

THE LANDMARK 1892 REORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST

Friday 23.

*Eleven brethren and sisters met and
formed the church.*

*In the evening Willie Miss Bartlett
and myself sent notices to the distant members
of their election*

William B. Johnson's diary for Friday, September 23, 1892. ("Willie" is William B.'s son, William Lyman.)



Mary Baker Eddy (1891 photograph)

One hundred years ago this September "...at the request of Rev. Mary Baker Eddy, twelve of her students and Church members met and reorganized, under her jurisdiction, the Christian Science Church and named it, **THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST**."¹ She had previously indicated the pattern that this reorganization would follow in an article for the July 1892 edition of *The Christian Science Journal*. In that article titled "Hints for History" she reminded her followers of "The diviner claim and

means for upbuilding the Church of Christ..." and cautioned them to "...let the divine will and the nobility of human meekness, rule this business transaction in obedience to the law of God, and the laws of our land."

It is the purpose of this issue of *Quarterly News* to provide our readers with an historical review of key events relative to this momentous organizational redirection of the Christian Science Church that would, eventually, ultimate in the publication of the *Manual of the Mother Church*.

The need to disorganize

The very difficulties attendant upon the congregational style of church government that had grown up around the 1879 charter² for the Church of Christ, Scientist, made clear to Mrs.

Eddy, in the late 1880's, the need to move her church forward organizationally.³ Although the Christian Scientist Association had approved Mrs. Eddy's non-traditional motion in April 1879 "To organize a church designed to commemorate the word and works of our Master..." they nonetheless followed the familiar patterns for Protestant church organization, which included personal preaching and a congregational style of church

government.⁴ Such organization might be adequate for a localized church, but not for a church conceived of as "...imperatively propelling the greatest moral, physical, civil, and religious reform ever known on earth."⁵

In 1888, moreover, both factionalism and rebellion threatened to destroy the young Christian Science Church in Boston.⁶ By late November 1889, in a letter to a student,⁷ Mrs. Eddy gave unmistakable direction as to the type of organizational structure necessary for the survival of her church. In that letter she exemplifies the same unwavering trust, so characteristic of her healing works, in relation to the transformation of her church, in these words: "This Mother Church must disorganize, and now is the time to do it and form no new organization but the spiritual one."⁸

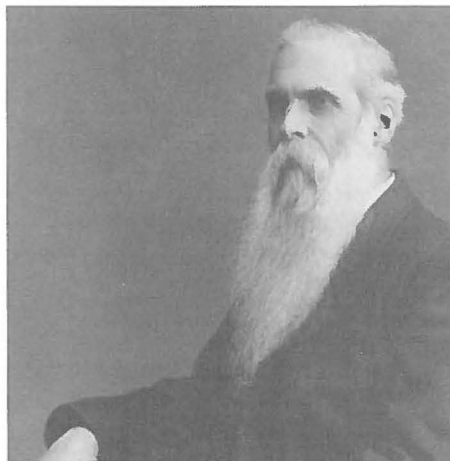
The end of the 1879 church organization

To use an architectural metaphor, the disorganization of the church could be likened to the thorough renovation of a building, in which the basic frame remains intact, but its interior features are removed so that the space may be reconfigured to better fit its purpose. Following Mrs. Eddy's instructions in early December 1889, the members voted to dissolve the church organization. This change did not mean the termination of the church or its activities. In fact, the 1879 church charter was never surrendered⁹ nor did church services cease. The church continued on as a sort of voluntary religious association with a valid corporate charter. What had changed was that, in dissolving the church organization that had grown up around the 1879 corporate charter, the Boston church had begun to free itself from some of the limitations of a congregational form of church polity in which the entire membership directs, by vote, the major functions of the church.¹⁰ Mrs. Eddy's disorganization of the Boston church in December 1889 did not mean the utter rejection of organizational structure for her church.¹¹ Rather than the outright destruction of the body corporate, her writings from this period illustrate her conviction of seeking the healing and restoration of her church on "...the purely Christly method of teaching and preaching..."¹² Writing only two years after the decision to disorganize her church and referring to those very changes, she could say, "After this experience and the Divine purpose is fulfilled in these changing scenes, this church may find it wisdom to organize a second time for the completion of its history."¹³



