

READING SCRIPTURES (including Psalms) IN SERVICE (RS)

n.d. (1620 on) + 1699 + 1726 + 1736 + 1772 or later + 1804 + 1806: "*Reading the Scriptures*. In the first periods of their settlement, our fathers were very careful to have the Word of God read and expounded in the sanctuary. It was a part of the worship, contained in their confession of faith. But, in process of time, so [p. 625] proper a service ceased in our Congregational churches. When Benjamin Colman was settled in Boston, 1699, he began to read the Scriptures to his congregation, then an uncommon practice. Though many were prejudiced against it, as well as his repeating the Lord's prayer after the first short prayer, still his example had much influence. The *Ratio Disciplinae* [by Cotton Mather] of 1726, says, as to reading the Bible in public, 'This practice obtains in many churches among us, and that no offence is taken at it.' Ten years after this, the First church in Salem adopted the like custom. The North church, after settling Mr. Barnard [in 1772], followed the example. It appears that not till 1804 did the Tabernacle, nor till 1806 did the South church have the Bible read from the pulpit. Since, this part of worship has been uninterrupted in all our religious societies, except those of the Friends." [MA/Salem; Felt 1849, pp. 624-625]

1641 + 1663 + ca. 1774 + 1807 + 1826: "FORM OF WORSHIP. 1641. The Pastor begins with prayer, and the Teacher reads and expounds a chapter. The practice of reading the Scriptures was dispensed with here about sixty years ago [i.e., about 60 years before this book was published in 1834]. It was revived in the First Parish 1807, and in the South Parish 1826. When it was dropped, the worship began with singing. Formerly, when a portion of the Bible had been read, one of the Ruling Elders would give out a Psalm. Then a sermon, and sometimes an extempore address would follow. This service was often beyond an hour. Then came singing, a prayer, and a blessing. In the afternoon performances, Josselyn says, 1663, that a Psalm was sung before the benediction." [MA/Ipswich; Felt 1834, p. 212]

1663 – see 1641

1699 – see n.d. (1620 on)

n.d. (between 1701 and 1745): "In Mr. Swift's day [John Swift, first minister, 1701-1745], few, except the pastor and deacons, had psalm-books; and it was customary for the minister to read the psalm in full, when the senior deacon would rise, face the audience, and repeat the first line, which would be sung by the congregation; and so on to the end of the six or eight stanzas." [MA/Framingham; Temple 1887, p. 337]

1726 – see n.d. (1620 on)

1736 – see n.d. (1620 on)

n.d. (between 1748 and 1780): "This brief order of service was enriched during Mr. [Rev. William] Lawrence's ministry [1748-1780] by the addition of the invocation, reading of the Scriptures and a congregational hymn..." [MA/Lincoln; Lincoln 1899, p. 25]

"some time before" 1749, 3 September: "The public reading of a lesson from the Scriptures, as a stated portion of the service, was not introduced into New England until near the middle of the last century. The following extract from the church records shows the period when it was first commenced here. '1749. Sept. 3. Voted, that thanks be given, by the pastor, publicly, to the Hon. John Chandler, Esq. for his present of a handsome folio Bible for the public reading of the Scriptures, which laudable custom was very unanimously come into, by the church, at one of their meetings some time before.'" [MA/Worcester; Lincoln 1837, p. 179]

"[smaller type:] '1759: Voted to read the Scriptures in the congregation.' [new paragraph, regular type:] What reason our ancestors could give for not reading the word of God in the sabbath services, we cannot imagine. In 1720, Mr. Holmes [Rev. William Holmes, "A Discourse Concerning the Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures by the Lords People, in their Religious Assemblies," Boston: B. Green, 1720] says: -- [new paragraph, smaller type:] 'Why this practice should be discontinued by any of the disciples of Jesus, I see no reason. I am persuaded it cannot be alleged to be any part of our reformation from Popish superstition.'" [MA/Medford; Brooks 1855, p. 225]

