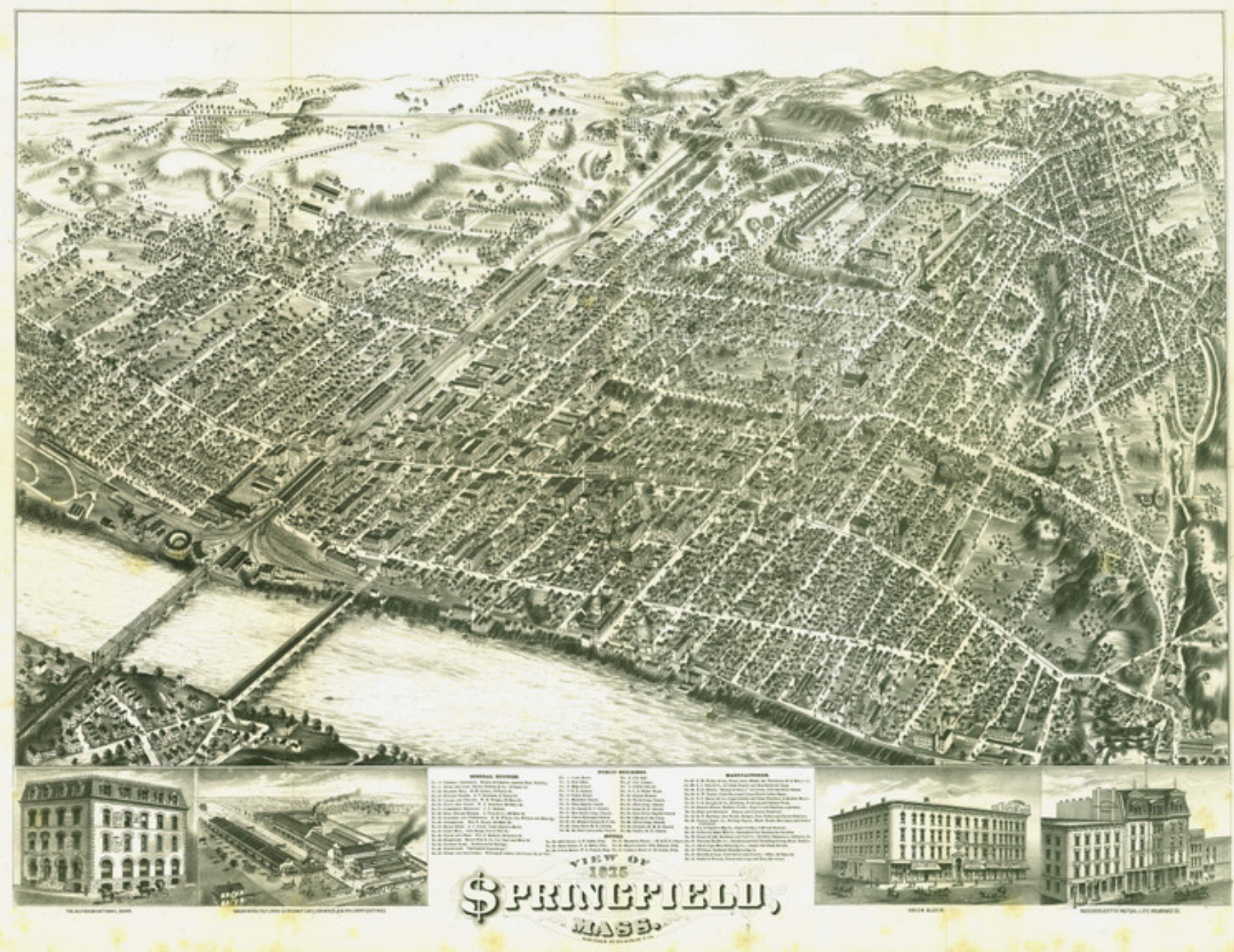


# The Interfaith Religious Heritage of Springfield, Massachusetts (1636-1993)



---

Rev. Dr. Robert K.  
Loesch

**The Interfaith  
Religious Heritage  
of Springfield, Massachusetts  
1636 - 1993**

**by  
Rev. Dr. Robert K. Loesch**

Produced by:  
Creative Publishing Plus, Inc., 603 Sumner Avenue Springfield, MA 01108 - (413) 733-1231

## Chapter I: 1636 - 1715

S

pringfield, Massachusetts, is one of the oldest settlements in America, founded as a trading post by William Pynchon in 1636. Today, Springfield is a vital, exciting community, moving with pride into the 21st Century. Its government, citi-

zens, and institutions have worked together to help their city grow and realize its potential for a quality of life that is fine and rare.

Yet, throughout the city, amid the sights and sounds of growth, underpinning plans for its future, are the echoes of Springfield's past. When we look at Springfield today, we can ponder: How did it all come about? What forces, what circumstances over the past three and one-half centuries have brought all this into being?

In this series we will explore one area of these forces and circumstances: the religious heritage of Springfield and its impact on the development of the community.

The settlement of Springfield in 1636 was one of the giant steps in the conquest of a continent. The English colonizers had become quite familiar with a thin edge of the eastern seacoast after years of exploration. However, the inland country was largely unknown - mysterious, forbidding, and also promising. The families who ventured to the Connecticut Valley were daring pioneers, the forerunners of many more to come who mile by mile, and valley by valley, pushed their way across a new world, inhabiting it as they went.

Thus, the story of Springfield is a beginning chapter in the story of all America. First, it was the settlement - like Plimouth Plantation - a small group of people in a wilderness amid hostile surroundings, struggling for survival. Later came the village, then the town, and finally the city. But the story of Springfield and its religious heritage is also unique.

Among the settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were many who had fled their native England seeking the freedom to worship God in their own way. But having found that freedom, the leadership of the new Colony often denied it to those who disagreed with their Puritan authority.

Religious and secular authority at that time were one and the same. To defy the Church was to defy the civil leadership and dissenters were often banished from the Colony.

It was just such a political and theological confrontation which led to the founding of Providence, Rhode Island, and Hartford, Connecticut, both established in 1636, the same year as the founding of Springfield.

The settling of Springfield, however, was quite different than that of Providence and Hartford. The latter two colonies were the result of political and theological differences with the established Puritan authority of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In each case, the leader was an ordained clergyman, respectively Roger Williams and Thomas Hooker.

In contrast, Springfield was settled for reasons of economic opportunity. Its founder, William Pynchon of Dorchester, was a merchant explorer. His primary interest was to establish fur trade with the Indians. He had scouted the area the previous year and, being a shrewd merchant, recognized the potential of the Connecticut River and of the native Indians for developing a profitable enterprise.

He returned in 1636 with a small band of eight Englishmen and their families to found the settlement, the first in Massachusetts west of the Boston area.

Thus, from its inception, Springfield had a character and energy of its own. Unlike most early Puritan New England communities, Springfield was a child of economics. Still, it was not without some degree of the religious bond which was more typical in the other settlements.



Although we generally think that the religious history in America began with the settlers from Europe, we need to remember that the actual history of religion began thousands of years ago with the prehistory of the ancient

native Americans.

During the Ice Age most of North America was covered by solidly frozen glaciers. Human life was impossible. About 10,000 B.C., the last glaciers had receded from New England. The temperature gradually became warmer, allowing new forms of animal and plant life to thrive in the Connecticut Valley which was covered by a huge inland lake.

The lakes and streams formed by the water melting from the huge glaciers benefitted those who chose to settle along its shores. The Eastern Woodland Indians represented one of the groups of Indians who resided in the Connecticut River Valley.

These Indians were hunters and gatherers of food. They developed a system of beliefs and practices which was complex. Their religion combined features such as worship of the spirits of their ancestors, the cycle of changing seasons and the weather, the meaning of life and death, and the interrelatedness of all nature with human life.

All of life, for the Native American, was sacred and holy. The spiritual life of the Indians brought the sacred realm into their daily activities in every area. For the Indian, there was no separation of the sacred from the secular. All of life was sacred and spiritual.

The Indians who settled along the Connecticut River hunted, fished and cultivated the natural resources with sacred reverence and care.

After the Indians had lived here for thousands of years, the first English colonists arrived in 1620 and began the Plymouth Plantation. Ten years later, in 1630, the much larger and more populous Massachusetts Bay Colony began

along the eastern shoreline where Boston is located today.

These English settlers included men and women seeking new economic opportunities in the New World. Many of them were also seeking freedom of religious worship and belief away from the tyranny of the established Church of England.

From this new colony along the Atlantic coast a small group of explorers traveled westward to found a settlement on the Connecticut River. In 1635, they built the first house on the Agawam meadows on the west side of the river. The next year they purchased land on both sides of the river. They established their settlement on the east side on higher ground in the area which continues as the central downtown section of Springfield along Main Street and Court Square.

The Native Americans who lived in this area in 1636 were called Agawams, part of the Algonquin tribe. Along with being skilled farmers, they hunted and fished throughout the region. These Seventeenth Century Indians had advanced greatly since the time of arrival of the first Indians in New England ten thousand years earlier.

The European settlers believed that they had a right to this land. They intended to advance their religion, build themselves in holiness, convert the Indians and promote freedom. Therefore, the early period of English-Indian relations resulted in much ignorance about Indian customs and beliefs. Mistrust and fear often led to military battles and conflict between the Native Americans and the newly arrived settlers.

A group of eight Englishmen with their families had arrived in small boats carried over the falls at Enfield. They had come up the river in a sailing ship as far as the falls, then transferred with their cargo to the shallops that brought them to the Indian village of Agawam. The English were accepted peacefully. As recent smallpox plagues had killed most of their population, there were very few Indians in the valley.

# S

The early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony believed that God had created human beings with a dignity that required equal and fraternal relations among each other. Governor John Winthrop had declared in 1630 that "It is by a mutual consent through a specially overruling Providence, and a more than ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consorti-ship under a due forme of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall."

