

CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SNOWFLAKE HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR

*Saturday, November 5 - Town Hall
9:00am to 4:00pm*

A Great Way to Spend a Fall Day in Chester

Tables include:

- ❖ *Handmade Crafts*
- ❖ *Nature Photography*
- ❖ *Designer Bags*
- ❖ *Hummingbird Houses*
- ❖ *Christmas Wreaths and Decorations*
- ❖ *Decorated Candles*
- ❖ *Porcelain Dolls*
- ❖ *Herbal Vinegars*
- ❖ *Handmade Jewelry*
- ❖ *Baked Goods*
- ❖ *.....and much more!!*

On the same day, visit the following locations in Chester Village:

- ❖ *2nd Congregational Church - Christmas Bazaar with soup, sandwiches and dessert for lunch*
- ❖ *Hamilton Memorial Library - Book Fair and "Tea and Confections"*
- ❖ *Chester Railroad Museum - Railroad Memorabilia and Artifacts*
- ❖ *Village Shoppe - Antiques and Gifts*
- ❖ *Pease General Store - Old Fashioned Mercantile Shop*
- ❖ *Carm's Restaurant - Known for breakfast and lunch*
- ❖ *A&L Market and Chester Village Market - Everything and anything you need*



Littleville Chapel

REVEREND DANIEL FOSTER

“The Fighting Chaplain of the Massachusetts 33rd”

Was Pastor at Littleville

By John Garvey

From the diary of the Reverend Daniel Foster:

“Little Alice was born in Chester on the 24th of April 1851 in an old brown cottage which lay under one of the green mountain peaks, on the western bank of a clear cold stream. At the time of her birth her parents had lived there about one year. Her grandmother and aunt also for months had been members of the circle which gathered under that old roof.”

The “old brown cottage” Foster refers to, and the church in which he preached, are now under the waters of Littleville Lake. The rather idyllic beginning to this diary entry had a more somber purpose, it was written upon the death of Alice when she was just four months old. Foster had titled the essay, “A Father’s Tribute to

His Departed Child”, but his wife Dora must have come upon him while he was writing it and helped him finish. In a female hand the title had been changed to “A *Parental* Tribute to *Our* Departed Child”.

The federal census of 1850 shows him living in the same house as Laura Bigelow, age 38, but whether she is the aunt referred to in the diary entry is not clear. He was in Chester only a year, forced out by the controversy that had followed him here, and would follow him his entire life.

But we have jumped right into the middle of his life, we need to go back to see how he came to be in Chester and to understand better why his stay here was so controversial.

Foster Becomes an Abolitionist

Foster was born in 1816 in Hanover, NH, the fourth of what would be nine children, eight boys and one girl. Seven of the eight boys, including Daniel, attended Dartmouth College, and six of the eight, including Daniel, became Congregational ministers. He left Dartmouth before graduating and spent two years teaching school in Kentucky, where, according to his diary, he "became an abolitionist from a settled conviction of the inherent sinfulness of Slavery, a conviction forced upon me by what I saw of the evil-workings of the system". He returned to New England and spent a few years teaching in public schools in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, as well as finishing up his studies at Dartmouth, receiving his degree in 1845. In 1847 he was ordained a Congregational minister and moved to Salem to start a small anti-slavery church, for which he was paid \$260 a year.

After a year in Salem he moved to Danvers, was ordained a Methodist minister and took over another fledgling anti-slavery church. He took on a teaching position in the public schools but his strong anti-slavery feelings created conflicts with the School Board and he was dismissed. Not able to support himself without the supplement of the teaching position he looked for a permanent pastorate at a more established church.

Foster Comes to Littleville

In January of 1849 he preached at both the Concord Trinitarian Church and the Congregational Church in Littleville with a view to becoming their permanent pastor. How he came to be known to the members of the church in Littleville is not clear. Certainly if they wanted an inexpensive preacher

they could have found one much closer than Danvers, so there had to be a strong contingent of abolitionist and temperance members in the congregation.

