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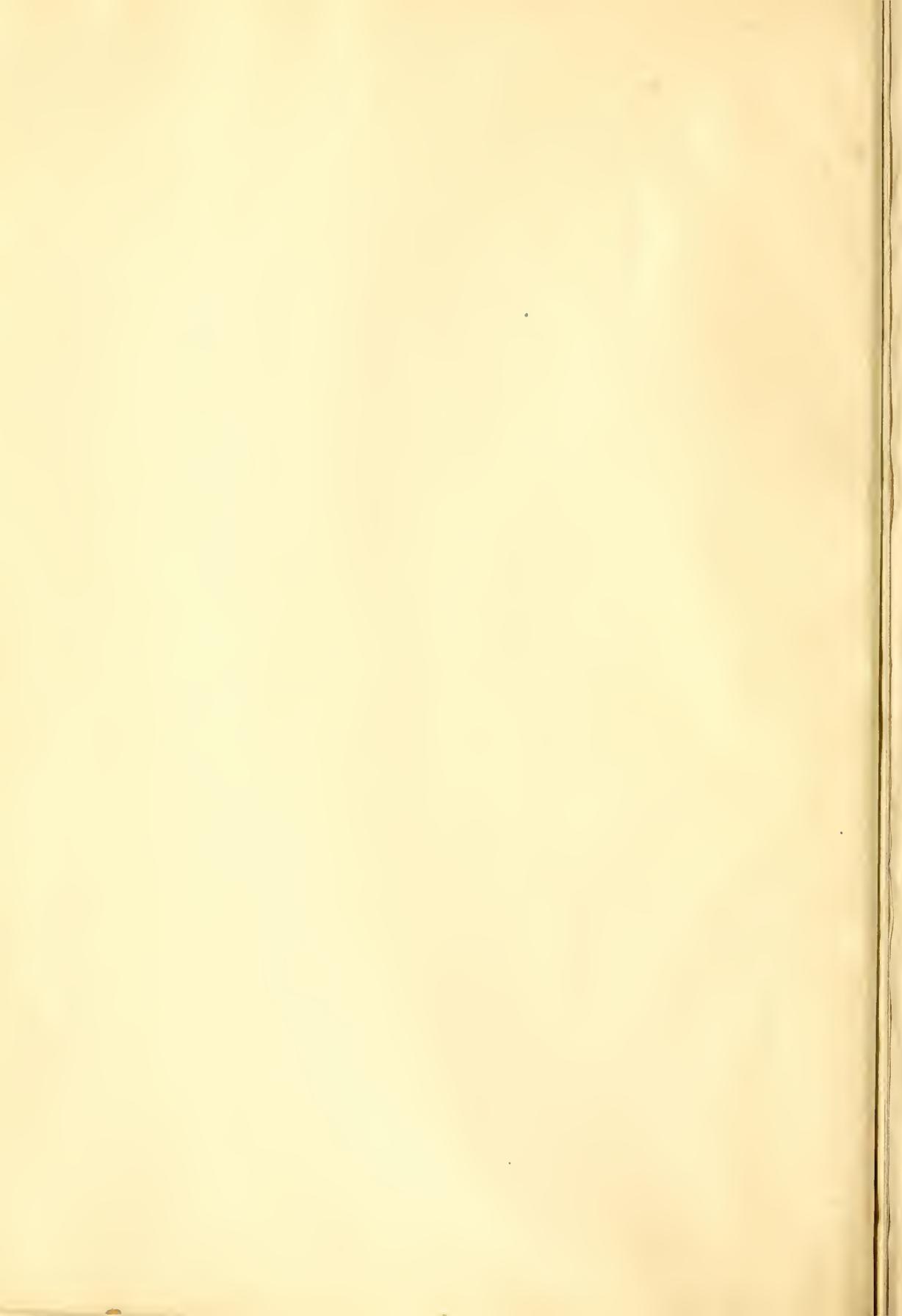
Class 724

Book 123

PRESENTED BY







REVEREND ENOCH COFFIN.

CONCORD'S FIRST PREACHER, 1726-'28.

By John C. Thorne.

HE subject of this sketch was descended from an ancient and honorable family, and is presumed to be of Norman origin.

