

PLYMOUTH CHURCH: AN AMERICAN BASTION OF FAITH AND HISTORY

I've been attending Plymouth Church ever since I was around 2 months old, when my mother brought me to her first Plymouth Service, which was also her first Mother's Day as a parent. Ever since then, the church has been an integral part of my childhood, from spending my early days in the nursery, to attending Sunday School during the latter part of Sunday worship, to spending my Sunday evenings with the Youth Group during middle and high school.

To me, Plymouth is not only a haven of worship but also of history, holding within its walls moments and artifacts integral to pivotal points in the American narrative. One such artifact is a hulking chunk of Plymouth rock, which rests securely upon its pedestal in the arcade. Plymouth rock is one of the most famous physical vestiges of formative America, shrouded in the mystic aura of early settlement. It is said to have been the first point of contact for the Mayflower, the most famous of colonizing ships, bringing the pilgrims to their new home in 1620 in hope of finding a place of religious freedom not present in the old world.

The rock stayed in that very same place on the shore of Massachusetts up until 1774 when, in order to prevent it from being completely eroded by the tide, citizens of Plymouth attempted to drag it to higher ground in their town square. As the rock was firmly rooted underground, the attempt yielded only a breakage, in which the base portion remained in its place and the top portion broke into several pieces.

Determined not to be defeated by a simple stone, the citizens brought the larger portion to the desired place in the town square, and reportedly sold the smaller pieces as souvenirs.

Common belief is that Plymouth Church's slab originated as one of these souvenirs, and the family which owned it brought it to their church, Church of the Pilgrims on the corner of Remsen and Henry Streets (now known as Our Lady of Lebanon), at a later date to be housed there. When Church of the Pilgrims and Plymouth merged in 1934, it was concluded that all artifacts would be brought and kept at Plymouth. To celebrate the moving of the rock, members of the church engaged in a less than politically correct parade in which they dressed as pilgrims and Native Americans and walked the rock to its new home.

While almost all parts of the Plymouth rock not still in Plymouth, Mass. have taken up residence in various museums (most famously the Smithsonian), Plymouth Church's piece has remained property of the church as is on display for the public to see and touch at will in the Arcade, just as it was near 90 years ago.

Walking through the arcade on any given Sunday and seeing such an almost mythical piece of American history within my reach still amazes me, and cements Plymouth's place in my mind as almost just as staggering a part of our Nation's story.

~ Aaron Gallivan