The Littleville congregation liked what they heard of Foster and called him to be their pastor. Though he was desperate for a steady income he declined their offer unless they would change their “Confession of Faith” and “Covenant” to reflect his abolitionist and temperance views, and change their name from Congregational to the Union Evangelical Church. They agreed to his demands – another good indication that he was hired for his abolitionist views – and Foster and his new wife Dora moved to Chester.

It was not very long before Foster came into conflict with a part of the congregation and from his writings we know that the leader of the opposition was Forbes Kyle, a prominent deacon of the Littleville church.

Forbes Kyle, 67 years old at the time that Foster came to Chester, had twelve children with his wife Rebecca, many of whom were already married by 1850, so it’s likely that the Kyle family made up a large part of the Littleville congregation.

Kyle was also an active and prominent member of the Whig Party, which was caught up in the political turmoil of the day. The Whig Party was fracturing over the issue of slavery and more and more Whigs were leaving the party, dissatisfied with the Whig Party’s lukewarm condemnation of slavery. Foster was one of those dissatisfied and two years before coming to Littleville he had left the Whigs and joined the abolitionist Free Soil party.

By 1850 when Foster arrived in Chester, the bleeding of Whigs to the Free Soil and other anti-slavery parties was becoming critical. The fact that Reverend Foster had left the Whigs to become a Free-Soiler could not have gone over well with Forbes Kyle but perhaps they might have put aside their differences were it not for the Compromise of 1850, which was passed while Foster was here in Chester.

The Compromise of 1850 was a mish-mash of acts pushed through by the Zachary Taylor administration meant to satisfy the North and South enough to prevent a Civil War. The abolitionist side, especially, considered it a failure. While it called for bringing California into the union as a free state, it also created the Fugitive Slave Law which the abolitionists considered abhorrent. The law gave the right of slave owners to pursue escaped slaves over state borders and have them captured and returned, and it put enforcement in the hands of the federal government as Northern states had simply been ignoring previous versions of fugitive slave laws.

Foster is Dismissed From Littleville

From his diary we know that Foster was incensed at the law and his frequent abolitionist sermons now included condemnations of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Taylor administration and the Whig party. It was too much for Whig loyalist Forbes Kyle to take and he orchestrated Foster's dismissal, just 10 months after his arrival.

He preached a farewell sermon to the Littleville congregation on October 20, 1850. Hearing that the Concord Trinitarian Church was again looking for a pastor he left for Concord, leaving Dora in Chester as she was now almost eight months pregnant.

In the few weeks that he was in Concord, before returning to Chester for the birth of his first child, an event occurred that would become one of the pivotal moments of his life. Before we get to that event we should read one diary entry that, made just weeks after arriving in Concord, mirrors what had just occurred in Chester. Some members of the Concord congregation were already complaining that he preached on nothing but slavery. His reaction to their objections shows us how he probably reacted to his detractors here in Chester.

"April 2 1851

I feel a good deal anxious for I learn that some of the people are dissatisfied with my preaching because I make reference so often to slavery. And so I have been trying to prepare sermons for next Sunday in the hopes that they will convince these people of their errors and my truth."

Foster Becomes a Radical

It was two days later that he heard of the arrest of Anthony Sims in Boston. The arrest of Sims, an escaped slave who had been living and working openly in Boston for some time, would be the first test of the Fugitive Slave Law in a Northern city. Foster's diary entry the next day shows how radicalized he had become, and how ready he was to act upon his beliefs.

"April 5, 1851 *Concord*

Oh my country, how hast thou fallen in this abject hour from thine elevation of honor into the deepest shame and crime. I renounce and cast off all allegiance to our wicked government."

Foster traveled to Boston the next day and was present every day of the trial.

"April 7 Boston

The courthouse is chained and every entrance is guarded by the police of this city. Courthouse is crowded today to see a new spectacle. A man is tried for claiming to be a man. God deliver us from this damning disgrace and overwhelm the oppressor and his counsel with confusion. It is now 12 o'clock

and I am so excited by this affair that I cannot rest a moment."

"April 8 *Boston*

The attempt will be made to rescue Sims if he is carried off in open daylight, no matter how many soldiers and police accompany to prevent. I shall be one in the attempt if it is made."