1763, 5 February: "...[Rev.] Mr. [Philemon?] Robbins was also requested 'to introduce ye Practice of constantly reading some part of ye Holy Scriptures in ye Publick Worship of God.' Previously to this time, the only way in which the Bible had been read in the church service was when it was 'expounded' by the minister, i.e.—when the minister would read a chapter, phrase by phrase, commenting upon each phrase as he progressed in the reading, and making, practically, a sort of exegetical sermon of the performance. The uninterrupted reading of a portion of Scripture was unknown in early New England worship." [CT/Branford; Simonds [1919], p. 79]

1769: "*April 19th*. First church in Newbury voted, that 'it is agreeable that the scriptures be read in publick.' [MA/Newbury; Coffin 1845, p. 235]

"Rochester, Aug. 9, 1770 Being a day set apart by ye chh for prayer & fasting on account of a severe drought ye chh were stayed after public service & voted that ye Scriptures should be read as part of ye Pubic worship on Lord's Day." [MA/Rochester; Rochester 1907, p. 120]

1772: "Among the Stoughton papers, quoted by Mr. John A. Stoughton, in his *Windsor Farmes* (p. 97), is the following petition: [smaller type:] EAST WINDSOR, / Sep^r. y^e 9, 1772. / To y^e Gentlemen Society Comm^{tt}. For y^e North Society [Scantic] in said East Windsor, this from us the subscribers are to Desier you as soon as may be

to warne a society meeting to do y^e following Business, viz.: [new paragraph] 1st. To see what y^e Society will do Respecting Singing whether they will ap[p]rove of Beeting y^e time with y^e hand in divine worship. [new paragraph] 2d. Whether y^e society will approve of Sounding or Pitching y^e notes with y^e voice or Pitchpipe before they begin to sing. [new paragraph] 3d to see whether they shall appoint y^e Rev. Mr. Potwine to tell the tuner what tune they shall sing. [new paragraph] 4. To see if the Society will agree upon a Serteine number of tunes that shall be sung upon y^e Lord's Day in divine worship in this Society, and what tune they will have sung. [new paragraph] 5 to see whether they will chuse any person or persons to tune the Psalm for us in this Society. [new paragraph] 6. To see whether the society will agree to Seet the Meeting house againe, or approve of y^e disorderly Sitting in y^e Gallerys among y^e young people. [new paragraph] 7. **To see if the society will agree to sing without having the Psalm read upon the Sabbath in divine worship.** [signed by 24 people]" [CT/Windsor; Stiles 1891, vol. I, p. 605]

1772, 8 December: "...voted Joseph Cornish Zacheus gillit Juny [= Jr.?] Coristurs Decon Asahel Holcomb Richard gay to read y^e Salme..." [CT/East Granby; quoted in Turkey Hills 1901, p. 37]

1772 or later – see n.d. (1620 on)

"...in 1773, the same society [the "first society"] voted 'to sing four times every Sabbath, without reading the psalms.'" [CT/Glastonbury; Chapin 1853, p. 78]

1773: "...the Society voted to omit the reading of the Psalm, 'as heretofore practised.'" [CT/Hartford; Parker 1892, p. 143]

ca. 1774 – see 1641

1774 and later: "During the intermission of the services on the Sabbath, the 'Scriptures and other books of piety' were read as early as 1774. The persons chosen for that purpose were members of the church, and they held their office about three months at a time." [MA/Boxford; Perley 1880, p. 248]

1782, 13 May: "...also voted That those that Lead in Singing in Said Society Sit in y^e meeting house where They think most Convenient to Sing[;] also voted that y^e Choeristers Set Such tunes as they think Proper according to y^e meetors Propounded[;] also voted not to Read y^e Psalm Line by Line[;] also voted to finish y^e front Seat in y^e Gallery[;] also voted a farthing on y^e Pound to Defray y^e Charges[;] also voted to Chuse m^r Isaac Owen J^r Sam^l [*sic*] Forward Thomas Stevens J^r Roswel Skinner and Jesse Forward To be Choiristers..." [CT/East Granby; quoted in Turkey Hills 1901, p. 48]