Similar charters signed by New England colonists reaffirmed this view of God's guidance in the creation of their government. On May 14, 1636, the eight male settlers of Agawam, later to be called Springfield, began their covenant with these words:

"Wee whose names are underwritten being by God's Providence ingaged together to make a plantation, at and over against Agaam upon Connecticut doe mutually agree to certayne articles and orders to be observed and kept by us."

The charter continued with its first article devoted to the establishment of a church: "We intend by God's grace, as soon as we can, with all convenient speed, to procure some Godly and faithful minister, with whom we purpose to join in church covenant to walk in all the ways of Christ."

The colonists of Springfield organized their government by following the church covenant pattern, in which the people mutually agreed with each other and with God to take certain responsibilities. A covenant society was one in which the will of God determined the values and laws of social order. This was a theocracy, or government ruled by the will of God. Government by the people in mutual agreement was the beginning of democracy.

However, in the Puritan settlement not everyone had the rights and privileges of citizenship. One needed to be a member of the Puritan

church in order to have rights of being a citizen. For the first one hundred years of Springfield's history the church and town government were one and the same, the congregation gathered for worship and to conduct civil affairs.

The first Puritan leaders emphasized the sovereign rule of God, high moral standards based upon careful study of the Bible, and the enlightenment ideals of the natural and divine rights of man within a democratic social contract.

Although the Puritan settlers had fled from England and the tyranny of the established Church of England, they instituted a church and civil order which prevented dissent and the participation of those who were not Puritans. Religious tolerance and acceptance of non-Puritans would take several generations.

It is assumed that the settlers first worshipped in the home of its founder, William Pynchon, until a church was formally built. This home was located at what would later become the corner of Main and Fort Streets.

In 1637, the first pastor of the settlement arrived: George Moxon. He had been educated in Cambridge, England, and came to Dorchester, part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He came to Springfield at the request of his friend William Pynchon.

This was the beginning of the first religious organization among the settlers, known today as the First Church of Christ, Congregational. The church continues today in a building just a few hundred feet from its original site on what is now Court Square. The first meeting house was erected in 1645. The present meeting house is the fourth building of the congregation, constructed in 1819.

The rooster weathervane on the steeple is the oldest of Springfield's artifacts. It was made by a London coppersmith and brought to Springfield in 1750. It has rotated on its perch for over two hundred and forty years, swivelling to indicate the changing direction of the wind. The symbol of the rooster reminds one of the apostle Peter and his denial of Jesus and the call of the

church to faithful discipleship.

T

he first major religious controversy in Springfield erupted in 1650. It was a conflict between the theological beliefs of the settlement's founder and the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in Boston.

William Pynchon was more than the shrewd merchant-explorer who settled Springfield. He was a wealthy, educated, and religious man who loved and studied the Bible and had his own thoughts about its teachings.

Here in his house on Main Street he wrote a book which was printed in London, entitled *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*.

Copies of this book arrived in Boston in October, 1650. It was considered by the governors of the Bay Colony to be heretical, and was condemned by the General Court, which ordered the book publicly burned in Boston.

William Pynchon appeared before the General Court and sought to defend his original statements, refusing to modify his views sufficiently for their approval. He was sent back to Springfield and placed under a one hundred pound bond, with orders to return in a few months. But he decided that Massachusetts was not a safe place for his life or his views. He feared being sent into exile or prison, so he left all of his property and business to his son John. He returned to England with his wife, stepson Henry Smith, and the pastor, George Moxon. None of them ever returned to Massachusetts.

Springfield was the very first New England town to be visited by the strange belief in witchcraft. Mary Lewis had been rejected and abandoned by her husband. In 1645 she married Hugh Parsons and had three children, two of whom died as infants. She became depressed and filled with grief.

With little emotional support from her second husband, she suffered a nervous breakdown.

She spread rumors that a new resident in the village, Widow Marshfield, was a witch. Magistrate William Pynchon found Mary Parsons guilty of slander. She was whipped and required to give restitution to the widow of twenty-four bushels of corn.

Next, Mary accused her own husband of being a witch. She claimed that he was responsible for the death of her child while under the influence of Satan. Other witnesses joined the hysteria against him. Hugh Parsons was tried in Boston in 1651 as a witch, and acquitted one year later. He never returned to Springfield, but settled in Watertown.

In the meantime, Mary Parsons' third child was born and died at the age of five months in March 1651. She announced that she was a witch and had killed her own child. She was sent to the General Court in Boston where she was acquitted of being a witch. But she was convicted in the murder of her son. Sentenced to hang, Mary Parsons, sick and insane, died in prison before the death sentence could be completed. After these two dramatic cases, there were no more witchcraft trials of Springfield residents.

It was nine years before a settled pastor was called to the church. In the meantime, services were led by laymen appointed by vote of the town meeting. There were a few supply preachers, including William Horsford, William Thompson, and Samuel Hooker. Usually the laymen leading services were Dean Samuel Wright, Deacon Samuel Chapin, John Pynchon or Henry Burt.

In 1661, Rev. Pelatiah Glover, a native of Dorchester, was ordained as pastor. He witnessed one of the greatest disasters to strike Springfield: the burning of the town by the Indians on October 5, 1675.

All during the preceding summer, Metacomet, also known as King Philip, son of Massasoit, had been on the warpath. Major John Pynchon was in charge of the English forces along the Connecticut River and was with his troops in

Hadley when the surprise attack came early in the morning.

**T**

he night before, the men, women and children in the village had been warned of an imminent attack. They sought refuge in the three fortified houses. In the morning they thought it was safe and returned to their homes. Rev.

Glover returned to his home, carrying with him his library. Soon the Indians attacked.

When Major Pynchon arrived with two hundred mounted troops, the Indians fled with their booty to Indian Orchard. The Indians had burned thirty-three houses and twenty-five barns. Along with main street of the Springfield side of the settlement only fifteen houses survived. In the entire settlement, only forty-five houses remained standing. Many people were left homeless, including Rev. Glover whose entire library and corn fields were destroyed.

Four persons were killed: Lieutenant Cooper, who had built the first meeting house, Thomas Miller, the constable, Mrs. John Matthews, and Edmund Pringrydays. Although the villagers were tempted to move permanently from Springfield, the General Court urged them to stay steadfast. In a few years they had recovered their losses.

There had been talk about building a new meeting house since the old one was becoming overcrowded. In 1677 the new meeting house was constructed, just west of the first one. The first building was then removed for five pounds. Protection from the Indians was provided by a stockade of foot-wide logs ten and one-half feet high. The same type of fortification was placed around Rev. Glover's new house.

Gradually, the citizens of the village began to seek changes in the strict theological and moral standards of the Puritan founders.

The people encouraged a relaxation of the disciplined order promulgated and enforced by

the village magistrate. One solution to this situation was called the half-way covenant. Individuals who were baptized but who would not make a public confession of their sins could subscribe to a half-way covenant. This would permit them to become adult members of the church.

Thus, a child whose parents were not communicant church members, but whose grandparents were, could be baptized.

In 1657 a ministerial assembly was held in Boston. The group decided that such children could be baptized by virtue of their grandparents' church membership, as long as the parents assumed the obligation of a Christian life. One problem was that those baptized into the half-way covenant were not allowed to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. This resulted in two classes of church members.

Along with the changing desires of the Puritan settlers to modify the original standards of religious life, the arrival of those of different ethnic and religious backgrounds introduced further forces for change.

The first of these different types of settlers were the Irish, who first arrived in the northern part of the settlement along the west side of the Connecticut River. This section, later known as Holyoke, was called Ireland Parish, and began in 1663.

Many came as indentured servants but soon became farmers. While many of these early Irish immigrants were Catholics they were not allowed to practice their faith in the Puritan village. All who came were expected to support the established Puritan church with their taxes and regular attendance at worship. Those Irish Catholics who attempted to maintain their religious beliefs were often penalized for their rebellious spirit and independence.

The first African-Americans to arrive in Springfield came as slaves as early as 1680. They represented the early establishment of the economic system of slavery which existed in the North and the South. The ownership of slaves

began after the colonial and Pequot Indian War in 1637. Indians were often captured as slaves to prevent retaliation. This led to the trading of Indians for African-Americans from the West Indies. In 1664, the first slave trade began between New England merchants and Africa, soon developing into a major source of commerce in the colonies.



Among the earliest records, it is reported that in 1687 William Pynchon's son, John, solemnized the marriage of "his negroes" Roco and Sue. During the colonial period, only the most prosperous Springfield families owned slaves.

Many of the settlers had established their homes and planting grounds on the west side of the river. Because it was difficult crossing the river for Sabbath services by boat, especially in the winter except when the river was frozen over, the residents signed a petition requesting the General Court in Boston to create a second church and parish. Therefore, in 1696, West Springfield was founded with the second Puritan church established in the area. At the time, West Springfield included the areas that later became divided into Agawam, West Springfield, Westfield and Holyoke.

Nineteen years later, a similar petition was forwarded to the court by those who had settled to the south of Springfield, upon the high ground. In 1715, the Longmeadow church and community were established.

The geographic spread of settlers in these directions was the first influence in the creation of additional churches. Those who had been members of First Church in Springfield joined these new communities. The union of church and town government meant that these separations also began the development of separate political communities.

In 1709, The Reverend Solomon Stoddard of

Northampton initiated a controversy about the implications of the Half-Way Covenant. In response to the inequality of membership with two classes, he admitted those who had become members by half-way covenant to receive communion. He taught that people who were prayerful and earnest should not be deprived of this sacrament. This attempt to welcome this group of church folk into greater participation in church life was called the Northampton Plan. Each local church in the region debated whether or not to follow his precedent. Finally, the half-way covenant was abolished in 1795 and all church members granted equal status.

