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# *Statisticians in History*

## William Cogswell 1787–1850



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he oldest of nine children, William Cogswell was born June 5, 1787, in Atkinson, New Hampshire. From his earliest days, education surrounded him. Cogswell's father gave the land for Atkinson Academy and was president of the board of trustees for many years, so his children attending the school in preparation for college was an expectation. After graduating, Cogswell attended Dartmouth College as a sophomore in 1808 and graduated in 1811. He received an AM from Harvard College and Brown University in 1816 and a DD from Williams College in 1833.

After graduating from Dartmouth, Cogswell taught at Atkinson Academy for a year before being invited to teach at Hampton Academy in Hampton, New Hampshire. While at Hampton, he studied theology and received a license to preach. Around this time, he also was advised by his physicians to take an extensive horseback journey for his health, which he did from 1813 to 1814,

combining preaching (missionary work) with traveling. When he returned from his trip, he again began theological studies.

Considered a powerfully motivating orator, Cogswell became pastor of the South Church (Parish) in Dedham, Massachusetts, on April 26, 1815, and stayed for 14 years. While minister of the parish, he married Joanna Strong and doubled the number of parishioners. Also during this time, institutions were forming and important firsts were taking place all across America. People were moving to the West and forming states and territories, the first successful educational magazine was published in New York, universities opened, *Webster's Dictionary* was published, and Ohio authorized high-school night classes.



A perspective view of the front and side of the Hollis Street Church, Boston, Massachusetts. Engraved by Samuel Hill, courtesy The Library of Congress.

Growth in America dictated the need for more ministers and missionaries, so the American Education Society was established to provide financial support for divinity students. On June 27, 1829, Cogswell was appointed General Agent of the society. For two years, his duties carried him throughout the Atlantic Coast states, soliciting churches and wealthy people to contribute to the society's cause. He did so well that, in 1832, he was elected secretary and director for the next 10 years, making him a member of the board of directors for 12 years. Certain journals of the time portrayed him as occupying a position that gave him more influence than any other in New England.

Out of the American Education Society and Cogswell's leadership arose the American Statistical Society in 1839. The society later became the American Statistical Association, and Cogswell served as a counselor until 1843.

In March of 1841, Cogswell was appointed professor of history and national education at Dartmouth College and, for health reasons, resigned from the American Education Society. Cogswell collected about 2,000 volumes of rare works for the Northern Academy of Arts and Sciences Library and became a member of

## Sermons and Publications

Sermon on Communion Sabbath, Boston, Massachusetts, 1816

Historical Sermon: South Church and Parish, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1816

Sermon: Suppression of Intemperance, 1818

Sermon: Nature and Evidences of the Inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, 1819

Sermon Before the Auxiliary Education Society of Norfolk County, Massachusetts, 1826

*Assistant to Family Religion: Manual of Theology and Devotion*, Boston, Massachusetts, 1826

Fast Day Sermon: Religious Liberty, Boston, Massachusetts, 1828

Valedictory Discourse at South Church and Parish, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1830

*Theological Class Book*, 1832

*Harbinger of the Millennium*, Boston, 1833

*Assistant to Family Religion: Manual of Theology and Devotion*, Boston, 1836

*Christian Philanthropist: Second Edition of the Preceding*, Boston, 1839

*Letters to Young Men Preparing for the Ministry*, Boston, 1837

*Christian Philanthropist*, Boston, 1839

Eight Annual Reports of the Education Society, 1833–1840

Reports of the Northern Academy of Arts and Sciences

*Individual and Family Names: 'What's in a Name?'* Boston, 1848

Class of Alumni of Dartmouth College in 1811: Minutes of Their Meeting in 1849; also, Brief Biographical Notices of the Members. Printed by order of the class for their use. Concord, New Hampshire: Asa McFarland, 1850

the American Antiquarian Society while a professor at Dartmouth. In 1844, he was offered the opportunity to serve as president and professor of theology at Gilmanton Theological Seminary.

William Strong Cogswell, Cogswell's son and a member of the senior class at Dartmouth College, died unexpectedly in 1848. He was only 19, and the death devastated Cogswell. Those who knew him said Cogswell never recovered from the shock; he died two years later on April 18, 1850.

During his death-bed testimony, Cogswell said:

I wish to bear my testimony to the reality and power of religion, and to that system of truths which we usually call orthodox. I have always preached them. I have now more confidence in them than ever. They form the foundation in which I trust. I not only firmly believe the truths of religion, but the truth as understood and embraced by the Congregational order; and as far as my memory shall be preserved and extended, let it be known that I die as I have lived, in the firm belief of the system of truth as maintained by our denomination.

In summing up the qualities and attainments of Cogswell, the Rev. Daniel Lancaster remarked that they were various and rare. "As a man," said Lancaster, "he was amiable, courteous, and affectionate; as a preacher, he was plain, instructive, and eloquent; as an

agent, he was prudent, energetic, and peculiarly successful; as a theologian, he was sound, judicious, and safe; as a counselor, he was wise, considerate, and cautious; as a critic, he was minute, just, and accurate." ■

## Further Reading

Hazlett, Charles A. (1915). *History of Rockingham County, New Hampshire and Representative Citizens*. Chicago: Richmond-Arnold Publishing Co.

New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 1847–1994. April 1883, 117–128.

Lancaster, Daniel. (1850). Sermon Delivered April 21, 1850, at the Funeral of Rev. William Cogswell, DD, Gilmanton, N.H. Concord, Massachusetts: McFarland & Jenks, Publishing.

American Education Society Records, 1815–1894. RG 0752, Congregational Library. [www.congregationallibrary.org](http://www.congregationallibrary.org).

(1940). Minutes of the First Six Meetings. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 35(209): 298–302.