Foster was in court on the day that the ruling came down that Sims must be sent back to slavery. He joined other abolitionists in an all-night vigil outside the jail, using the office of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, as a headquarters. Just before dawn on April 12th, 300 armed federal soldiers surrounded the jail and brought Sims out. No attempt was made to free him from that heavily armed force but the abolitionists followed the contingent down to the wharf. As Sims was being led onto the ship, Reverend Foster was asked to lead the onlookers in prayer. While he was already well known in the abolitionist circles his prayer that day gave him a measure of notoriety in the Northeast. It was published in numerous newspapers and both Thoreau and Emerson mentioned it in their journals. He returned to Concord the next day to pack, and late the day after that was with his wife in Chester.

"April 14th 1851 *Chester*

I am at home again with my dear sweet wife. But this is a theme too sacred even for the private pages of a journal. On the pages of my heart, is it not all written in characters unfading? I am now in a quiet retreat in which I can calmly review the exciting scenes through which I passed last week."

Doctor Bartlett from Chester Village was called to the Foster cabin on the evening of April 24 and after 24 hours of hard labor, Daniel and Dora's first daughter was born.

"April 25 1851 *Chester*

The long trial is over and our daughter is born. Just as the clock struck nine little Dora was ushered into the world without any disaster to mother or child. Dora's first question was 'Is it alive?' This the little one answered by a turn of lusty crying. For 24 hours Dr. Bartlett has been watching this case and has certainly managed it with great skill and delicacy. Mrs. Bigelow and Mrs. Kelso have also provided cheerful and priceless aid to the end of the protracted trial. Mrs. Day was with us the first night. I don't think Mrs. Bigelow and Mrs. Kelso could have felt more interest or rendered more generous aid to their own daughters. May God reward them for their kindness."

Harriet (Kelso) Gilman says that "Mrs. Kelso" is probably Clarissa Kelso, age 40, wife of Joseph Kelso. Joseph is listed in the 1850 census as a farmer, and Harriet says that her family refers to him as "river Joe", with a farm near the Littleville Fairgrounds.

Foster Leaves Littleville

On May 1st, Foster, his wife Dora and their infant daughter left Chester, never to return.

May 1st 1851 Concord

Came today back from my old home in Chester to my present field of toil in this town."

Since this is the newsletter for the Chester Historical Society our story about the Reverend Daniel Foster ought to end with his removal from Littleville.

However, his life is so entwined with the major events of the day that we ask for your forgiveness in continuing to follow his life.

We return to Concord and it was during this time that he became friendly with both Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

His agreement with the Concord Trinitarian Church had been for one year and with just a few months left on that contract he received an extraordinary letter. A wealthy abolitionist, Deacon Gregg, had left a bequest in the hands of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society of \$1,000 for the support of "an Orthodox Anti-Slavery Minister", and the Society had chosen Foster to receive the bequest. With the letter was the first check for \$100.

Just days before receiving this letter Foster had preached a sermon entitled, "The Bible, Not an Inspired Book", essentially outing himself as a Unitarian. William Lloyd Garrison, a Unitarian himself, published the sermon a few days later in his newspaper, The Liberator, thus making Foster's conversion to Unitarianism well known. Though desperate as he must have been for the money, two days after the sermon appeared in The Liberator, Foster wrote back to the Society refusing the bequest, saying "I cannot honestly take the fund for I am not in any possible sense in which I suppose Mr. Gregg used the term - an Orthodox minister." Once he left the Concord Trinitarian Church he would call himself a Unitarian minister for the rest of his life.

His Controversy with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society

There were evidently no hard feelings on either side from his refusal of the bequest because a few months later when Foster proposed to the Anti-Slavery Society that they hire him to be one of their "lecturing agents" at \$12 a week plus expenses they readily agreed. Other duties would include collecting donations for the Society, selling Society books and subscriptions to the Liberator. In the first twelve months alone, Foster lectured 300 times

in 87 different locations and turned over to the Society \$400 after expenses.