The first of that name in England was Sir Richard Coffyn, Knight, who accompanied William the Conqueror on his invasion of that country in 1066.

Sir Richard held the rank of general in the army. The lands received by him from the king were upon the borders of the river Severn, and have descended in direct line in the family for upwards of seven hundred years.

The genealogy of Concord's first preacher which is here given back to Peter Coffyn, in England, is far enough to answer our purpose. It is like this: Enoch Coffin⁵ (Nathaniel⁴, Tristram, Jr.³, Tristram², Peter¹) was born in Newbury, Mass., February 7, 1696. Graduated at Harvard college, 1714; died August 7, 1728. He married January 5, 1716, Mehitable Moody. They had four children. All died before reaching maturity. His father was Hon. Nathaniel Coffin of Newbury, deacon of the first church, and clerk of the town, also representative to the General Court three years, 1719-'21, Councillor of the Province in 1730, and Special Justice of the Court of

Common Pleas for Essex county in 1734. He had eight children. Two of them, the Rev. Enoch Coffin and Samuel B. Coffin, graduated at Harvard college. He died in 1749, aged eighty. Upon the tombstones of his grandfather and grandmother in the "First Parish Burying Ground" are these inscriptions:

To the memory of Tristram Coffin Esq., who having served the First Church of Newbury in the office of Deacon 20 years, died, Feb. 4, 1703-4, aged 72 years.

On earth he purchased a good degree,
Great boldness in the faith and liberty,
And now possesses immortality.

He was made a freeman of the colony April 29, 1668. Elected representative in 1695, 1700, 1701, and 1702. Also,

To the memory of Mrs. Judith, late virtuous wife of Deac. Tristram Coffin Esqr, who having lived to see 177 of her children and children's children to the 3d generation, died Dec. 15, 1705, aged 80.

Grave, sober, faithful, fruitful vine was she,
A rare example of true piety,
Widow'd awhile she wayted wisht for rest,
With her dear husband in her Savior's brest.

Enoch's great-grandfather, Tristram, was born in Brixham Parish, County of Devon, England, in 1609, and came to this country in 1642, on account, it is said, of the success of Oliver Cromwell, he being a firm Loyalist, with his mother, wife, two sisters, and five children. The de-



First Parish Burying-ground, Newbury, Mass.

From History of "Ould Newbury," by permission of the Author.

scendants of Tristram were very numerous—indeed there were born between the years 1652 and 1728, 1,582 children, of whom 1,128 were living at the latter date.

Hon. Peter Coffin, Esquire, the eldest son of the above, born in 1630, was a prominent man in those days,—he was Judge of His Majesty's Superior Court of Jurisdiction, and first member of His Majesty's Council of the Province. He lived in Dover, N. H., and Exeter, where he died on March 21, 1715, aged eighty-five years.

From Tristram and Peter are descended all of the name of Coffin along the Merrimack valley.

Joshua Coffin, great grandson of Nathaniel, born October 12, 1792, on the old homestead, died June 24, 1864. Was a graduate of Dartmouth college and a noted schoolmaster. Was town clerk of New-

bury for seven years, and justice of the peace for the county of Essex. In the old mansion where he was born and died he collected the material for and prepared his History of Newbury, published in 1845.

The "Quaker Poet," William Whittemore, was one of his pupils and friends, and refers to him in the lines addressed "To my old Schoolmaster."

