

“In the Beginning....”

Anne Krantz, Historian

Previous church historians have written regular articles for the *Spire*. Gene Cronin faithfully researched and wrote a church history column for the *Spire* that first appeared in March 1999, rarely missing an issue until he retired from the position in August 2002. Gene left us a wonderful series of 37 articles covering a wide range of topics, including the difficult times for our congregation during the abolition period before the Civil War. Sharon Beckley continued to write “Back in Time” *Spire* articles during her tenure as Historian.

This past summer, with Andrea’s help, I located the Cronin articles in the files. Andrea scanned them and put them on a USB drive so I could read them and make small edits. Sharon’s series of *Back in Time* articles were also scanned for this historical collection. Andrea is now reformatting them so they all have consistent columns, page size, etc. The hope is that we can put them online for all to read and enjoy.

The project to frame some old letters written by former church ministers, along with other handwritten church documents, has provided us with a new opportunity to learn more about our history from original sources. The earliest document is, of course, our *Covenant*, written on September 22, 1741. Its facsimile hangs with the collection in the upstairs hall next to the parlor door. An aspect of this project was to transcribe all the framed letters from the hard-to-read cursive. Bill Vielle, our neighbor and President of Northeast Documents Center, sent us transcription guidelines, and transcribed the *Covenant* as an example. All framed letters have now been transcribed by Katrina Holman and myself, and the transcriptions are in a notebook in the desk drawer in the hallway.

Covenant Transcription—This photo shows what the first few lines look like. The immediate question is what is the big scribble at the top? Bill’s transcription notes explain that they are Daniel Wilkins’ initials. The Reverend Daniel Wilkins, our new Harvard educated pastor, was apparently in charge of this endeavor and, like John Hancock, made it known. But the next line introduces Jeannie Shepard. Who was she and why is her name, a woman who back then had no vote or say in church business, mentioned in the very first line? For those of us who forgot to take Latin, Bill points out this line is written in Latin, which he translates: “Ex dono” is Latin for “gift of.” The next letter is not a \downarrow but an \updownarrow for *Ioannes*, Latin for ‘Johathan’ Shepard. Bill explains that “This may be Col. John SHEPARD Jr. (1731?–1802), a justice of the peace and the son of Col.



John Shepard (1706?–1785), who signed the original covenant, of which this is a copy.” *jus. Pacis*” is Latin for “Justice of the Peace.”

Here is the format used in official transcriptions showing that spelling corrections or inserted words are in brackets, and the numbered notes are at the bottom of the page:

DW

Church Book Ex dono Ioannei [Ioannes] Shepard jus. Pacis

The Church in Amherst [N.H.] imbodyed the 22 of September 1741. the Covenant

is as followeth viz

These are likely the initials of the Rev. Daniel Wilkins (1710–1784), the first pastor of the Congregational Church of Amherst, N.H.

“Ex dono” is Latin for “gift of.”

“Ioannes” is Latin for “Jonathan.”

This may be Col. John SHEPARD Jr. (1731?–1802), a justice of the peace and the son of Col. John Shepard (1706?–1785), who signed the original covenant, of which this is a copy.

“jus. Pacis” is Latin for “Justice of the Peace.”