Mary F. Eastaman

The period from the disorganization of the church in 1889 to its reorganization some three years later was a time rich in foundational developments for the Christian Science movement, including the landmark fiftieth edition of *Science and Health* in January 1891 and the first edition of *Retrospection and Introspection* in November 1891.¹⁴ Clearly, it was Mrs. Eddy's own initiative under God's impulsion that was guiding her into this new uncharted territory of developing an organizational structure that would most nearly approximate what she perceived as the spiritual basis of church, even as her successive revisions of *Science and Health* sought word structures that would more precisely express her "...glimpse of the great fact...Life in and of Spirit..."¹⁵



Ira O. Knapp

Seeking a method for reorganization

How to fashion a human organization that would serve the unique requirements of a church dedicated to the "...apprehension of spiritual ideas..."¹⁶ gradually became evident to Mrs. Eddy over a period of more than thirty years. This gradual development of the church organization was even recognized by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in a 1924 decision that read in part, "Her views in 1892 apparently were in a state of transition, development or evolution. She had not then completely formulated the precise form of ecclesiastical organization best adapted in her mind to carry out her conception of a church. She was studying the problem but had not reached a conclusion."¹⁷

To attach undue concern to the extent that the years from 1889 to 1892 and after can be characterized as a state of organizational transition is to

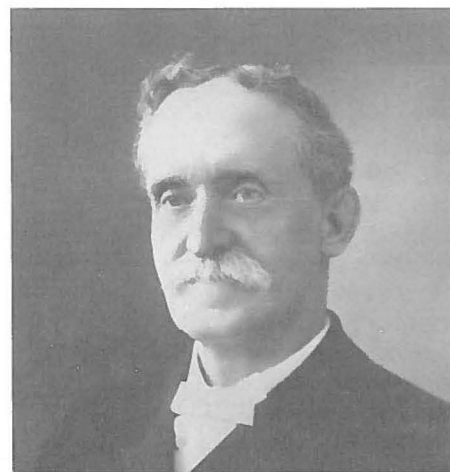


Julia S. Bartlett

miss the crucial point of Mrs. Eddy's unwavering conviction that, "...material ways and means whereby to establish the Church of Christ are weak..."¹⁸ On the surface, much of the controversy in 1892 appeared to be related to such things as the question of who had the legal authority necessary to enable the Boston congregation to proceed with the building of a church edifice or a combined church and publishing building. Yet the real controversy in that period was the age-old conflict between man's knowledge and God's wisdom.¹⁹

Finding the right method for reorganization

In the early spring of 1892, Mrs. Eddy wrote a letter to the Christian Science Church in Denver, Colorado, at the time of the dedication of their new edifice, reminding them to, "Exercise more faith in God and His spiritual means and methods, than in man and his material ways and means of establishing the Cause of Christian Science."²⁰ The result of her "exercise of faith in God and His spiritual means



William B. Johnson

and methods..." became evident in August 1892. As Mrs. Eddy put it in October 1892, "About six weeks ago I called for legal counsel and engaged two able lawyers in my native state. Guided by the Divine Love they found in the laws of Massachusetts the statute...for incorporating a body of donees, without organizing a church. Truly, God's ways are not man's ways; and faith in the Divine methods are indeed the footsteps of the flock. What joy might now crown this faith had it taken firmly the first steps and held on, till it clasped God's right hand."²¹