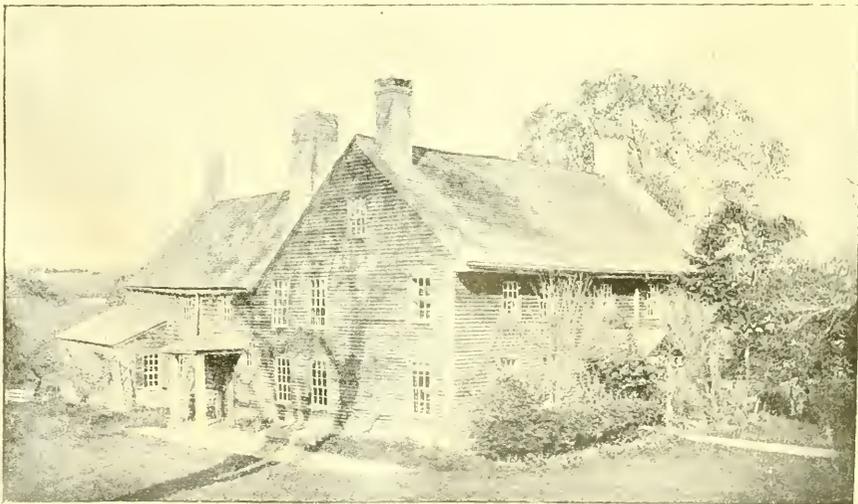
I,—the man of middle years,
In whose sable locks appears
Many a warning fleck of gray,—
Looking back to that far day,
And the primal lessons, feel
Grateful smiles my lips unseal,
As, remembering thee, I blend
Olden teacher, present friend,
Wise with antiquarian search
In the scrolls of State and Church;
Named on history's title-page
Parish clerk, and justice sage;
For the ferule's wholesome awe
Wielding now the sword of law.

Tradition asserts, so says Currier in his history of "Ould Newbury,"

“that the centennial anniversary of the settlement of the town was celebrated in the front yard of the ‘old Coffin house,’ beneath the shade of a lofty elm, remarkable for its great size and graceful shape. This noble elm, with its widely extended branches, was one of the prominent landmarks for miles around; it served as a guide for vessels entering or leaving the harbor.” This monarch of trees was struck by lightning several times and finally cut down about 1885. This ancient and magnificent tree reminds us of the “old Coffin elm,” at the North End, Concord, N. H., perhaps a scion of the Newbury elm, set out by Captain Enoch Coffin, a branch of this great family, in 1782, also known as the “Webster elm,” as it was planted the year of Daniel Webster’s birth. This stands to-day on the former Coffin homestead, a grand and majestic tree outlined against the sky in form of strength and beauty. Two

large elms now stand on the Coffin homestead in Newbury, planted by Joseph Coffin, one in 1792, when his son Joshua, the historian, was born, the other in 1794, when his son Thomas was born.

Rev. Enoch Coffin, whom we will now more fully consider, was born in the old, big Coffin house which still stands in Newbury, erected upwards of two hundred and fifty years ago. A fine picture of this ancient mansion here appears, taken from Currier’s “Ould Newbury.” Enoch was evidently not of a robust constitution, for we learn that he received a call to settle in Dunstable as a successor of Rev. Thomas Weld, but was obliged to decline in consequence of ill health. Feeling, perhaps, the need of an invigorating expedition into the forests, and finding a new home among New Hampshire’s health-giving hills, he arranged to leave Newbury. We see by the records of the proprietors of



The Old Coffin House, Newbury Mass.

From History of "Ould Newbury," by permission of the Author.

Penny Cook, that on the 17th of January, 1726, the "Great and General Court" of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, decided to set apart "Penny-Cook Plantation" as a township, in answer to a petition of the previous June. On the second of February following, the committee of the general court met at the house of Ebenezer Eastman, in Haverhill, for the purpose of admitting settlers to the township of Penny Cook. In this they proceeded with great caution "in order to the admitting of such as shall be thought most suitable." After much inquiry and examination the requisite number of one hundred was obtained. Here in this careful selection of the first settlers of Concord, men of worth and high character, we see was laid the foundation of a strong, upright, moral community. Among the early applicants and who was accepted, was the Rev. Enoch Coffin, then a young preacher of Newbury. On the seventh of February the committee of the court voted "to appoint surveyors, and chainmen to attend them when they should go to allot the said tract of land into one hundred and three shares, according to order." Thursday, May twelfth, "Early in the morning, the committee begun their journey from Haverhill, in order for Penny Cook, being attended by twenty-six persons, including the Surveyors, Chainmen, and such of the intending settlers as were disposed to take a view of the Lands." With these went the Rev. Enoch Coffin, as chaplain of the expedition into the wilderness. Says Moore in his *Annals of Concord*, 1824, "The settlers of Penny Cook, like those of all the

older towns, strictly observed the religious institutions of their fathers. Rev. Enoch Coffin, of Newbury, Mass., accompanied them on their first visit to their new lands." Late on Friday afternoon, the party arrived and "Encamped on a piece of Intervale Land, or plain, called Sugar Ball plain." On Saturday they proceeded with their surveys of the "township according to the General Court's order."