Just when it seemed that he had finally found a way to pursue his beliefs and still earn a living, he involved himself in an ongoing controversy between two anti-slavery groups. Foster was lecturing on behalf of one of the oldest abolitionists groups in the country, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, started by William Lloyd Garrison and others. Prior to Foster going to work for them, some members dissatisfied with certain aspects of the Society split into other factions, one of which was called the Liberty Party.

Just as Foster began his work for the Society, a prominent member of the Liberty Party published a history of the anti-slavery movement which included harsh opinions on both the Society and Garrison himself. Foster liked much of what he read in the book, and began to sell copies of it on his lecture tours. When reports reached the Society that Foster was selling a Liberty Party book they sent him a letter demanding that he stop. Foster replied "I infer from your last letter that I am required as an agent of the Massachusetts Anti Slavery society to refrain from selling Goodell's 'Slavery & Anti Slavery.' I cannot consent to this and therefore must give up my agency & act upon my own responsibility in the anti slavery field". He was again unemployed.

He Meets John Brown and Moves to Kansas

For the next few years Foster continued lecturing and preaching where he could and even tried farming in Princeton for a year or so. In 1857, through connections with fellow Unitarians, he was appointed Chaplain of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. It appeared that he might be able to settle down again with a steady paycheck.....and perhaps he could have done so had he not been in the House chambers on the day that, just two months into his position, John Brown delivered a speech before the House on the Kansas troubles.

Foster was captivated with Brown and realized that Kansas was where the real battle against slavery was being waged, and he immediately quit his lucrative post and resolved to move his family to Kansas. In a letter to a friend he said he was leaving for Kansas because he was "convinced that our cause must receive a baptism of blood before it can be victorious. I expect to serve in Capt. John Brown's company in the next Kansas war, which I hope is inevitable & near at hand."

Foster wasted no time in getting directly involved in John Brown's activities. On April 15 he was present at a meeting of the Kansas Aid Committee of Massachusetts

at which they voted to give Brown 100 rifles and \$500 to bring to Kansas. With all that property in his possession Brown had a will drawn up a few days later that directed how the property was to be distributed in Kansas, and Foster signed the will as a witness.

For the next few years Foster traveled back and forth between Kansas and Massachusetts, often teaching in Kansas and returning to Massachusetts to lecture and raise money for the Free-Soilers in Kansas. One biographer of Foster theorizes that he was bringing secret information from and to Brown during his many trips back and forth between Kansas and Massachusetts, but there is only circumstantial evidence to support that claim.

The Fighting Chaplain

In 1862 the Foster family (now numbering four children) returned to Massachusetts, this time so that Foster could enlist in the 33rd Massachusetts Regiment as a chaplain, eventually declining the chaplain title and being promoted to captain. The next year, when the Union army began forming what were known as the U.S. Colored Troops, Foster volunteered to be an officer in the 37th U.S. Colored Regiment.

In February of 1864, shortly after the 37th was formed, he wrote a letter home to Dora.

“February 7, 1864 near Norfolk, VA

My Dear Wife,

I received your letter of February 5 today, and I was made very happy through the spirit of love thus breathed into my soul from my dear, far-off home.”

After the inspection this morning I held a religious service with my men. I will mention one simple incident which shows the benefit of such influence with these men. The merchant carts passing our camp one day last week were robbed. Complaint was made and a searching investigation instituted. The result is that no man from Company B is found who could be persuaded to join in this plundering. Some from all the other companies are found to be guilty and are to be severely punished.

The boys were solicited to join in this work of plunder but they replied no, our Captain has said we must not steal or do anything else to please our enemies and offend God, but in all things act like true Christian men and so they all refused. I do not think that I will be able to see you all till about next Christmas when I do hope to see you all on a good long leave of absence. Much love to the precious children and to your dear parents.

Your fond husband, Daniel Foster.”