These events brought the first period of Springfield's religious history to a close. The once dominant and solitary expression of the Puritan religion was beginning to permit variations of belief and practice.



## Chapter II: 1715 - 1820

F

or the first period of Springfield's history, from 1636 until 1715, the village had grown slowly but was completely dominated by the authority of a single Puritan tradition. The geographic size of the settlement had

begun to spread outward, but Springfield as a community was diminished with the separation of West Springfield and Longmeadow.

No longer was First Church in Springfield the only congregation and parish, as it was required that each separate community support its own pastor and church. It was still necessary that everyone had to conform to the Puritan faith which was closely allied with the town government.

The second period, from 1715 through 1820, revealed many new dimensions and changes within Springfield's religious life. The events leading up to the colonial independence from the British government and the shaping of the new Federal order under the Constitution provide the main political features. The church and town affairs finally were separated with the disestablishment of Puritanism as the official religion of the Commonwealth and the community. Several other Protestant groups began to emerge within the town, providing the beginning of religious diversity. The most important theological development of this period was the Great Awakening.

The fourth pastor of First Church was Robert Breck who was called by the congregation in 1734 when he was twenty-one years old. He was a graduate of Harvard University and had preached in New London, Connecticut. There he had suggested that there must be some dispensation of God's justice to embrace those not among the "elect" of the churches, that the

"heathen" could also be the object of God's love.

The county ministerial association opposed his ordination. Two controversial church councils were held with crowds for and against him. To provide a neutral ground, the council was transferred to New London. Most of the local congregation in Springfield supported him, but the area clergy asserted their authority to block his ordination.

Finally, Robert Breck was granted the right to be called and ordained by vote of the Massachusetts local council. The right of the local church to hire him was declared. Following this turbulent beginning, Rev. Breck remained as pastor of First Church for forty-nine years.

The rigid, authoritarian role of the Puritan clergy began to change in the 1730's. A wave of emotional pietism swept through many of the English colonial settlements and was widely accepted in the Connecticut Valley.

The movement had begun by Jonathan Edwards, pastor in Northampton, in 1734 which became known as the Great Awakening. Edwards had succeeded his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in 1728. He was concerned about the moral degeneracy and prevalence of vice in this period. He taught that people were losing their awareness of sin and were drifting away from God's righteousness.

Emotion became the sign of personal conversion and the intellectual understanding of religion gave way to an outpouring of individualistic, excited protestations of penance and faith. The earlier Calvinistic emphasis on election to salvation was replaced by personal communion with God. The class of the elect was no longer an exclusive society. A more sophisticated democracy had developed among the Puritan believers.

Robert Breck was the pastor of Springfield's First Church, having just arrived when the

Great Awakening swept through the area. He supported the revival and invited enthusiastic preachers into the pulpit. Membership grew and the concept of covenant broadened.

**T**

he effects of the Great Awakening were to release democratic forces into the communities affected and prepared the way for political democracy. The Calvinistic emphasis on the idea that few were to be saved and many condemned was,

in some respects, more appropriate to a class society than the new Evangelical stress on a common humanity in which each person communed with God on the same plane with everyone else.

Jonathan Edwards stated his argument in a book entitled "Freedom of the Will." He defined liberty as "the ability to act as one chooses." He preached that "the law of this nation is a law of liberty." He emphasized that man's natural liberty must not be externally restrained. If men were to do the will of God - to do what was good, just and honest - natural liberty was an absolute necessity.

Edwards and other pastors, such as Stephen Williams in Longmeadow and Robert Breck in Springfield, declared this doctrine in pulpit and print and developed congregations well grounded in the theory of natural rights and liberties. They taught that both the restraints of God's law and society's application of that law were required.

The Christian doctrine of original sin was the reminder that the human condition required a continuing struggle against evil. Members of the congregation were reminded by the sermons and prayers of their own sinfulness. Other examples of evil were provided by the British officials and their economic sanctions against the colonists. The sinfulness of British corruption was used in Calvinist sermons as a justification for the rebellion against tyranny. If a king or magistrate did not serve the needs of his

subjects he was committing a sin against the law of nature. Jonathan Edwards had preached that "a great deal of holiness" would render a "a man unable to take complacency in wicked persons or things."

The young preacher taught that man was completely dependent upon God's sovereignty in contrast to the unworthiness of man. By 1734 the townspeople had been converted by his preaching, responding with anxiety to the fear of God's wrath.

The spirit of the revival spread into nearby communities for several years throughout the Connecticut River Valley, and into New York and Boston. George Whitefield, famous evangelist, preached in Northampton in 1740 as the revival continued. Both Edwards and Whitefield shared their emphasis upon the necessity of a conversion experience for a new, regenerated spiritual life, saved by God. The direct results of this awakening were increased attendance at worship and higher standards of morality among the New England Christians.

By 1748 opposition to Jonathan Edwards had developed in his Northampton congregation. The congregation objected to his reversal of the admission of Half-Way Covenant believers to the Lord's Supper. Edwards wished to restrict the sacrament of Communion to professing Christians who were members of the visible church. He also opposed the Half-Way Covenant, asserting that infant baptism should be extended only to the children of converted parents.

Edwards was dismissed as pastor in 1750. He then ministered for several years to the Indians at Stockbridge.

The French-Canadians were one of many of the ethnic groups which would later play an important role in the development of Springfield. They arrived in Springfield during the late seventeenth century.

The earliest French settlers in North America were the explorers and fur traders who arrived under the trade monopoly of the Company of

New France. Although the fur trade was successful, very few immigrants arrived to settle in the explored territories. Therefore, in 1660 France established New France as a royal province. The most notable difference between the English and French colonies in North America was the size of their respective populations. By 1668 there were three hundred thousand English settlers living along the Atlantic coast. In contrast, in the same year, only twenty thousand French colonists were living in the entire area from the northern coast of Canada down the Mississippi River to New Orleans.

**F**

our wars between the French and the English in the battle for territory and colonial power lasted from 1689 through 1763. The final stage of this struggle in North America led to the first major migration of French-Canadians to the

British colonies. With the peace treaty of 1763 after the British victory at Montreal, more than sixty thousand French-Canadians became British subjects.

In 1774 the British Parliament passed legislation which allowed French-Canadians to continue the practice of their Catholic faith and live under the existing French laws. New England colonists were upset by this new law as it prevented the supremacy of the British colonists in the territory and strengthened the power of the Catholic Church. The Quebec Act thus became another reason for the New England colonists to rebel against the British government.

From 1775-1778 the American colonial troops, in alliance with French troops, attempted to conquer Canada from the British. However, the Americans were unable to take control of Canada. Soon, many French-Canadians began to immigrate from Canada to the New England colonies.

Following Paul Revere's midnight ride in Boston, on April 20, 1775, Isaac Bissell rode into Springfield on horseback to alert "all friends of American liberty" of the arrival of British troops in Boston ready to attack the colonists. The bell of First Church awoke the townspeople to the alarm. Sixty-two Springfield men volunteered that day, ready to march in support of the minutemen at Lexington and Concord.

For the previous one hundred and forty years, most Springfield residents had been loyal Englishmen and women. They had been patiently and deliberately trying to avoid separation from British authority, reluctant to become independent and in revolution against their mother country. Even after the military battles began in 1775, some Springfield residents continued to be loyalists to the crown, including Jonathan Bliss, who was forced to move to New Brunswick, Canada.

In 1777, some German mercenary troops stopped in Springfield, remnants of General Burgoyne's defeated British army on their way to surrender in Boston. They had marched from the battle of Saratoga across the Berkshire mountains, many of them sick and dying along the way.

Earlier some German officers had moved to Springfield to become servants after their capture in Bennington. Several of those earlier settlers, plus the mercenary troops under General Baron von Riedesel, decided to remain in the city as permanent residents. These were probably the first German Protestants who came to settle.

The entire community had rallied to support the Revolutionary War effort. The local citizens had to tax themselves to pay for military wages, guns, ammunition, beef, blankets and clothing for the colonial soldiers. They also had to help support the families who were in need while the adult males were away fighting. These burdens upon the town's residents were in addition to the

regular taxes to build roads, schools, courts and other public needs.

**B**y 1776, Springfield had about one hundred and seventy-five houses on six streets. Only one street ran easterly off from Main Street, called the Causeway or the present State Street. From the Causeway, Maple Street extended up to the foot of Central Street hill. All the other streets extended westward towards the river from Main Street.

General George Washington selected Springfield as the location for an arsenal to serve in the manufacture and storage of ammunition and weapons. The town was chosen because it had an operating blast furnace and foundry, good transportation location on the Connecticut River, and yet was securely distant from land or water incursions by the British.

The arsenal began in 1777 and rapidly the city developed along with the growing population of employees. Springfield made a strong contribution to the war effort by providing the resources manufactured at the arsenal. This was the primary cause of the town emerging as a major community in Western Massachusetts.

The Revolutionary War ended in 1781 with the surrender of Cornwallis. Many of the former animosities among the religious groups in Springfield began to fade away. One factor may have been the cooperative efforts necessary to fight against the British and the development of a community spirit which transcended religious differences. For example, the Episcopal Church began to be accepted as a distinct tradition within the city. The narrow Puritanism had become more liberal and broad as the churches developed a more American form of theology and customs.

Following the extensive conflict with the British, many settlers had become debtors in need of

economic relief. Farmers and many poor people favored the issuance of paper money to discharge their debts. But most merchants opposed their solution because of its expected effect upon business.

The result was Shay's Rebellion in 1786. Farmers and debtors united in an attempt to seize the arsenal. They were turned back by government troops. Within a few years after this unsuccessful rebellion, the economy improved.

In 1794 Congress established the former arsenal as the United States Armory. By the next year there were forty employees. Later, the War of 1812 increased the pace of production, attracting many skilled and unskilled laborers to the city. After that war ended, many workers were laid off and another economic depression followed.