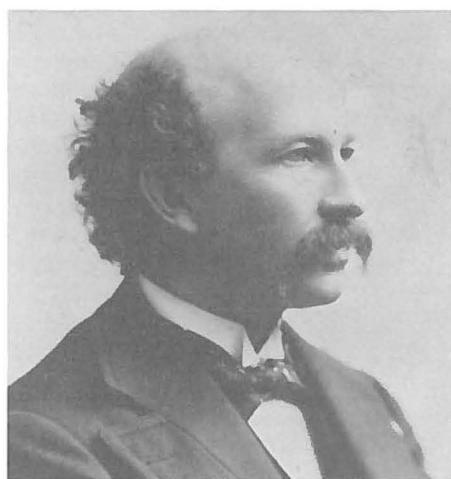
The statute "...for incorporating a body of donees..." allowed for the creation of a governing board for her church that could handle both the fiduciary and the religious responsibilities she would assign to them. As section one of Chapter thirty-nine of the Massachusetts Public Laws states, "The deacons, church wardens, or other similar officers of churches or other religious societies, and the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal churches, appointed according to the discipline and usage thereof, shall, if citizens of this commonwealth, be deemed bodies corporate for the purpose of taking and holding in succession all grants and donations, whether of real or personal estate, made either



Mary W. Munroe

to them and their successors, or to their respective churches, or to the poor of their churches."²²

Prior to the establishment of the Christian Science Board of Directors as "...a perpetual body or corporation under and in accordance with section one, Chapter 39 of the Public Statutes of Massachusetts"²³ on September 1, 1892, Mrs. Eddy requested twelve of her students to meet on



Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy

August 29th to organize a corporation to be known as "The First Church of Christ, Scientist."

The twelve (Ira O. Knapp, William B. Johnson, Joseph S. Eastaman, Stephen A. Chase, Julia S. Bartlett, Ellen L. Clarke, Janet T. Colman, Mary F. Eastaman, Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, Eldora O. Gragg, Flavia S. Knapp, and Mary W. Munroe)²⁴ met at Julia Bartlett's rooms on Dartmouth Street in Boston.²⁵ At the August 29th meeting the twelve were informed by a message from Mrs. Eddy, sent via Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, that a new church corporation would *not* be formed. Instead these faithful students were acquainted with and concurred in support for a new deed of trust drafted by Mrs. Eddy that made use of the Massachusetts statute previously mentioned, which allowed for the creation of "...a perpetual body or corporation..." to "be known as the 'Christian Science Board of Directors.'" This deed of trust revised the church's name from its 1879 title as "Church of Christ, Scientist" to "The



Ellen S. Clarke

First Church of Christ, Scientist." Principally, the deed of trust, executed on September 1, 1892, served to convey title for the land on which the original edifice of the Mother Church was to be built from Mrs. Eddy to the Christian Science Board of Directors.²⁶ As one biographer of Mrs. Eddy has aptly noted, this deed of trust, "...has always and very justly been looked upon as one of the important landmarks in the history of the movement, for in it the plans for a 'Mother Church,' which Mrs. Eddy had evidently been formulating for some time, were first unfolded."²⁷

The newly organized Christian Science Board of Directors included Ira O. Knapp, William B. Johnson, Joseph S. Eastaman and Stephen A. Chase.²⁸ On September 16, 1892, Knapp, Johnson, Eastaman and Chase sent a letter to all contributors to the church building fund to apprise them of the current situation. In that letter they informed the contributors that the Christian



Janet T. Colman

Science Board of Directors was now formally organized (under Massachusetts corporate law), held legal title to the land upon which the church edifice would be built and was legally empowered to collect and hold funds for building the church.²⁹

Although the Boston church had both a new self-perpetuating board and a congregation, it had, as yet, no actual members. That situation was rectified on Friday, September 23, when those twelve students³⁰ were again invited to meet at Julia Bartlett's apartment for the purpose of voting themselves and twenty other students of Mrs. Eddy as "First Members."³¹ Basically, the new organization of The First Church of Christ, Scientist in

Boston was in place. William B. Johnson, Clerk and member of the Christian Science Board of Directors, noted in his diary, "Friday [September] 23 [1892] Eleven brethren and sisters met and formed the Church."³²

Corporate law and church reorganization

Employing the provisions of the corporate laws of the state of Massachusetts to gain the incorporation of her church in 1879 and of her church's Board of Directors in 1892 was entirely a matter of using a particular legal statute as "...the best practical way of accomplishing the immediate end she had in view."³³ In discussing the practical nature of church organization with Judge Clifford P. Smith in 1909, Mrs. Eddy indicated that the organizational structure must serve the needs of the Christian Science movement. Furthermore, she noted, that those who go about saying that Christian Science needs no church organization were in the position of "not knowing what they are talking about." As Mrs. Eddy saw it, "Organization is a simple matter, ...doing things by working together."³⁴ Adam Dickey, a secretary for Mrs. Eddy from 1908–1910, later characterized



