

### III

#### GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

It is not surprising the first organizations of which we have record within the church are women's groups. In the Puritan church, women were considered inferior in mind and body. They had neither voice in church affairs nor the opportunities to meet socially. Their primary role was that of motherhood. Abigail Adams had not yet written to her husband John, as he attended the Second Continental Congress in March, 1776, requesting he "Remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than were your ancestors."

Early Stoughton was a farming community. As farmers' wives, the women were employed full-time in the struggle for survival which the role demanded. In order to care for the needs of their families, the women raised and preserved food, cared for and butchered farm animals, spun cloth and made clothes. All this, in addition to bearing and caring for children, as well as the sick and elderly, and maintaining and running a household. The lives of both farm men and women centered around the family unit.

In the early 1800's, many farmers took advantage of the economic opportunities offered by the Industrial Revolution. No longer would their survival depend solely on the sweat of their brows as they toiled on their farms alongside the women and children of their own family unit. Because the men became more aware of the larger community, they participated more actively in community affairs.

About this same time, women, too, started to take advantage of educational opportunities. For many, the missionary societies in the churches were the vehicles which allowed women to move out of their, heretofore, restricted lives of home and pew. In the church societies, the women were able to develop their skills, express their gifts and respond to their faith. Still, they had no vote in church affairs.

The women's groups of which we have knowledge are listed:

"Some Benevolent Charitable Society"  
(Name Unknown)

In 1818, a group of women met with Rev. Ebenezer Gay for the purpose of organizing such a society.

Ladies' Reading Circle

Rev. Gay instituted this group in 1819.