The large influx of workers represented the first major introduction of people of different religious backgrounds into the city. The attraction of employment was the primary reason that many diverse religious traditions became part of Springfield's early history.

Although the first settlement of houses had been along Main Street, which remains the central downtown area of the city, the newly arrived workers settled near their places of employment. Thus began the new residential areas near the Watershops Pond and the Ames Paper Mills.

In 1791, the pioneer Methodist bishop, Francis Asbury, preached to people living in the vicinity of the Watershops. After his visit, he remarked that "this place is a haunt of soldiery; the armory being kept here. There appears to be little religion among the inhabitants."

In the following years, there was a succession of itinerant Methodist evangelists who preached in the city. In 1819 the first Methodist Church was built, called Asbury Chapel, located on Hickory Street.

Also in 1819, the fourth Meeting House of First Church was constructed, the building which is still used for worship by the present

congregation. It was designed and built by Isaac Damon of Northampton. He had just completed building the bridge across the Connecticut River joining together Springfield and West Springfield.



As early as 1794, a few Baptists met occasionally for prayer and study with visiting Baptist missionaries. The first Baptist Church was established in 1811. The congregation met for the first ten years in private homes and schoolhouses. Their first building was erected at Central Street and Cherry Lane, in spite of the opposition of Rev. Samuel Osgood, the pastor of First Church.

In 1816, Lieutenant Colonel Roswell Lee, Superintendent of the Federal Armory, was concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Armory workers. Most of them did not want to attend worship services at First Church.

He requested permission from the Federal government to use part of an unused Armory building as a chapel. He wrote: "Let it be recollected that we have no right in the parish; no persons living in the public land are seated in the church (myself excepted)."

The Episcopal chapel was dedicated 1817 by the Rev. Titus Strong, rector of the Episcopal Church in Greenfield. Twenty years later, there would be built the first Episcopal Church, called Christ Church. The first pastor was Rev. Henry Washington Lee, the son of the Superintendent of the Armory.

Farmers and merchants of old Yankee backgrounds preferred to attend First Church on Main Street. But the laborers at the Armory chose other religious traditions, including Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Unitarian. Sometimes the Congregationalists expressed strongly their disapproval of the new rival groups as they witnessed their own faith and practice challenged and diluted. They also feared that those involved in the military

and armaments work would corrupt the morality of the local townspeople.

The second Congregational Church founded within the city began in 1819 when fifty-four members of First Church petitioned the state legislature to create a new church. Following argumentative church meetings in an effort to avoid the breach, the new church was constructed at the corner of State Street and Willow Street. The new congregation supported views contrary to the Trinitarian beliefs of the members of First Church. The second church soon became the Church of the Unity, located adjacent to the former Classical High School, in its building erected in 1869. The architect was H. H. Richardson of New York City and it was part of the developing Unitarian denomination.

In the 1700's many African-Americans gained freedom from slavery by their service in the Continental Army during the War of Independence. Others sought freedom through legal suits and the determination of equal rights under the United States Constitution adopted in 1787. The Fugitive Slave Law abrogated the effect of the Constitution because it required that escaped slaves must be returned to their masters.

Jenny, a fugitive slave arrived and settled in Springfield for several years. She was married to an African-American named Jack in a ceremony performed by Rev. Bezaleel Howard. Soon afterwards, her owner arrived from New York to claim his property and take her back with him. In reaction in her defense, the town selectmen and several local citizens purchased Jenny from her owner and then freed her. As a freedwoman she settled near Mason Square, west of Goosepond. In 1808, she became the last slave to be freed in the town.

In the ten years between 1810 and 1820 the population of Springfield grew an amazing forty-two percent, reaching 3,914 people in 1820.

In 1816 the first covered toll bridge was built across the Connecticut River. Springfield and

West Springfield were more closely linked by this development. The river was active with steamboat transportation, making Springfield a growing crossroads town.



In 1821 several local citizens donated land to create a central urban space for the town, called Court Square. The church had been erected on one edge in 1819 and the county court house was also erected along the same side.

## Chapter III: 1820 - 1900

S

This period of the inter-faith religious heritage of Springfield continues from 1820 until 1900.

The development of the city as a transportation crossroads led the growth from town into an active city. The population grew rapidly in response to many industrial and commercial opportunities.

The diversity and expansion of religious groups continued as different national and ethnic groups settled in this area along the Connecticut River. This review cannot include every group but is limited to a few which can symbolize and represent the wide variety of new forms of religious belief and practice. Each group and tradition added immeasurably to the wonderful quality of life in the city.

These groups will include, in the following order, the Irish, French-Canadian, Jewish, African-American, and Italian. Each group will be considered individually from the start to the end of this eighty year period.

First, let us welcome the entrance of the Irish into the community, the vast number of whom were Roman Catholic.

In the 1830's many Irish arrived, escaping the crop failures and massive famine in Ireland. Most came as laborers, working hard at jobs the Yankees would not do. Many Irish laborers were imported for major construction projects, including the Enfield Canal (1827), Cabotville (1829), New York (later Holyoke, 1847), Indian Orchard (1850) and the railroad (1830's).

By 1846 about four hundred Irish lived in Springfield. The Catholic Church was established following the route of the railroad laborers. The first was dedicated in Cabotville in 1843, named St. Matthews. It was later superseded in 1859 by the Holy Name of Jesus

Church in Chicopee.

The Catholic Church attempted to purchase land adjacent to the U.S. Armory on Prospect Street to serve the Catholic residents in the immediate vicinity. Controversy over the land continued in the courts and it was never used for a church. The first Catholic Church in the city was St. Benedict's, built on Union Street in 1847, with its first pastor being Father George Reardon.

Most of the residents, who were Protestant, regarded the Irish Catholics with suspicion and hostility. However, an enlightened view was expressed by the *Springfield Republican*: "If Catholics exist in our midst, it is better that they should have a place of worship of their own peculiar preference than that they should remain without any of the ordinance of religion as they otherwise would."

The early Irish immigrants settled in shanties on Lyman and Ferry Streets in the North End alongside the railroad tracks.

By 1855 there were more than two thousand Irish in the city, an increase of one thousand and six hundred in nine years. This rapid increase led to many problems of overcrowding, disease, illiteracy and poverty.

Across the nation, the anti-Catholic Know Nothing political party opposed the new immigrant Irish population. However, the party lost its influence when the issue of slavery and the Civil War took priority.

From 1860 to 1864, two more Catholic churches were built to serve the Irish community. St. Michael's Church opened in 1861 on Elliot Street, a large stone church capable of seating two thousand worshippers. In 1864 St. Matthew's Church was built in the Indian Orchard section.

Twenty-five hundred men from the city of Springfield joined the military troops to fight in the Union Army against the Southern Confed-

eracy. When the War Between the States concluded, many Irish citizens supported the movement in their homeland to free Ireland from British control.

S

pringfield's Irish settlers began to be successful in business, the professions, and political activities. As a group, the city has gained by the strength of their spiritual devotion and loyalty to the Catholic faith.

In 1870, the Catholic Church established the Diocese of Springfield, with The Right Reverend Patrick Thomas O'Reilly as its first bishop. In the same year, St. Michael's Church was established as the Cathedral for all Catholic parishes in the diocese which includes Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties.

The bishop created Sacred Heart parish in the North End. This parish moved into its new Gothic building at the corner of Linden and Chestnut Streets in 1888. Bishop O'Reilly died in 1892, succeeded by Bishop Thomas Beaven.

West Springfield at this time had a larger population than Springfield. However, by 1820, Springfield had twice the number of residents of West Springfield.

Fifty-eight percent of those employed in the city of Springfield were in manufacturing, working mainly at the Armory, Ames Paper Mill and Belcher's Iron Works. These workers settled into growing neighborhoods on Armory Hill and along Mill River in the South End.

At this time the Chicopee section of the city developed its own manufacturing and residential identity. The Second Congregational Church in Springfield was that established in the Chicopee section.

In 1823 the Union Street Methodist Church was founded. St. Paul's Universalist Church started in 1827, followed six years later by the Olivet Congregational Church serving the people in the Armory Hill area.

Between 1820 and 1830 the city's population increased a phenomenal seventy-five percent. This growth was the result of the vitality of the New England economy and the expansion of industry throughout the region.

The locks at Enfield, Connecticut, on the Connecticut River opened in 1827. It had been one hundred and ninety years since William Pynchon and the English settlers had carried their boats up over the side of the Enfield Falls in order to reach Agawam.

Thomas Blanchard of Springfield saw the new opportunities of river transportation and built the first local steamboats to travel up and down the river in the next year. His steamboats opened river traffic from Windsor, Vermont, all the way down to Hartford.

Both steamboat transportation and the development of extensive canal networks across the Northeast were soon supplanted by the construction of railroad tracks. The new construction along the east bank of the river required the destruction of many houses along the city's riverfront and walled off the river from easy access by the residents. The railroads also defeated the commercial use of the river for transportation as the trains were faster, more efficient and more economical.

The next major group of immigrants to arrive in Springfield were the French-Canadians. In the 1830's began one hundred years of large migrations of French-speaking people from Canada. Economic depression and food shortages in the North encouraged their movement into New England.

Many came for seasonal farm work or employment in the textile mills, especially those in Holyoke and Indian Orchard. By the year 1848, the population of Cabotsville-Chicopee Falls had grown so large, due to the attraction of the employment at the large mills, that it was set apart from Springfield as an independent town: Chicopee. By the 1850's the Indian Orchard Canal Company had built two mills near the Chicopee River that held fourteen thousand



spindles for the manufacture of cotton and woolen cloth.