"Sabbath day, May 15th. This day Mr. Enoch Coffin, our Chaplain, performed divine Service both parts of the day. Fair and Cool." John Wainwright, Esq., clerk, has most graphically related in his journal the details of this journey, which most fortunately has been preserved, and from which I have been able to quote. So, as stated above, on the Sabbath day, May 15th, 1726, was held the first religious service in Concord, or even in central New Hampshire, the Rev. Enoch Coffin, preacher.

To commemorate this important event, there was erected, on Sugar Ball Bluff, over-looking the beautiful plain where the first settlers encamped and held their religious service, a neat and substantial granite monument. This was dedicated October 26, 1899, at the fifty-seventh annual meeting of the Concord Congregational Union, at which an address was given by the Hon. Joseph B. Walker; John C. Thorne presenting the report of the work as chairman of the committee of the Union.

The monument, which is of Concord granite of fair proportions, as seen in the accompanying illustration, stands some seven feet in height, and is erected in Memorial park, a plot

of ground comprising about three-fourths of an acre. It bears this inscription:

On the interval below this spot a committee of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, their surveyors and attendants there present to locate and survey the Plantation of Penny Cook, conducted the first religious service ever held in the central part of New Hampshire, on Sunday, May 15, 1726. Rev. Enoch Coffin, Preacher.¹

the one hundred and three intending settlers, was that of Enoch Coffin. He drew No. 36 "House Lot," of one and one half acres, located at the extreme south end of the Main street; also No. 26 the "Home Lot," of about seven acres on the interval, in the section designated as the "Great Plain." There is no doubt that the



Monument on Sugar Bal Bluff Concord N. H.

From the "Congregationalist," Boston, by permission.

On the obverse it is inscribed:

Erected by the Congregational Societies of Concord, October, 1899.

At the meeting of the committee at Andover, Mass., February 7th and 8th, 1726, for the drawing of lots for the land at Penny Cook, we find that the first name on the list of

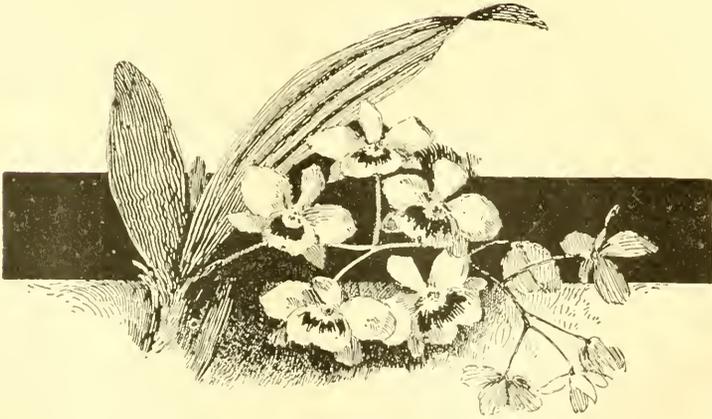
¹The last line, "Rev. Enoch Coffin, Preacher," has been cut upon the monument, in justice to the facts, since the photograph was taken for the above half-tone illustration.

Reverend Mr. Coffin located in the town, being one of the original proprietors, and that he was employed to minister to the settlers. He preached more or less to the people for some two years, for, consulting the records again, we read "That at a meeting of the proprietors held at Bradford, Mass., March 12, 1729, it was voted: That the sum of four pounds be allowed and paid unto the heirs of the Reverend Enoch Coffin,

deceased, for his preaching and performing divine service at Penny Cook, in full discharge." He was not Concord's first minister, but was its first preacher. The Rev. Timothy Walker was settled as the first regular minister of the town November 18, 1730.

That Mr. Coffin well and faithfully performed the duties of his high

office there is no question. He was, however, obliged to lay down his work, after a short service for his Master, at the early age of thirty-two years, and passed on to his reward. We cherish his memory as one of the religious pioneers of his time, and Concord owes him honor and reverence for his faith and works within her borders.

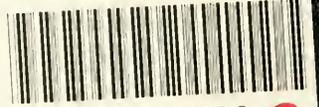








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