





Top: *Watts Hymnal*, owned by Francis Hatch of Falmouth, in Museums archives.

Center: Title page of hymnal, 1835 ed.

Bottom: “Joy to the World” as revised by Watts from Psalm 98.

favor of music (and, eventually, of the observation of Christmas as well) can be traced through several items found at Museums on the Green.

Our archives hold three copies of *The Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D. to which are added, Selected Hymns from other authors, and directions for musical express* by Samuel Worcester, with publication dates of 1823, 1835, and 1858. The earliest “singing” in the Puritan meeting house had consisted of the metrical recitation of Psalms, usually led, or “lined out,” by the designated precentor—a practice that few today would recognize as hymn singing. The texts recited sought to be literal translations of the original Hebrew scripture, with little attention given to the poetic nature of the verses.

Unhappy with this practice, Isaac Watts, an Independent (Congregational) pastor in England, wrote new versions of the psalms to make them more suitable for singing and revised the language to give it a New Testament flavor. Urged by his father, Watts wrote a new musical psalm every Sunday for two years, reshaping the nature of the psalter. He later added hymns—songs that conveyed the beliefs and feelings of Christians, but were not purely translations of biblical texts. Ultimately, Watts wrote about six hundred hymns, more than any other single hymn writer.

One of Watts’s most widely sung hymns, appearing in all three editions of the Museums’ hymnbook, is “Joy to the World,” first published in 1719. Based on Psalm 98, this hymn continues the use of psalms, albeit in an evolved form, as the

proper vehicle for church music. Watts did not regard “Joy to the World” as a Christmas hymn; rather, he intended it to describe the Second Coming. If you read all its lyrics carefully, you will not find a reference to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Producing texts that were more poetic, and thus easier to sing, was but part of the task of moving from metrical psalters to the hymnals we know today. The second ele-

ment was the creation of tunes to which the words could be sung. Another item found in the archives is an 1829 edition of *The Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music*. In the interest of providing quality music for hymns, this text provided instructions in reading music and then offered a number of hymns set to tunes of famous composers. This collection was created by Lowell Mason, a native of Massachusetts, though living in Georgia at the time. When he had trouble finding a publisher, he submitted the collection to the Boston Handel and Haydn Society, which published it anonymously, at Mason's request. Within its pages, we find hymns for use throughout the year, as well as Christmas songs, such as "When shepherds watched their flocks by night." Lowell Mason would later compose a tune called "Antioch," based on musical quotations from Handel's *Messiah*. "Antioch" blended so successfully with Watts's poem that it became the only tune we now associate with "Joy to the World."

The celebration of Christmas was finally restored to Congregational worship during the nineteenth century, some say as a way to help bring a divided country back together following the Civil War. According to Rev. Showalter, the Falmouth church began to observe Christmas in the early 1880s. Probably parishioners drew some inspiration for their festivities from the other denominations flourishing in town, including Methodists,

Episcopalians, and Catholics.

The Christmas we know today is made up of strands borrowed from many religious groups, from secular lore such as the stories of Dickens, and from immigrant traditions, most notably the German Christmas tree. Though the Puritans and their spiritual heirs in the Congregational Church came late to the Christmas party, through Watts and Mason they contributed one of its most beloved carols.

*Terry White  
& Meg Costello*



*Left: Rev. Henry K. Craig presided over the first Congregational Christmas in Falmouth in 1882.*

*Below: In 1895, Congregationalists enjoyed a "merry" program that included Santa Claus and Jingle Bells along with religious music.*

**Vol. 4 Sabbath, December 22, 1895.**

**The Grand Old Name from God on Christmas Day**

1. ORGAN PRELUDE. From St. Cecilia, Offertory 2. *Battle*
2. GLORIA IN EXCELSIS. Chanted by Choir
3. RESPONSIVE HYMN. Selection 2. "The Magni God, Prince of Peace." Congregations started but rising to sing
4. BETHLEHEM SONG. No. 48. (Two stanzas only.)
5. THE CHRISTMAS BIBLE and SERMON LESSON
6. ANTHEM. "There were Shepherds." Carl Flinger
7. CHRISTMAS OFFERTORY. Home Expenses
8. HYMN 449. "Christ is born in Bethlehem." C. Wesley
9. PASTORAL PRAYER and DEUT. "Hark! Hark my Soul."
10. CONGREGATIONAL HYMN 141. "Star of Bethlehem."
11. **The Christmas Service.** "Here is some (some of) bread, I am the bread which comes down from Heaven," Matt. 13: 1 John 1: 14. Dinner—Mark's supper and God's supply.
12. HYMN 448. "That is the living bread." R. B. Palmer
13. GLORIA PATRI and Pastor's Fifth Christmas Sermon at the Door. **WILL** those in Side Aides please pass out the Main Aisle. Will those in Gallery come down and do likewise.
15. ORGAN POSTLUDE. "Hallelujah Chorus." Handel

**SUNDAY SCHOOL at noon.** All Welcome. By Rev. School.

**V. P. & C. R. & others.** Young Subject: *Home Meeting.* Leader: Mr. W. O. Lawson. Everybody Welcome.

**Bring Home Song Book.**

**Christmas Sunday-School Concert To-Night.**

**7 O'CLOCK. THE PUBLIC INVITED.**

**Subject: The Son of the Morning!**

Christmas Joy and Peace! Christmas Songs!

*Arranged by Gilbert Fennell.*

Recitations by the Children.

Address by Pastor and Superintendent.

**COLLECTION**—Every person invited to Give Something Freely.

**WILL** school will please meet the Superintendent in the Vestry at 6:45 o'clock sharp.

**ARRANGEMENTS THIS WEEK.**

**TUESDAY 7:30 O'CLOCK.** *More Time in Years.* Christmas Festivities for the Children. All members and friends of the Sunday-School invited. P. R. SANTA CLAUS will be (Herrington-Bell).

**WEDNESDAY 7:30 P. M.** "Oh Earth Peace Good-Will Toward Men." *Early.*

**THURSDAY 7:30 P. M.** W. C. T. U. meets with Mrs. May.

**FRIDAY 7:30 P. M.** The Church Covenant Meeting. All new converts urged to attend these meetings. Young people desired. Try for a large attendance. Subject: Christmas A. D. and A. G. 1895.

**NOTES.**

(1) It is hoped that all who signed cards at recent meetings will desire to assist with the church in the January or March Conventions.

(2) Don't miss the *Home Concert To-Night.*

(3) Evangelist Hester is in Dover, Me.

(4) YOU are requested a Committee of One to be sent at all meetings of this Church. Perhaps you are already on the Committee. Keep it up!

(5) Jesus entered Humanity on Christmas Day—WILL you be born into His Divinity to-day?