D

uring the Civil War many French-Canadian came to Springfield for jobs. By the end of the war there were almost six hundred living in the city. They lived primarily in three locations: Indian Orchard, the South End and the North End.

Soon they established their own churches, schools, societies and stores.

Contrary to the more unified geographic settlements of the Irish and Italians, the French-speaking community settled in dispersed areas of the city. As their number increased they developed institutions to maintain their French language, Catholic faith and cultural traditions. One of these annual festivals was that of St. Jean Baptiste on June 24, the patron saint of all French people.

Millowners in New England sent agents to bring back French-Canadians who would frequently work for less wages and struck less often than other laborer groups. The fact that many French-speaking workers did not enter labor disputes caused antagonism against them by other laborers. This hostility and prejudice encouraged them to maintain their ethnic identity. Of the many French organizations formed in the late 1800's the most important were the Catholic churches and parochial schools.

St. Joseph's Church began in a former Unitarian Church at the corner of State and Willow Streets in 1870. After a fire destroyed the building, the congregation worshipped in St. Michael's Cathedral. In 1873 Father Louis Gagnier arrived and founded two of the city's three French parishes: St. Joseph's Church, built on Howard Street, and St. Aloysius in Indian Orchard. Both churches started parish schools.

In 1888, the French Protestant College started in Springfield, having begun a few years earlier in Lowell to serve the French-speaking popula-

tion. By 1894 it changed its name to the French-American College and then in 1905 to American International College. Originally, its primary student body consisted of immigrant students but it soon came to serve people of all backgrounds.

Eventually, many French-Canadians improved their economic status, moving upward to become skilled workers and industrial leaders.

Tremendous social and economic changes in Europe in the 1800's encouraged many immigrants to come to America. Several waves of European Jews migrated from German territories between 1830 and 1870. Many new arrivals had left behind good jobs but brought no possessions, so the most common work among Jewish immigrants was as an itinerant peddler or trader.

With the increased need to produce guns and ammunition during the Civil War many skilled artisans were hired by the Armory. Due to the prejudice against them, many of these early German workers did not admit their Jewish heritage. There were two outstanding Jewish residents in the city at this time. Leopold Karpeles received the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1870 for his service in the Union-Army. Julius Hallenstein, another German Jew, lived in the city after an honorable period of Civil War service.

The first few Jewish families were isolated and small in number, with little sense of community identity. But when a large flood of Russian Jews arrived in the city in the 1870's a strong and active Jewish community developed. Czarist Russia had continued a series of vicious organized pogroms against the Jewish population. Between 1870 and 1914 more than two million Jews emigrated to the United States, many of them from Russia and the Eastern European countries.

Most of the Russian Jews sought to enter business, relocating from Boston or New York to Springfield. The solitary Jewish peddlers continued to face persecution and opposition from

the earlier residents, just as earlier groups had been scorned by their predecessors.

I

n 1881 Louis Rittenberg moved his dry goods store from Holyoke to Springfield to dispense supplies to the peddlers. His shop on Worthington Street aided many new immigrants. In this period many Jewish families settled on Liberty

Street and northward to Ferry and Sharon Streets in the North End.

At this time, the basic requirements for a Jewish religious community were established. A minyan - the minimum number of male Jews (ten) needed to hold services in the traditional manner was attained. Before this, individual prayer had been held in the home. So anxious for a minyan were the first Jews that some would wait at the nearby train station searching for others passing through whom they would encourage to settle in the city. Weekly Sabbath services were likely held in the homes of the community members.

The first known religious Jewish organization was founded on November 5, 1887. The Aquidass Achim Society met in a single upper story room in the Patton Block at the corner of Main and Hampden Streets. Unable to support a rabbi, learned men led the services.

Since Jewish law requires all burial grounds to be sanctified, the purchase of land was required. Before 1892 the Jewish community had secured a suitable cemetery across the river in West Springfield. No longer did the dead have to be transported to Boston or New York for proper burial.

Jewish food laws were another problem since all food must be prepared according to religious rules to permit kosher food. In addition to peddlers, other occupations began. These included selling ice, groceries, men's clothing, tailoring, collecting rags or scrap metal, fresh fruit, fish, vegetables, livestock and matches.

By 1895 several Jewish families which had

arrived with little or nothing owned growing businesses. The growth of the synagogue paralleled the economic success of the Jewish population. By 1892 the synagogue moved from 274 Main Street to a room at 322 1/2 Main Street, over Graves Hall. On June 2, the congregation was incorporated and named Beth Israel, or House of Israel. Shortly afterwards, Beth Israel was built on Gray's avenue, the first religious structure built by Springfield's Jewish community.

In 1891, another synagogue had begun as the Sons of Jacob Association and moved several times to temporary quarters in the North End.

Springfield, a progressive city in its population and perspective, sought to help its new residents become good American citizens. The assimilation of immigrants included Jews, Italians, Poles, Syrians and Greeks. Free evening classes were provided at various schools for any city resident. Many immigrants who worked during the day were able to learn English and skills that enabled their advancement.

In addition to public education for children and adults, Hebrew education began outside of the school system. Around 1900 several Jewish charitable associations also began. These included Hachnosath Orchim, to aid poor travelers, the Jerusalem Collection, Hebrew Free Burial Association, and the Hebrew Ladies Relief Association.

The Young Men's Hebrew Association was founded in 1895, with its goal to be "the improvement of the mental, moral, social and physical condition of its members and the protection of Hebrew interests."

Throughout the period, the Ferry Street area was the hub of the city's newest immigrant population. Newly arrived Jews, Italians, Irish, Greeks, Syrians and Poles all settled in the area just north of the railroad station.

Although some African-Americans settled in the North End, the majority of them began living in the Armory Hill and Mason Square areas. The African-Americans are the next

group of Springfield's citizens whose religious history we will consider.

T

he Underground Railroad was the response of many Americans to enable slaves to escape to freedom into the northern states and Canada. Springfield was a way station in this clandestine network. "Conductors provided food and shelter to

the African-Americans, hiding them in cellars, attics and secret closets. One hideaway was "the prophet's chamber," a little back room in the house of Rev. Samuel Osgood on South Main Street.

About 1840, several fugitives decided to risk capture and settle in Springfield. This was the beginning of black empowerment with the church and community. At first, African-Americans were restricted to the Cross and Willow Street area and Hancock Street and Eastern Avenue. The first church for African-Americans, the Free Church or Zion Methodist Church, began on Sanford Street, the current site of the Civic Center.

The church emerged from the Pyncheon Street Society, an anti-slavery group which had withdrawn from the First Methodist Society. Later, Free Church became St. John's Congregational Church on Hancock Street. The church has always identified itself closely with the solution of community issues of concern to the African-American population.

Although African-Americans were allowed to worship with whites in the earlier churches, prejudice and hostility often discouraged interracial fellowship. In 1844 there were about one hundred and fifty African-Americans in Springfield. Until they organized, they would remain powerless. From the church as a base, self-help and self-protection groups to aid African-Americans were organized. The Springfield community of African-Americans emerged as a church-centered community.

St. John's Church was instrumental in devel-

oping pride, leadership, other churches and organizations and a self-identity for African-Americans in Springfield. Eli Baptist, a free African-American who arrived in Springfield in the 1850's, was one of the founders of St. John's Church.

John Brown, a white advocate of the abolition of slavery, arrived to work in the city in 1846. He associated with the African-American community and attended St. John's Church. After he moved from Springfield, he led the abortive attack on Harper's Ferry and was hanged.

Thomas Thomas, an African-American slave from Maryland, settled in the city in 1844. He joined First Church and, cooperating with John Brown, was active in the Underground Railroad.

In 1860 two hundred and seventy-six African-Americans lived in Springfield, in two sections: upper State Street and Cross and Willow Streets. Many African-Americans served in the military during the Civil War. There were approximately fifty-seven African-American men living in Springfield in 1863 between the ages of 16 and 45, at least half of whom enlisted in the Union Army.

Following the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves in the southern states, many African-Americans emigrated to settle in the north. This trend continued for a century into the 1970's. New opportunities were expected in the urban communities in the north, such as Springfield. These newly arrived Southern African-Americans joined those who had settled in earlier years.

In 1899, Rev. Dr. William Nelson DeBerry arrived to become pastor of St. John's Congregational Church. A graduate of Fisk University and Oberlin Theological Seminary, DeBerry was an active leader in Springfield. The William DeBerry elementary school is named in his honor.

The earliest religious organizations were started in the 1840's, with Zion Methodist Church in 1844 on Sanford Street. In 1849 Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

began on Loring Street. The Quincy Street Mission Sunday School in the Armory Hill area developed into St. John's Congregational Church which merged with the Sanford Street Church. The building was dedicated in 1892.

ethel Church was destroyed by fire in 1938, and the church moved into the former building of the Springfield Day Nursery in the same year.

B

With the extension of the railroad linked to Worcester in 1839, the city became a major crossroads between all four points of the compass: north, south, east and west. The Merriams bought the copyright to publish *Webster's Dictionary* and the *Springfield Republican* became a daily newspaper. Eleven thousand people lived in Springfield in 1840.

From 1820 to 1900 many new churches had started in the city, many of which have already been identified, relating to specific ethnic or national groups.

In the ten years starting in 1840 four new Protestant churches were founded. South Congregational Church and North Congregational Church, in 1842 and 1846, both were created by former members of First Church.

The Pynchon Street Methodist Church began in 1844, later merging to become Trinity United Methodist Church on Sumner Avenue. Four years later the Evangelical Congregational Church began in Indian Orchard.

In the 1840's several churches located in the downtown district. After the early development of several separate residential areas, the centralization of transportation facilities began to emphasize the downtown area as the central part of the city. The railroad station and public buildings indicated this trend.

Several churches erected downtown buildings, including the Methodist, Baptist, Universalist, Episcopal and Congregational churches.

