

## First Church History Role Fact Sheet: Nathaniel Ames

1741: Nathaniel Ames was born, son of Nathaniel Ames a Dedham doctor, innkeeper and author of America's first almanac.

1757: Nathaniel entered Harvard College where he had a good time going to theater and concerts, fishing, playing cards, and occasionally studying astronomy, philosophy, and Greek and Latin literature.

1761: Nathaniel graduated from Harvard and returned to Dedham to study medicine with his father.

1762: As a member of First Church, Nathaniel attends the first service in the new meeting house in July.

1764: Nathaniel's (and Fisher's) father died and Nathaniel took over writing and publishing the yearly Ames Almanac, which continued to do until 1775. He also ran the Ames Tavern. Over the next 10 years Nathaniel also acted in area plays and even in 1772 wrote a play called The Toy Shop that was produced in Dedham.

1765: Nathaniel Ames joins the Sons of Liberty to protest the Stamp Act. When the Stamp Act is repealed by Parliament in 1766, Nathaniel leads the effort to raise a Pillar of Liberty on the First Church green in honor of William Pitt, a leading British politician who had opposed the act.

1774: After the Boston Tea Party and Parliament's retaliatory Coercive Acts suspending self-government in Massachusetts, colonists meet at the Ames Tavern to pass the Suffolk Resolves. This document stated that the Parliament's Coercive Acts were null and void and directed Massachusetts citizens to prepare to defend themselves against British military force. Paul Revere rode down to Philadelphia with this document and it persuaded many Continental Congress delegates to reject compromise with Britain.

1775: When General Gage sent troops to seize colonist weapons stored in Concord, Nathaniel marched from the steps of First Church with Dedham troops to Cambridge where they ambushed retreating Redcoats. He manned a field hospital for the Patriots. As he later wrote, "I went to the Concord fight, extracted a ball from I. Everett's arm, Dead men and horses strewed along the road from Charlestown to Concord." Nathaniel also married Meletiah Shuttleworth in 1775.

1776: Nathaniel attended town meeting in First Church where voters resolved "that if the honorable Congress should declare the colonies independent of Great Britain, they (Dedham citizens) would solemnly engage to support it in that measure with their lives and fortune."

1786: Nathaniel became involved with politics again by sympathizing with the poor farmers of Western Massachusetts who, led by Daniel Shays, closed down the courthouses where judges were foreclosing on their farms. He was saddened when Massachusetts Governor Bowdoin recruited an army to suppress them without attending to their complaints that dishonest lawyers were scheming to deprive them of their land. Nathaniel's younger brother Fisher Ames, on the other hand, wrote articles for local papers which were critical of "Shays Rebellion".

1793: The French Revolution and the beheading of the French King Louis XVI divided many Dedham citizens. Nathaniel and many others supported the liberty and equality ideals of the French revolutionaries and also voiced his hatred of England because of its anti-democratic policies. At meetings at his house he rallied likeminded Dedhamites who called themselves Jacobins in honor of the Paris club to which many French Revolution leaders had belonged. Fisher in turn became a leader of the town's conservative Federalist faction who favor closer relations with Great Britain.

1798: Nathaniel and his fellow Dedham Jacobins erect liberty poles that on the road between Boston and Providence with messages critical of Federalist president John Adams. Nathaniel's fellow Jacobins were charged with treason by the Federalist government and fined. Nathaniel is incensed, while Fisher is delighted!

1803: Nathaniel and Fisher differ on the appointment of a new minister for First Church. Fisher wants a minister with a traditional theology, Joshua Bates, and Nathaniel thought he would be too conservative. After Fischer forced through the choice of Bates as minister, Nathaniel left First Church for St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Nathaniel later reacted to Fisher's criticism of his method of laying manure on his garden by complaining in his diary that "Having turned me out of the House of God, I thought that he (Fisher) would allow me to grovel in the dung."

1818: Bates decided to take on the presidency of a college and First Church interviewed new ministers. Nathaniel and others wanted Alvin Lamson, a liberal theologian from Harvard Divinity School. Liberals like Lamson rejected the rigid theology of Congregationalism that emphasized the depravity of human nature and the inability of people to have an effect on their own salvation. They called themselves Unitarians because they rejected the idea that Jesus was a god. Nathaniel and other Dedham community members voted for Lamson. More traditional church members opposed him. The Massachusetts Superior Court ultimately decided that Nathaniel and fellow townsfolk paid taxes to support the church and therefore should be able to register their majority vote for Lamson. Afterwards, churches throughout New England split with many majorities voting for Unitarian ministers.

1822: Nathaniel dies at 81 years of age.