

On Sunday, June 10th, 2018, the day we held our Frame Raising Celebration, Pastor Joel shared this message entitled, "*They Labored Not in Vain.*" Based on the passages from Psalm 127:1-2 and Matthew 7:21-27. The Psalm passage is the one quoted on the plaque in the sanctuary, commemorating the restoration and re-dedication of the sanctuary on June 20, 1999.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it, labor in vain."

I want to tell you a story. It is the story about this church, this sanctuary building. And since you are here, even if you have never been here before, but are here now, sitting inside this building today, it is now part of your story too.

200 years ago, on June 13th, 1818, the frame of this building was raised up. It was a Saturday and most likely a fair day, since they wouldn't have begun the work if the weather had not been accommodating.

It was an eventful day, a day many had been anticipating. Judge William Crosby, father of the later to become Governor William G. Crosby, spoke to the occasion and workers from the neighboring towns, accustomed to handling heavy timber, would have come to help out. We are told in Joseph Williamson's *The History of the City of Belfast*, that a barrel of punch, also referred to as "grog" was provided by the parish committee.

"Grog" was a mixture of water and rum. Apparently the British Royal Navy had instituted a mixture of 4 parts water to 1 part rum for its sailors while at sea. This accomplished a number of things. First, fresh water kept in casks, would over time stagnate and become slimy with algae. Adding alcohol to it, kept it fresh longer and made its taste sweeter. Secondly, if given their rations of rum straight, sailors tended to hoard it until they had enough to get drunk on, and this for obvious reasons, created problems. Adding water to the rum, diluted its effects, but also caused it to spoil more quickly, thus discouraging sailors from hoarding it. So giving the sailors grog, kept the water palatable and kept the sailors from getting drunk. My assumption of why the

workers here were given grog, is that it was just a nice treat, a little something special to serve as a way of the church people saying thank you, to those who came to lend a hand.

It would have been a very exciting day, with all the workers here, and the church people gathered to watch it all take place. Beams would have been lifted, secured into position, and whole sides of the framing heaved up into place. Remember, there were no cranes, no machines to do all the heavy lifting. Just pulleys and rope and rigging, and strong men to do the labor. I'm sure the whole town would have turned out to watch the construction.

Talking to Gary Grant about this, he reminded me that this wasn't just a one day deal. The frame itself, that is the outer framework of the building, may have gone up in just one or two days, with the rest of the building requiring months to finish. But what Gary was talking about was the time of preparation even *before* the frame raising day. So much would have had to have been prepared and made ready before this day could have come.

We know that Samuel French was the Master Builder and he would have had a hired crew that worked under him. And before any frame could have been raised, they would have had to build a deck or floor to put the frame on. Before that, they would have had to build a foundation to support the decking. Before that they would have had to find and hew the trees, some of them of amazing girth, which would become the beams of this building. When you go up in the attic and look at those beams, some of them must have come from trees with a 24" diameter. They're huge! All of the beams would have had to have been measured and

cut to the specific sizes needed, and Master Builder French would have had to have all of that figured out. Before that they would have had to clear the ground and find the most accessible part of the property suitable for the building of the structure. And if you've ever been down in the cellar, where our boiler sits, you know that they must have had quite a time digging out that space. It's like a cave down there! Solid bedrock! But even before that, this land had been pasture land. It was lightly wooded, and one of the historians speaks about there being stumps from the trees that had been felled and knolls that needed to be leveled, even after the building had been built. There was so much work that had to be done before that exciting day here, 200 years ago.

And even before any of that work could begin, there needed to be a vision, an idea of a new meeting house in this small town of Belfast. There had been 2 meeting houses built in 1792, one on each side of the river. They had been of a more modest design. The east side meeting house was two-stories, 50' x 40'. On the west side, a single story, 40' x 40', but it was finished inside, with regular pews. These had served them a for a long period of time.



REV. W.M. FROTHINGHAM

But the people were ready for a more formal church structure and the presence of a new minister, Mr. William Frothingham, who had taken the job of Preceptor of the

Academy here, and who had preached a few times to their great satisfaction, spurred their hope of a new meeting house, in part, to persuade him to become their pastor. And so, on the second day of February in 1818, the parish voted to build, and a committee of 19 men was chosen to begin plans and find a location for their new church.

That group would submit a plan for a structure 67' long by 50' in width, containing 64 pews. The estimated cost was \$6,000, of which \$5,490 had been provided by an auctioning of 61 of those pews. The design would be based on the Congregational Church of Rev. Dr. Tappen in Augusta. That structure no longer exists as it burned down in a lightning storm in 1864. It was based on a design found in a book, *The Country Builder's Assistant*, written by Asher Benjamin in 1797. It is remarkable how similar his design is to our church.