By the time of its incorporation as a city in 1852, Springfield had become a community with gas-lights, insurance companies, savings banks and stores located along its main street.

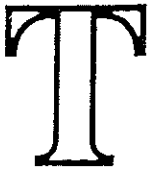
During the Civil War, the economy of the city prospered with the Federal government contracts for guns and ammunition. By 1870 there were twenty-seven thousand people in Springfield. Almost twenty-six percent of them were born in foreign countries.

Several new churches began: State Street Baptist Church in 1864 and the Advent Christian Church in 1878. Union Memorial Church (non-denominational) was erected at the foot of Round Hill, then an exclusive residential area in Brightwood.

When the Civil War began, African-Americans were not permitted to enlist. The African-American pastor of the Sanford Street Church, Rev. J. N. Mars, asserted that blacks wanted to support the Union Army, partly to ensure the defeat of southern slavery. He said, "We see rebels slaughtering our white friends and destroying their property; must we stand and look on quietly?" He went to North Carolina, helping from black regiments for the Union Army and serving as chaplain in an African-American brigade.

Production increased at the Federal Armory. When Fort Sumter was attacked in 1861, output was one thousand guns per month at the Armory. By 1864, the rate was one thousand guns per day. Three thousand, four hundred workers worked around the clock. When southern troops captured the Harper's Ferry Armory, the Springfield Armory became the principal source for the Union's small firearms.

The economy of the entire community improved during the war. Meanwhile, Main Street was changing. Multi-story brick business blocks replaced the old wooden stores and homes. For example, the Haynes Hotel at Main and Pynchon Streets included stores, post office, telegraph office, workshops and an eighty-room hotel.



he Young Women's Christian Association, the third oldest in the nation, began in 1868. Its main purpose was to provide young women with a wholesome place to live, plus educational and recreational activities.

Fifteen women, representing seven Springfield Protestant churches, founded the association. When a fire in 1875 destroyed forty-five downtown buildings, their temporary headquarters were also lost. They began providing room and board for women at 19 Bliss Street, the current location of the Springfield Rescue Mission. Later, they moved to a building on Court Street which was removed following the 1905 fire which destroyed the City Hall. In 1909 they dedicated their new YWCA on Howard Street which is now used for a Hampden County alcoholic rehabilitation program. The YWCA, and its brother organization, the YMCA, continue with many programs to benefit the community, based upon a non-denominational spiritual foundation.

The population of the city continued to increase rapidly. The 1860 population of 15,199 increased seventy-six per cent to 26,703 by 1870. In the next decade to follow, there was a twenty-five percent growth, bringing the census to 33,340 by 1880.

In this period several churches consolidated and merged with other churches. Union Methodist Church became State Street Methodist Church; Pynchon Street Methodist moved into a new building on Bridge Street in 1868, becoming Trinity Methodist Church.

Serving the African-American community, Third Baptist Church, began in 1870. In the twelve years from 1887 to 1899 there was a sudden expansion in the number of religious congregations in Springfield, responding to the growth of the population and movement of various groups into new neighborhoods.

A listing of these new churches and their dates of founding show this growth:

- 1888: Emmanuel Congregational, Eastern Avenue Congregational
- 1889: St. Luke's Methodist, Swedish and Park Congregational, German Evangelical Lutheran
- 1890: Seventh Day Adventist, St. John's Congregational
- 1891: Swedish Evangelical Lutheran, B'Nai Jacob, Bethany Baptist
- 1892: Loring Street African Methodist Episcopal, Congregational Beth Israel
- 1893: First Swedish Methodist, St. Peter's Episcopal, Mt. Carmel Roman Catholic
- 1894: Faith Congregational, Church of Christ (Disciples)
- 1895: All Souls' Roman Catholic
- 1896: First Presbyterian, Second Universalist, Third Universalist
- 1899: Wesley Methodist Episcopal, Park Memorial Baptist.

Eastern Avenue and Olivet Congregational Churches later merged together. St. Luke's Methodist and State Street Methodist Churches eventually merged to form the Wesley Methodist Church. The Third Universalist Church disbanded, as did the Church of Christ.

The final immigrant group which we will review in this period is the Italian. In 1864 two Italian immigrants settled in the city. Others soon arrived to work in the Kibbe Brothers Candy Company or as construction workers and skilled craftsmen.

Several families soon advanced into successful business, including insurance, construction, and the professions of law, medicine and education. In this period all immigrant groups benefitted from the evening school programs to teach English language and American citizenship.

Large numbers of Italians emigrated to Springfield, largely escaping hunger, poverty and disease in southern Italy. The early settlers located in separate areas of Springfield: Winchester Square, North End and downtown.

Luigi Bondi lived in a home at the foot of Court Street near the river. Many large homes with gardens along the riverbank had been converted into multi-family boarding houses and had housed first Irish, then Italian settlers.

**T**

he center of Italian life, however, was in the South End, in the area of Water Street (now Columbus Avenue), Union and Wilcox Streets.

In 1886 there were only one hundred Italians, but by 1893 (in seven years) there were more than two thousand

Italians living in Springfield. In 1892, the city celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. The Catholic Church sponsored special mass celebrated by the Bishop with an oration about Columbus delivered in English, French and Italian.

There was violence and discrimination against the Italians by the previous groups which had settled in the area. Italians faced danger in their daily work, especially those in construction. Many of these laborers moved from site to site, living in tar-paper shacks in the labor camps. Many of these laborers advanced to operate small stores or restaurants to serve the needs of the growing Italian community.

In 1897 the Mount Carmel Society was founded to bring together men of Italian descent for social and religious purposes. In Italy the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was almost a national holiday. The local society transplanted the festival and parade customs of this event to Springfield, first held July 17, 1903.

At first, lacking a church, Italians worshipped in the mortuary chapel of St. Michael's Cathedral, guided by Father M. A. K. Kelly, an Irish-American priest who spoke Italian.

In 1885, Rev. David Allen Reed, a young minister, founded a School for Christian Workers at Winchester Square, to train young people for community service. Five years later, the school's name was changed to The International

YMCA Training School, now known as Springfield College. It continues today as one of two YMCA colleges in the United States officially recognized by the Y movement to prepare professionals in their programs. It has grown steadily, maintaining its original purpose of training young people to serve the community.

This concludes the third period of Springfield's religious heritage from 1820 to 1900. The tremendous vitality and variety of the religious traditions have contributed significantly to the city. This variety of traditions continues as it formed the foundation for the start of the twentieth century.

## Chapter IV

T

he final period of the inter-faith religious heritage of Springfield begins with the turn of the century in 1900, and includes all of the twentieth century. The First World War, the Great Depression of 1929, and the Second World War were the

major events of the first fifty years of this period.

Most of the religious congregations and their leaders were engaged in these national events, with many members of the religious communities serving overseas or giving their support to soldiers and sailors.

The churches had been providing many of the social services that were taken over by the government at the Federal, state and local levels. The religious groups continued to be engaged in providing humanitarian support to those in need in the community and beyond.

The events of the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam engaged the churches in debates and actions regarding major social change. The religious institutions have always reflected the wide spectrum of views and positions of the society at large. Religion has provided the traditional support for the *status quo* of many people. But it has also provided basic social criticism and prophetic witness that was in opposition to much of the prevailing social consensus. This has involved conflict and change within the religious communities as well as in society.

In 1900 the city's population was 62,059, an increase of forty percent since 1890. By 1910 the census had increased another forty-three percent to number 88,926. In the second decade of this century, the population increased another 45 percent, so that in 1920 there were 129,614 people living in Springfield.

During this thirty year period from 1890 until 1920, the proportionate share of the ethnic groups changed considerably. The Irish share decreased in thirty years from forty-seven percent to eighteen percent; French Canadian share decreased from twenty percent to twelve percent. The Italian share increased from two to fourteen percent, and the Russian proportion increased from one percent to twelve percent. Other groups increasing their proportion in the city were German, Swedish, English, Polish and newly appearing Mediterranean groups of Greeks, Syrians, Armenians and Turks.

Some of the churches founded to serve the Mediterranean settlers which continue to exist in Springfield area: St. Mark Armenian Church on Wilbraham Road, St. Gregory Armenian Church in Indian Orchard, St. Luke Greek Church on Prospect Street, St. George Cathedral and St. Peter and St. Paul Orthodox Church on Carew Street.

From 1900 until 1920 the South End became extremely overcrowded due to the large influx of Italian immigrant families. As some advanced in economic growth, operating their own businesses, families moved into West Springfield and Agawam.

The first church founded exclusively for the Italian community was Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in 1907. It began when the diocese assigned two priests to the community: Father Anthony Della Porta and Father Alfredo Ballestrazzi. This parish became the central focus for the cultural and spiritual life of the Italians living in Springfield.

The 1936 flood and the hurricane of 1938 caused extensive damage to many houses and businesses in this area. In the 1940's many families moved into Feeding Hills, Ludlow and East Longmeadow. The once cohesive Italian South End was being altered drastically. Some of the factors that caused this exodus were deteriorating housing, old schools, inadequate rec-

reational facilities, and the construction of Route 91. By 1963 nearly four hundred buildings in the South End had been torn down to make way for the new highway, dislodging more than three thousand people, mostly Italian-Americans.

T

here are four Episcopal churches in the city: Christ Church Cathedral, St. Barnabas and All Saints, St. Luke's and St. Peter's. The growth of the Episcopal churches in Western Massachusetts led to the formation

of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts in 1901. The bishops of this diocese have served ably to lead the parishes of the five counties of the western half of the state. They have been: Alexander Hamilton Vinton 1901-1911; Thomas F. Davies 1911-1936; William Appleton Lawrence 1937-1957; Robert M. Hatch 1957-1970; Alexander D. Stewart 1970-1984; Andrew F. Wissemann 1984 - 1992. The current Episcopal bishop is Robert S. Denig, consecrated in 1993.