"In 1783 it was voted to read a psalm to be sung..." [MA/Canton; Huntoon 1893, p. 312]

"April 22:^d 1784 A Church-Meeting being called To know what Measures the Church will pursue, to render the Music performed as part of divine Worship as agre[e]able and edifying as may be ----- Voted. That the Reading of the Psalm in the Meeting-House, in the time of public Worship, by the Deacons be omitted for the first time of singing in the forenoon, and the last time in the afternoon, till further Order from the Church..." [MA/Lincoln; church records, transcription by NC, probably 1992]

1785, 24 August + 1786, 12 March, 4 September + 1787, 17 October + 1788, 25 September: "One difficult matter, which required all the abundant tact of Mr. [Rev. Joseph] Avery to manage, was the change which came in the latter part of the eighteenth century in respect to church music, and other elements of public worship. To place the following records in order will show with sufficient distinctness the gradual modification of sentiment. [indented] '1785 Augst 24th At a Chh meeting appointed to consult what is proper to be done relative to singing in the publick worship of God— Voted 1 / that Dea. Haven set such tunes as he shall think fit & proper—omitting for the present those tunes which are found particularly disagreeable to a number of the Chh—& to sing by reading of two Lines of y^e psalm. 2 / The Question was put whether the reading of the psalm be omitted at the last time of singing on every Sabbath 11 Votes for & 11 against it.—' '1786 March 12. Voted that the Singers be desired to sing such tunes as may be sung with reading two Lines only, at those times of singing which immediately precede the sermons & the Chh will acquiesce in their singing without reading at the beginning of the exercises, & the last time in the afternoon—& further that this be continued till tis otherwise signified to them by the Chh. or Town, or each of them.' [p. 95] '1786 Sept.^r 4th at a Chh. meeting—Voted 1 / to signify to the Singers that the Chh desire that all such of them, as are able to lead in the Singing, would do it as occasion may require— 2 / that 'tis the earnest request of the Chh that the Singers would omit the singing of Milford & Hart[ford] [←square brackets in source] & in Tunes that are repeated, that, if it may be, they would omit the Repeats till the last time of going over the tune.' '1787 Oct.^r 17. The Chh met. 1 / put to vote whether the Chh will make any alterations as to the present mode of singing. [new line] eight votes for, & eight against it.—' '1788 Sept.^r 25 at a Chh meeting Voted 1 / that the Chh acquiesce in having the Singing carried on in the publick worship, without having the psalm read by the Deacons any part of the day.— 2 / that **if a bible, with explanations of the scriptures, shall be procur'd,—that a portion out of the same may be read in lieu of the singing at the beginning of the exercises that part of the year when 'tis usual to sing five times in a day.—**" [MA/Holden; Estes 1894, pp. 94-95] [These church votes should be considered in tandem with Rev. Avery's later correspondence with parishioners Rice + Smith; see RS/OW 1791 + 1794; also note that on 13 October 1787, four days before one of these votes, Rev. Avery wrote to Rice asking him to attend the next Church meeting, "that they may hear from you the reasons of your absenting yourself from special ordinances" (photocopy of this letter with copies of later letters).]

“1786 To see if the town will choose one or more persons to assist Capt. Russell in pitching the tune. Also to see if the town will vote that singing shall be performed a part or all of the time without reading the psalm. Voted that Capt. Stephen Russell be assisted by Joseph B. Varnum, Moses Nowel and Joshua Bradley in setting the psalm. Also that singing be performed in the afternoon without reading the psalm.”
[MA/Dracut; Coburn 1922, p. 192]

1786, 12 March, 4 September – see 1785, 24 August

1787, 17 October – see 1785, 24 August

1788, 25 September – see 1785, 24 August

1804 – see n.d. (1620 on)

1806 – see n.d. (1620 on)

1807 – see 1641

1826 – see 1641