Flavia S. Knapp

the church organization which his teacher had established as, "...the most simple form of church government of which the world knows anything."³⁵

Corporate law hadn't provided the simplicity in the 1892 reorganization; rather it had allowed for the necessary conditions under which a church organization on a more spiritual basis could evolve. After all, a corporation is merely "an artificial...legal entity created by or under the authority of the laws of the state or nation, ...vested

with the capacity of continuous succession, irrespective of changes in its membership...acting as a unit...to the common purpose of the association..."³⁶ Historically, the corporate laws of Massachusetts came forth from the practical wisdom of founding fathers such as John Adams, who believed in, "...the value of common action..." in the "...organization of churches and towns..." to the end of "...the common interest..." promoting the "...security and happiness of the constituent individuals."³⁷

Certainly Mrs. Eddy was squarely within the founding fathers' understanding of the appropriate purpose to which incorporation might be put. The incorporation of her church



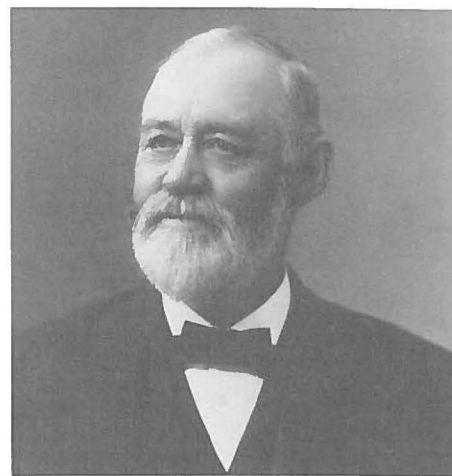
Eldora O. Gragg

(1879) and of its governing board (1892) sought to promote the common good through establishing a church to "...reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing."³⁸

The 1879 Church of Christ, Scientist (an incorporated church with a local Boston-based membership uti-



Joseph S. Eastaman



Stephen A. Chase

lizing a congregational style of government) developed in 1892 into The First Church of Christ, Scientist (a parent church with world-wide potential³⁹ and an incorporated self-perpetuating Board of Directors under the authority of the Founder's deed of trust and ultimately, in 1895, under the authority of her *Manual of the Mother Church*). It was as if layers of organizational development, starting in 1879, had been added to and refined, much like the process of creating a finely-lacquered finish on a precious treasure. Such institutional refinement by the church's Founder served to "...shelter its [scientific Mind-healing's] perfections from...contaminating influences..."⁴⁰ This spiritual-mindedness enabled Mrs. Eddy to say prophetically, prior to discovering the legal method that would open the way for the 1892 reorganization, "Of my first Church in Boston, oh! recording angel, write: God is in the midst of her, how beautiful are her feet, how beautiful are her garments, how hath He enlarged her borders, how hath He made her wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose."⁴¹

Thomas C. Proctor

1. Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church* (Boston: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1926), p. 18.
2. For background on the church's 1879 incorporation under Chapter 375 of the Acts of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, see: *The Christian Science Journal*, August 1889, pp. 256–261.
3. Very few of Mrs. Eddy's students or followers caught the fullness of the vision of church organization which was unfolding to her at this time. In fact, Lanson P. Norcross, an ex-Congregational minister and Pastor of the Boston Church of Christ, Scientist, from September 1889–April 1893,

believed strongly enough in the congregational form of church government that he came, for a time, to "...the conviction that the form of government which Mrs. Eddy had evolved was not of the best type." (William Lyman Johnson, *The History of The Christian Science Movement, Volume 2* [Brookline, MA: Zion Research Foundation, 1926], p. 340.)