William White \$136. 60	William Moody, \$136. 61	Charles K. Tilden, \$201. 62	R. Kimball, \$136. 63	Geo. Watson, \$91. 64	Minister. 65	FULPIT.	Let to J. Furman \$128. 66	S. Upton, \$136. 67	Joe. Lee, \$136. 68	T. Cunningham, Jr. \$163. 69	M. Stepper, \$146. 70	William Crosby, \$152. 71
Thomas Bartlett, \$127. 39	Philip Merrill, \$127. 38	Hudson Bishop, \$138. 37	Phineas Kelham, \$134. 36	William Schmond, \$100. 35	T. Bartlett, \$132. 41	John Wilson, \$136. 52	George Watson, \$135. 11	Thos. Pickard, \$120. 33	Robert Miller, \$122. 43	R. Patterson, 4th \$176. 21	B. Whittier, \$171. 40	N. Phillips, \$121. 32
Paul Giles, \$122. 42	Nathan Read, \$120. 41	S. Jackson, \$103. 40	Otho Abbot, \$101. 38	Let to W. Hatch. 34	John Angier, \$150. 50	B. P. Field, \$161. 19	R. B. Allyn, \$181. 9	Robert White, \$118. 31	Eben Poor, \$101. 35	B. Hazeltine, \$129. 15	E. McFarland, \$170. 8	J. White, \$112. 30
J. S. Spring, \$101. 39	Robert Brier, \$101. 35	J. S. Kimball, \$135. 17	T. Cunningham, \$101. 34	Let to A. Edmunds. 12	W. Crosby, \$150. 18	W. West and B. Hartshorn, 23	J. P. Ladd, \$146. 7	S. Nickerson, \$102. 81	S. Spring, \$101. 39	J. Williamson, \$139. 10	J. McKinley, \$135. 5	Nathan Swan, \$101. 28
John Furman, \$101. 45	John Furman, \$101. 46	John T. Poor, \$132. 47	John Furman, \$101. 48	R. Furman, 2d, \$101. 45	John Furman, \$101. 49	Alfred Johnson, Jr., \$135. 50	R. C. Johnson, \$135. 48	Ralph C. Johnson, \$135. 48	John Furman, \$101. 45	John Furman, \$101. 46	John Furman, \$101. 47	John Furman, \$101. 48

GROUND PLAN OF THE CHURCH, WITH THE NAMES OF ORIGINAL PEW-HOLDERS, AND THE PRICE PAID FOR EACH PEW.

So the day that we are celebrating here today, the day of the raising of the frame of this church building, did not just happen of its own accord. Much work went into the planning and the preparation of it. And certainly there was much prayer and discernment involved as well.

God had inspired a vision in those people, through the beautiful church their neighbors had built in Augusta, through the preaching of a young minister in their midst, through their own hopes, dreams and desires to have a place of worship that could serve them and their posterity for years to come.

It would be a place that in 1819 would come to hold a Paul Revere & Son bell that continues to chime out the hours to this day. A place that in 1848 would install a second pipe organ that has served this congregation for 170 years. It would be a place that would inspire and support men and women of the Abolitionist movement, the Temperance movement, the Suffragists, would support and participate in worldwide missions programs of the wider church, engage in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and in our own day the fight for equal rights for the LGBTQ community, and be a kind of catalyst for so many other justice issues our people have faced.

It has been a place that has held services to honor great people like Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.. It has held vigil and prayers for our young people who have gone off to war, so many times, too many times, and it has baptized, confirmed, wedded, and buried our own from one generation to the next.

Jesus said that those who listen to his words and follow them, are like the ones who built their house on solid rock. Well this house of God was built on solid rock - literally! But it has also been built upon the rock of God's love and compassion.



Certainly, it has had its difficult times. We've endured splits of the congregation, unethical behavior of pastors and members, and many trials and tribulations that all congregations face at some time or another. But we have also witnessed the re-uniting of our people, the forgiveness and reconciliation of those hurt and divided, many good and exemplary clergy and lay leaders, the hard work of those who have worshiped here and sought to bring about a better world, the traditions and theology of both Congregational and Unitarian beliefs and in 1961, the embrace of a new denomination in the United Church of Christ.

We can look upon this old building and see the walls, the steeple, watch the clock tick the hours and hear the bell ring. And we could easily forget about all the planning and work and vision that brought it into existence. Likewise, we could sit in our pews on Sunday mornings, sing our hymns, hear the readings and the sermons. We could easily forget about all the years this place has been sanctuary for the weary, has been blessing for families, has brought healing for the struggling and hope for the down trodden. We could easily forget that thousands of souls have made this place their spiritual home and fail to recognize that we are just the latest in a long line of people who have committed to hearing and doing God's work in this place.

Certainly we can say, with assurance, that God has indeed built this house and that those who have labored in it, have not labored in vain. We are a part of a legacy of God's people, God's children of light, God's laborers in the vineyard, God's builders who build on solid rock! May we continue to labor in the service of Christ's love and compassion in our world, that this place, this old meeting house, this sanctuary, this church, is filled to overflowing with the hope, the joy, the inspiration, given of God, for another 200 years! Amen.