In 1928 Christ Church in Springfield offered its land, buildings and endowments as the Cathedral Church for the diocese. Since then the cathedral has been the official seat of the bishop and the center for diocesan worship and work.

Many women have been important in the spiritual life of the churches of Springfield. Here are a few representative examples.

Lucy Mallary (1861-1932) was appointed in 1912 as the Congregational missionary to the foreign-born people in the city. The first public housing development built in 1942 was named for her.

For many years Florence Law directed the relief and rehabilitation work of United Church Women in Springfield. She was also the first African-American to hold a top office in the United Church Women of Massachusetts, serving as president in 1954. This organization

continues to bring Christian women of many traditions together for worship, study and service, now called Church Women United.

The Jewish Home for the Aged on Massasoit Street was founded in 1912 by eighteen women, led by Rebecca Glickman, a Lithuanian Jew.

During the entire twentieth century, the Jewish community has grown in strength and vitality in Springfield. Let us review some aspects of their religious heritage in our local community.

By 1900, the local Jewish community exceeded one thousand, and differences began to be recognized among their practices. The place of birth or origin of a family and differences in national religious customs began to make divisions among the community. This led to the creation of synagogues which served specific traditions, often conforming with the divisions within Europe.

Kesser Israel was founded in 1900, located at 140 Ferry Street. This congregation represented Orthodox Hasidism, a mystical form of Judaism which emphasized emotion above reason and rituals. Nine years after its founding, Kesser Israel moved into a mansion at 329 Chestnut Street.

A smaller group, the Congregation of Sons of Israel, was founded in 1902, building its first permanent synagogue at 1321 Dwight Street in 1924. In 1921, the Sons of Jacob dedicated their new house of worship at 98 Congress Street.

Two other synagogues were founded in the early 1900's: Tiferes Israel (which would last for only thirty years) and Beth El.

At this time, many Jewish families began to move upward economically, being able to purchase homes in the north end. But the new movement of Jewish population was into the prestigious Forest Park neighborhood, opening up an entirely new territory for Jewish economic and social development.

A new, more lenient form of Judaism began in 1912: Beth El, the first Conservative synagogue in Western Massachusetts, using English in place



of Hebrew in Sabbath services. Its location was at 150 Fort Pleasant Street in Forest Park.

**K**

odimoh Synagogue, dedicated in 1923 on Oakland Street, was the first Orthodox synagogue to locate in Forest Park.

Although many of the Jews who relocated in the Forest Park area were among the most prominent in Springfield, the predominant influence of Jewish life remained in the thickly populated North End.

Tragically, anti-Semitism raged throughout Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century. The destruction of World War I left many Europeans homeless, particularly Jews. Springfield's Jewish and non-Jewish population cooperated to raise funds to relieve the suffering abroad and to help resettle many refugees in the city.

Although the American economy improved during the First World War, and many had raised their standard of living, the Great Depression and the destruction of Jewish life in Europe affected those living in this city. As a result, during the period following the War, local Jews increased their programs and institutions to serve the neediest members.

Five Orthodox synagogues remained in the North End, including the original Beth Israel. Beth El and Kodimoh served Forest Park. In 1923, Beth Israel built its synagogue at 565 Chestnut Street.

The United Hebrew Charities were incorporated in 1927, later renamed the Jewish Family Service of Springfield.

Sinai Temple was founded in Forest Park in 1931, the first Reformed Temple in Springfield. From the 1930's through the 50's Jewish migration into suburban Longmeadow illustrated a new area for expansion. A Jewish Community Center to serve both the North End and Forest Park populations was located at 130 Maple Street. The Young Men's Hebrew Association

was absorbed into this center.

In 1938, with the Nazi persecution of Jews, a public resolution from the Protestant churches in Springfield to President Roosevelt was published. In part, they said, "Inasmuch as the indefensible, deliberate and brutal treatment of the Jews by mobs, countenanced by the Nazi government, is an outrage against humanity of such proportions as to transcend all national and racial lines, and to constitute a threat universal in significance, the united Christian churches of Springfield, add their protest to the mounting expression of indignation by the civilized world, and are convinced that the American people, through their government, are obligated by heritage to extend the strongest moral pressure to the end that such monstrous persecutions shall cease."

A few days later, Rabbi Price was the speaker at the annual Thanksgiving Eve Service of the three major downtown Protestant churches and members of the Jewish faith. He said: "We are thankful for the opportunity granted us to strengthen the bonds of religious brotherhood and to establish an ideal state of goodwill between two groups of diversified creeds at a time when religion is assailed and human relations strained.

"It is a sad fact that in dealing with each other, people accentuate their intolerances: They fail to realize that even people who differ in their religious or political viewpoints may pool their forces and co-operate for the common good of humanity. Therefore, when we find ourselves tonight within the reach of a desirable goal in human relations, when we see men and women of different denominations worshipping God in perfect accord and with unity of purpose, we realize we have ample cause to be thankful."

In 1924, Mount Calvary Baptist Church became the full owner of the former Beth Israel Congregation building on Grays Avenue.

In Europe, the terror continued as the Nazis imprisoned, persecuted and murdered millions of Jews in the tragedy of the Holocaust. Springfield responded cooperatively to this need,

sending funds through several agencies and relocating refugees from 1939 through 1945.

D

uring the post-war period, the Jewish community gave almost exclusive emphasis upon programs and institutions in Longmeadow and Forest Park. The Jewish families increased into middle- and upper- middle class, moving out of the

North End.

The support of the new nation of Israel became the primary concern of the Springfield Jewish community, as that nation welcomed many refugees from the Holocaust. Moving from 188 Sumner Avenue, the new Reformed Sinai Temple was dedicated in 1950 on Dickinson Street.

Beth El and Kodimoh built new synagogues in the Forest Park area after World War II, respectively in 1953 on Dickinson Street and in 1963 on Sumner Avenue. Tragically, Beth El was destroyed by fire in 1965, with its building replaced in 1968.

Urban renewal in the 1960's cleared the entire nine-block area which was the former Jewish neighborhood in the North End.

Two of the North End synagogues were sold to the city and their congregations relocated: Kesser Israel into the earlier Kodimoh building, and B'Nai Jacob into Longmeadow.

During the period after World War II, the Jewish service agencies continued to grow, serving the community well. These included the Jewish Federation, the Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Service, Jewish Nursing Home of Western Massachusetts, the United Hebrew Schools and Heritage Academy.

In addition to serving their own community, the Jewish congregations have led many efforts to develop interfaith and interracial cooperation. The leaders and members of the synagogues have contributed significantly to the moral and spiritual quality of life in the education, culture and business aspects of the city's

growth.

Let us now consider some highlights of the role of the African-American churches and their community in Springfield. Many of these churches sponsored programs and organizations for the specific purpose of developing leadership and resources for the unity of the African-American population.

For example, St. John's Congregational Church founded social service programs which emerged as the Dunbar Community League, and Mount Calvary Baptist Church initiated a community association for North End residents.

The pastor of St. John's Church, Rev. Roland Heacock, made this assessment in 1933: "here in this enlightened community of Springfield, there is a determined sentiment against the Negro's possession of any job save that of some form of manual labor. This determination is never voiced, never in print, would be vehemently denied, but nevertheless exists. We cannot draw the city's pay envelope for any job save that of janitor or caretaker... We have yet to crash the gates of the police department, the fire department, the City Hall. Public opinion here is coldly apathetic toward the right of the black man to possess the fullest extent of his earning power."

"The principle of economic segregation is an accepted principle of this and other northern communities."

Following the Second World War, increased migration of southern blacks into the north, including Springfield, in order to find better employment, housing and educational opportunities, led to a larger community here. Gradually, the status of many African-American families began to improve but discrimination and prejudice continued to be the norm in the city.

The churches sought to provide leadership in cooperation and inter-racial understanding, but most congregations tended to serve within one racial group. A few parishes are inter-racial

and therefore provide more programs that emphasize cooperation than churches which are predominantly African-American or white.

T

he civil rights movement nationally in the 1960's resulted in public action and demonstrations in Springfield. Social change and improved legal status with equal rights protection resulted in improved opportunities for city residents in housing, employment and

education. People of all racial and ethnic backgrounds benefitted from these changes, although the spearhead had been the public opinion and pressure from within the black minority. The churches, black and white, were deeply engaged in the civil rights movement.

By the 1990's the social and economic situation of the African-American community in the city has improved vastly, although much progress still needs to be made. The public school system and municipal agencies have done much to increase the relations between the races. The African-American churches have been able to bring the needs and issues of the population to the awareness of the wider community and have developed many solutions based upon spiritual and moral foundations.

As the immigration of various ethnic groups increased into the twentieth century, so the number of Catholic churches to serve specific groups or new neighborhood developed. In 1900 there were only five Catholic parishes in the city. Three were mainly Irish: St. Michael's Cathedral, Sacred Heart and St. Matthew's. Two were French-speaking: St. Joseph's and St. Aloysius.

Within thirty years, by 1930, there were fifteen Catholic parishes and missions, half of which were formed for specific ethnic groups. These new churches were: St. Peter and Paul's (later St. Anthony's) for the Lebanese; Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard and Our Lady

of the Rosary for the Polish; Mt. Carmel for the Italians; and St. Thomas Aquinas for the French. Five new parishes served primarily the Irish: Holy Family, Our Lady of Hope, Holy Name, All Souls, and Our Lady of Sacred Heart.

The first Polish immigrants to the city had arrived in Indian Orchard, with seven refugees living here in 1880. The larger Polish community developed in Chicopee and Ludlow, most of them working as laborers and mill workers. The first Polish mass in Springfield was celebrated in 1903 at St. Matthew's Church. The next year, Immaculate Conception began. When many Polish settled in the vicinity of Franklin and Liberty Streets, Our Lady of the Rosary Church was dedicated in 1918. Urban renewal and the construction of Route 291 displaced many families from the North End, dispersing many into Ludlow and Wilbraham.

