samuel Mulford, to represent East Hampton before the Royal Governors when petitions of grievances were to be presented.

Samuel Buell was a patriotic supporter of the colonists' grievances against the colonial government and in the difficult days of the military occupation he was the principle spokesperson for the community in dealing with authorities on both sides. He thought that starting a school and a public library was an appropriate concern for a minister.

Lyman Beecher, though a bit of a gadabout, was absolutely fearless in attacking evil wherever he saw it - including the prominent members of the congregation he served. An unashamed partisan, he had no problem with his famous sermon being widely circulated as an anti-Jefferson tract.

So these were remarkable men. I must say also, in passing, that they served a remarkable congregation. The members of the local church seem to be incredibly long-suffering in

their willingness to endure the eccentricities, the peculiarities, the very human frailties of their ministers. They tolerated theological and political hobby-horses; supported protest, revival, revolution; and though they didn't pay them much, they built beautiful church sanctuaries and gave the ministers fine homes in which to live - two of which, Hunting's and Beecher's, still grace Main Street.

These men were parsons - in the old fashioned sense, meaning "chief person of the community." Whether they were the chief citizen of East Hampton, they were certainly among the leading citizens in the days when the minister was not only the spiritual leader of the community, but also its conscience, its teacher, its advocate. It is a humbling honor to be the nineteenth minister of the East Hampton Church.

1. Letters of Lion Gardiner, p. 34
2. Town Records, vol.1, p.12
3. Town Records, vol 2, p. 169.