

A LESSON FROM THE PAST

By: Roger Rush

Diana Ross McCain, writing in *Early American Life* (October 1989), described the hardships of worship in the seventeenth century Connecticut. Church attendance was almost universal since it was required by law of young and old alike, unless excused by serious illness or some other equally compelling circumstance.

Church buildings were not built for comfort of the church goer. Winters were especially hard on the devout. The church building of that day had no fireplace, no stove, no significant heat source of any kind. Preachers often delivered their sermons wearing their heavy coats and mittens. Samuel Griswold Ridgefield, writing of his boyhood in Ridgefield, Connecticut, around the turn of the nineteenth century, said, "Nobody thought of staying home from church because of the extremity of the weather."

In about 1830 stoves were introduced. Ridgefield, writing about their introduction, said: "As soon as this reform was suggested, they began to wrestle with the people, until at last the church and society were divided into two violent factions, the Stove Party and the Anti-stove Party." At the first worship service following the introduction of the stove, the head of the anti-stove faction slid to the floor in her pew in a faint. She was carried outside where she quickly regained consciousness. "What happened?" she was asked. "Oh, it is the heat of those awful stoves," she replied. "No, no, my dear," responded the head of the stove faction, "That can't be: it's a warm day, you know, and there's no fire in them."

It is an amusing story, but it illustrates an important point. It has been our tendency, almost since the day God first revealed His will to man, for men to seek to change it. We either make laws where God has made none, or set aside the laws which He has made. Moses warned against this when he wrote: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Deuteronomy 12:32) So many problems could be avoided if only we would heed this command! Let's not make laws where God has made none, and let's not set aside any which He has made.