He would not make it to Christmas. In September of that year the 37th was part of the approaching Union forces that were laying siege to Richmond, Virginia. Foster’s company was about 10 miles outside of Richmond at a place called Chapin’s Bluff. On September 30, 1864 his company was sent forward to test the enemy lines but when the retreat was sounded some of his men were too far forward to hear it. Foster jumped on his horse and rode forward to bring his men back. As he approached the enemy lines he was shot in his left side, just above the hip. He managed to stay on his horse and return to the Union lines, where his men took him down and laid him on the ground. He asked them to turn him around, as he had vowed that he would die facing the enemy. He died a few moments later.

His men and fellow officers raised enough money to have his body sent back to his wife Dora, and he is buried in West Newbury, Massachusetts. His gravestone reads:

IN MEMORIAM

REV. DANIEL FOSTER

Born in Hanover, N. H. Dec. 10, 1816

Chaplain of the 33d Mass. Reg. Vols.

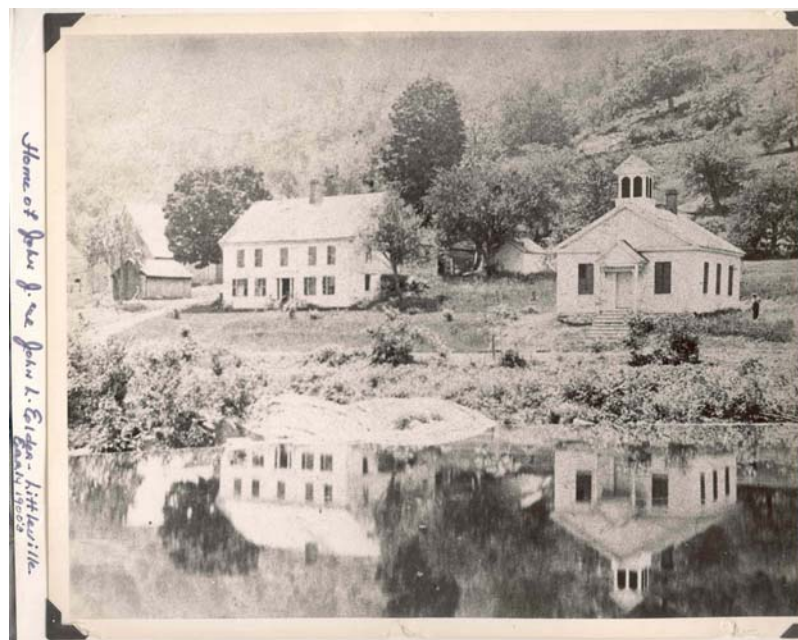
Captain of the 37th U.S. Col. Troops

Fell before Richmond, Va. Sept. 30, 1864

Greatly beloved and respected by the Officers of the Reg. and by his own men.

Friend of the poor and needy.

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”



Littleville Chapel and Elder Home – circa 1900



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Bibliography for this edition

Dean, Bradley P. "Let Posterity Judge: Anti-Slavery History and the Foster-May Controversy of 1853". Thoreau Society Bulletin, 1999. Concord Massachusetts.

Dean, Bradley P. "The Reverend Daniel Foster: A Biographical Sketch". Thoreau Society Bulletin, 2000. Concord Massachusetts.

Foster, Daniel. Private papers 1841 – 1884. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston Massachusetts.

Item	Price	Size	Qty	Total
"Chester Folks - The Founders of the Town, Their Ancestors and Descendants" by William Mills	\$18.00			
"Memories of the Boston and Albany Railroad" by Norvel Parker	\$15.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Chester" by Francis O'Leary	\$18.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Huntington" by Francis O'Leary	\$20.00			
"Gateway District Towns - A Pictorial History"	\$16.99			
"Chester Cookbook" - A reproduction of a 1960's-era Chester PTA cookbook	\$8.50			
"Entering Chester" magnets - A miniature version of the state highway signs	\$1.00			
"The Mystery of the Old Mine" a mystery for children by Gertrude Whitcher	\$10.00			
Chester Historical Society pens	\$1.00			
Chester T-Shirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$10.00			
Chester Sweatshirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$20.00			
Shipping + handling				\$3.00
SUBTOTAL				
Annual Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$5.00			
Lifetime Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$25.00			
Additional tax deductible contribution				
TOTAL				

Make check payable to the "Chester Historical Society" and send to:
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