Some members of Our Lady of the Rosary Church separated in 1933 to found St. Joseph's Polish National Catholic Church on Prospect Street, a tradition separate from the Roman Catholic Church.

Among the French-speaking population, many families moved out of the South End in the first two decades of the 1900's. Many families advanced economically and moved to better neighborhoods, other were forced out by the relocation of Water Street to form Columbus Avenue, and the later construction of I-91. The French community continued to support its specific Catholic parishes.

Seven new Catholic churches were built following World War II. All of them were located in residential areas, no longer serving specific ethnic group but representing several backgrounds in their parishes. These new churches were: Blessed Sacrament, Dwight Street, 1953; Holy Cross, Plumtree Road, 1949; St. Paul the Apostle, Dwight Road, 1960; Holy Name, 1968; St. Patrick's, Allen Street, 1961; St. Catherine of Siena, Parker Street, 1961; and St. Mary's, Page Boulevard, 1948.

At present, there are twenty Catholic churches within the boundaries of the city of Springfield,

all contributing in many wonderful ways to the spiritual life of their members and the wider community.

T

wo Roman Catholic religious orders have had a major role in Springfield's history: The Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Sisters of Providence.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph have provided teachers for many of the city's parochial schools, including Cathedral Elementary, Cathedral High School, Holy Cross, Holy Family, Holy Name, Our Lady of Hope and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The contributions that these women have made to the development of individual students for the past century is immeasurable.

Sister Mary Dooley was the sixth major superior of the order and is president of the College of Our Lady of the Elms. The college was founded in 1928 and provides education in liberal arts and moral values. Its campus is located in Chicopee. One of its outstanding alumna is Sister Kathleen Keating, S.S. J., who has served as the president of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph since 1979 (president is the title which replaces the former title of mother superior). She also served as president of the National Assembly of Women Religious.

The Sisters of Providence from their mother house in Holyoke have been responsible for the founding of Mercy Hospital. Started in 1898, it continues as a modern general hospital with over three hundred beds serving greater Springfield. Its president is Sister Mary Caritas, S.P.

The spiritual leadership of all Catholics in the city has been provided by the bishops of the Diocese of Springfield, covering all four counties of Western Massachusetts. In 1920 Bishop Thomas Beaven died after serving for twenty-eight years. He was followed by Bishop Thomas M. O'Leary who died in 1949, also completing twenty-eight years as bishop. Bishop Christopher Weldon served from 1950 until his retirement in 1977. Bishop Joseph F. Maguire, who was installed in 1977 and retired in 1992.

His successor is the Most Rev. John A. Marshall who was installed in 1992.

The most recent major immigrant group have been Spanish-speaking, mainly coming from Puerto Rico. They have settled in the north and south ends of Springfield and have become associated with churches in their neighborhoods. Most Spanish-speaking or Hispanic people are Roman Catholic and participate in several Catholic churches. Some smaller mission churches have also emerged to respond to their specific needs to have worship in Spanish.

For the first thirty years, (1953-1983) Blessed Sacrament was a territorial parish serving the neighborhood of the North End of Springfield. In 1983 the Spanish Apostolate was moved from its location at 67 Jefferson Avenue to Blessed Sacrament Parish. During the time the apostolate had its home on Jefferson Avenue (Casa Cristo Rey) worship, sacramental and religious services took place at Sacred Heart Church on Chestnut Street.

During the time since 1983 Blessed Sacrament has become more clearly identified as a Hispanic Church. The membership is now 85-90% of Hispanic origin, and the most prominent group is of Puerto Rican origin. As the Spanish Apostolate of the City of Springfield, this parish serves the immediate neighborhood surrounding the church and also any Hispanic family that wishes to associate with the parish. The vast majority of families live within the City of Springfield but some families that are associated with the parish come from other areas such as Chicopee and West Springfield.

Several parishes have sponsored the resettlement of refugees from Southeast Asia, following the conclusion of the war in Vietnam and the holocaust in Cambodia. As a result, many churches have supported the relocation of Vietnamese, Laotian, Thai and Cambodian into Springfield. The trend towards greater diversity within the churches of the city continues, developing a community which is composed of people from many nationalities and ethnic

traditions.

T

he Springfield Ministers' Association met monthly in the early part of this century in order to have fellowship and study together. It was composed of the Protestant clergy of the greater Springfield area.

In 1926 a major sociological study of the Protestant churches of the city was published. The study surveyed the internal organization of each church and its involvement in the community. Among its conclusions, it urged greater cooperation among the churches and the sharing of their limited resources.

This publication, plus the regular meetings of clergy, encouraged the group to initiate a religious census of the entire population of Springfield, followed by a cooperative visitation program. The group emphasized the value of a permanent interchurch organization that could carry out some united church programs that could not be performed effectively by the individual congregations.

Some of the shared activities of the ministers' association were services and visits to nursing homes and the city hospital, a radio ministry, and common worship services. Rabbis were included in the association, but apparently no Catholic priests attended. Study topics included law enforcement, public education, temperance, public morality, worship, unemployment, psychiatry and book reviews.

In 1928, the Ministers Association voted against Federal plans for increased armament spending and supported a national program for the "outlawing of war and the furtherance of peace by arbitration." Union Thanksgiving services were held by several congregations and combined Holy Week noon-time services were started in the 1930's.

In 1934 the association led efforts to oppose the start of race-track gambling in the Springfield area. United efforts in opposition to this

proposal enabled the churches to learn the merits of organized cooperation. In 1934 the association supported the formation of a local council of churches, and two years later voted upon its proposed constitution. The tragedy of the Second World War diverted attention of the churches and their leaders away from the organization of the council for a few years. The group coordinated efforts to resettle refugees during and after the War.

Finally, three separate councils, composed of men, women and youth, were brought together as part of the new Council of Churches of Greater Springfield. The new council also included the Springfield Council of Religious Education, which has sponsored daily vacation *Bible* school and leadership training for teachers and church leaders.

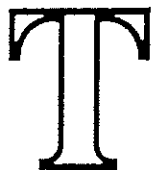
The Council of Churches began in 1938 with voluntary leadership and temporary offices at First Church. The first full-time executive secretary was Chaplain Frank Loehr who started with offices at 145 State Street. Fifty-five churches and four synagogues were members, representing eleven traditions.

In 1965 a religious census of the city was conducted by the Council of Churches. The total population of 187,700 included 25,101 Protestants, 84,933 Roman Catholics, 9,000 Jews, and 4,000 Orthodox Christians. At that time there were twenty-one Roman Catholic Churches and Eighty-three Protestant churches.

Of the Protestant churches, the survey reported that only twenty-four had more than four hundred members. This was the number the survey considered to be the minimum necessary to support adequately a full-time pastor, equip and maintain a church building, and provide a program of service to its members and community.

Today the Council of Churches of Greater Springfield continues to bring together the Protestant churches of the metropolitan area for worship, study and community service. Operating from 152 Sumner Avenue, the Council assists the hungry and homeless, those without

fuel, nursing home residents, hospital patients, and local church leaders. Resources were provided in Christian education, worship, interfaith dialogue, peace and justice, and stewardship. There are sixty-six member churches among the nine communities in the area.



he Council includes the following Christian traditions: African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Armenian, Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Iglesia Christiana, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Unitarian-Universalist, United Church

of Christ and United Methodist.

In 1980, the population of the city was 152,319. Racially, there were 115,878 white, 25,519 black and 10,498 of other racial groups. There were 13,804 of Spanish origin (including all racial groups) of whom 12,298 were Puerto Rican.

Almost ten percent of the population in 1980 had been born in a foreign country. Many foreign ancestries were represented, with the largest being Irish, French, Italian, English and Polish. Other less populous national groups of ancestral origin were Dutch, German, Greek, Hungarian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Scottish, Swedish, and Ukrainian.

In concluding this series about the religious heritage of Springfield we can rejoice in the past three hundred and fifty-seven years. We can be glad that our nation has fostered and cherished the freedom of belief and worship.

Many wonderful religious traditions have become a part of the whole community. Each group has enabled important and unique qualities that are distinctive within each tradition to be maintained and nurtured. Each group has been able to make positive and creative contributions to the wider community and society. Each group has fostered unity and cooperation with those of different traditions. All of these

gifts are important to carry into the future of the life of Springfield.

In the years ahead, may we build together upon the foundations of the spiritual life of the people of this community. May all continue to grow in understanding the will and purpose of God in the journey into the future.

## FOR FURTHER READING

*At The Crossroads: Springfield, MA 1636-1975.* Frank Bauer. Springfield: Bicentennial Committee of Springfield, 1975

*History of the First Church.* Henry Morris. 1875.

*Springfield, 1636-1986.* Edited by Michael F. Konig and Martin Kaufman.

*Springfield - Present and Prospective.* Eugene Gardner, et al., 1905.

*Springfield's Church 1636-1936.* Curtis Pierce Donnell.

*Springfield's Ethnic Heritage Series.* U.S.A. Bicentennial Committee of Springfield, 1976.

*Springfield's Spiritual Contribution to the Nation 1637-1937.* Gilbert Montague.

*Starting Over: The Formation of the Jewish Community of Springfield, MA, 1840-1905.* James A. Gelin.

*Story of Western Massachusetts.* Harry Andrew Wright. 4 volumes. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1949.

*The Immigrant Experience in Springfield,* Kathyne Burnes, et al.

*The Springfield Church Survey.* H. Paul Douglass. New York; George H. Doran, 1926.

*Town Into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880.* Michael H. Frisch. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

*Women of Springfield's Past.* Robert M. Grahame and Catherine S. Blakeslee, 1976.