4. The charter for incorporation of the church as the "Church of Christ, Scientist" was obtained in August 1879. Under that charter the By-laws provided that the church would have "the following officers: Pastor, Five Directors, Treasurer and Clerk." The membership would determine the Pastor's salary, provide a place for public worship, provide hymnals, support church music, vote on candidates for membership, discipline or dismiss members and select church officers by ballot at the December annual meeting. (*The Christian Science Journal*, August 1889, pp. 259-261.)

In the 1879 church, "The first officers and directors were: Mrs. Eddy, president; Edward A. Orne, clerk; Mrs. Eddy, Mr. Orne, James Ackland, and Arthur T. Buswell, directors. They elected...Mrs. Eddy pastor...." (Sibyl Wilbur, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy* [Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1941], p. 257.)

The problem with the 1879 organization was that "...final authority...rested not with her (Mrs. Eddy) but in the membership. ...Though Mrs. Eddy's counsel was on the whole heeded by the church, in principle and sometimes in practice effective gov-

ernment lay in the hands of the majority. Hence the church was prey to...factionalism...." (Stephen Gottschalk, *The Emergence of Christian Science in American Religious Life* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973], pp. 177-178.)

5. Mary Baker Eddy, *Pulpit and Press* (Boston, MA: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1923), p. 20.
6. For a useful overview of some of the problems in 1888, see: Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Trial* (Boston: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1971), pp. 240-244 and Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1954), pp. 174-193.
7. It is of interest that this letter of November 23, 1889, was addressed to Lanson P. Norcross who later had difficulty understand-

Timeline Organizational Development of the Church of Christ, Scientist

August 1879

Church of Christ, Scientist incorporated.

December 2, 1889

Members of the Church of Christ, Scientist vote to disorganize.

December 17, 1889

Mrs. Eddy executes a deed of trust under which she appoints a Board of Directors to maintain church services.

Summer 1892

Mrs. Eddy employs "...two able lawyers..." to locate "...in the laws of Massachusetts the statute...for incorporating a body of donees, without organizing a church."

August 29, 1892

Twelve students of Mrs. Eddy met, at her request, at Julia Bartlett's apartment on Dartmouth St. in Boston to concur in their support for a new deed of trust written by Mrs. Eddy that creates an incorporated and self-perpetuating "Christian Science Board of Directors."

September 1, 1892

Mrs. Eddy's new deed of trust is formally executed.

September 23, 1892

The twelve students meet again, at Mrs. Eddy's request, at Julia Bartlett's apartment to vote themselves and twenty other students of Mrs. Eddy "First Members." With this action, the foundation for the present organizational form of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts is in place.

- ing Mrs. Eddy's reorganization of the church in 1892. (William Lyman Johnson, *The History of the Christian Science Movement, Volume 2*, p. 336.) Yet, that Norcross came to appreciate the wisdom of his teacher's reorganization, is born out by a letter of congratulations he wrote to her on December 22, 1894, as the construction of the original edifice of The Mother Church was drawing to completion. (See: *The Christian Science Journal*, February 1895, p. 455.)
8. Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown*, p. 213.
 9. Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 382, note 20.
 10. While ruling out a congregational style of government for the parent church, The Mother Church, we find that "...each branch church shall be distinctly democratic in its government..." (Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, p. 74.)
 11. In fact, she executed a deed of trust on December 17, 1889, that appointed a Board of Directors (David Anthony, Joseph S. Eastaman, Eugene H. Greene, William B. Johnson, and Ira O. Knapp) and authorized them to maintain church services, appoint a pastor for the church, organize the church at any time, fill vacancies on the Board, and, if they wished, increase their number to seven. The deed also named a Board of Trustees (Alfred Lang, Marcellus Munroe, and William G. Nixon) to hold title to the lot of land upon which the church edifice would be built and to collect funds to that end. (*The Christian Science Journal*, June 1982, p. 341, note 5 and Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown*, pp. 245-246.)
 12. Mary Baker Eddy, "The Way," *The Christian Science Journal*, December 1889, p. 434.
 13. Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: Wm. G. Nixon Publisher, 1891 — first edition), p. 58.
 14. Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Trial*, pp. 289-290 & 301-302.
 15. Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings, 1883-1896* (Boston, MA: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1924), p. 24.
 16. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy, 1934), p. 583.
 17. [Massachusetts court document] *Dittemore v. Dickey*, 249 Mass. 95, 144 NE 57 (1924).
 18. Quoted in Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority*, p. 15.
 19. See: Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority*, p. 382, note 21.
 20. Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings, 1883-1896*, pp. 152-153.
 21. Mary Baker Eddy, "To the Contributors of the Church Building Fund in Boston," *The Christian Science Journal*, October 1892, p. 275. Mrs. Eddy made a number of important points in this article, among which were that she would not allow money that had been gained through falsely advertising the church as including "publishing rooms" to be spent on building the church. (*Ibid.*, p. 274.) Nor would she be prevented from publishing this article and its "statement of facts." (*Ibid.*, p. 276.)
 22. "In May 1971, this statute (renumbered section one of chapter 68) was amended by substituting 'residents' for 'citizens.'" (Mary Baker Eddy, *The Manual of the Mother Church* [Boston, MA: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1979], p. 130.)
 23. Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, p. 130.
 24. For biographical information on all except Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy see: *Pioneers in Christian Science* (Brookline, MA: Longyear Historical Society, 1972). For biographical information on Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy see: Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority*, pp. 24-29.
 25. It is noteworthy that Mrs. Eddy selected Julia Bartlett's apartment as the location for this important meeting. Prior to Mrs. Eddy's departure from Boston to Concord, New Hampshire, in June 1889, "she dictated the following few lines for me [Julia Bartlett] to write, while having a talk with her...: 'If there is anything pending for the Church or Association and you feel an inclination of duty to go away before it is accomplished, ...stop and consider the consequences and take it up that your mind shall not be influenced or swayed from God's line of action....'" (*We Knew Mary Baker Eddy*, fourth series, [Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1972], p. 82.)
 26. Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, pp. 128-135.
 27. Hugh A. Studdert Kennedy, *Mrs. Eddy* (San Francisco, CA: Farallon Press, 1947), p. 366.
 28. In 1903 Mrs. Eddy increased the number of Board members to five. (Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church* [Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1903, 28th edition], p. 24.)
 29. For the full text of this letter see: Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown*, p. 267.
 30. Ellen L. Clarke was absent from this meeting.
 31. This special designation would change to "Executive Members" in 1903 and continue until it was finally repealed by Mrs. Eddy in 1908 (Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, p. 18). Until then, these "First/Executive Members" participated in the governing of the church as a hold-over from the earlier congregational form of church government used from 1879-1889. Gradually through the various revisions of the *Manual of the Mother Church*, first published in 1895, the responsibilities of the "First/Executive Members" were transferred to the Christian Science Board of Directors.
 32. Diary, William B. Johnson 1891-1892, Longyear Museum and Historical Society.
For the full text of the tenets and church rules which members subscribed to when they united with the First Church of Christ, Scientist, see: Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown*, pp. 271-273.
 33. Robert Peel, "A Church Designed to Last: The Founding of the Mother Church," *The Christian Science Journal*, July 1982, p. 401.
 34. *Permanency of The Mother Church and its Manual* (Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1972), p. 5.
 35. Adam Dickey, "The Mother Church and the Manual," *The Christian Science Journal*, April 1922, p. 7.
 36. Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1979), p. 307.
 37. Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of Government in the American Economy, Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 30-31.
 38. Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of the Mother Church*, p. 17.
 39. This more universal sense of church was given expression by Mrs. Eddy on page 13 of *The Christian Science Journal* for April 1889, only six months before the dissolving of the 1879 church organization, in these words, "I want to say, too, to my students everywhere, whether they have attended my classes or have received instruction through reading my books, that they can become members of the 'mother church' here in Boston, and be received into its communion by writing without their personal presence."
Interestingly enough, two years after the 1892 reorganization the membership was "nearly three thousand, ninety-five percent of whom lived outside of Boston." (Hugh Studdert Kennedy, *Mrs. Eddy*, p. 368.)
 40. Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection*, p. 52.
 41. Mary Baker Eddy, "Hints for History," *The Christian Science Journal*, July 1892, p. 135.

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