

## Jeremiah Hallock

[Mercy Humphry \(click here\)](#)

[Dr. Solomon Everest \(click here\)](#)

For forty-one years he guided the spiritual affairs of the Parish of West Simsbury, later Canton, Connecticut. During that time he was, perhaps, the most well-known, and revered man in the community; yet, today, few in our town recognize his name. He was so venerated by his ministerial peers that after his death they commissioned one of their number to prepare a memoir of their beloved colleague. I am indebted to Reverend Cyrus Yale of New Hartford, who wrote *The Godly Pastor, The Life of the Rev. Jeremiah Hallock of Canton, Conn in 1826*, shortly after Hallock's death; my copy is a revised version published in 1854.

Hallock's ancestors had lived on Long Island from the early days of English settlement. Jeremiah was born on Monday, March 13, 1758 in Brookhaven on the south shore of Long Island. His parents, William and Alice Hallock, had a total of nine children who lived to maturity, of whom Jeremiah was the oldest. When Jeremiah was eight years old the family moved to the wilderness area of Goshen, Massachusetts to bring into cultivation a new farm. There he lived until the age of twenty-one. While yet a teenager Jeremiah answered his country's call to arms and served as a Revolutionary soldier in 1776 and 1777. His service was largely in the area of Fort Ticonderoga and Lake George. During the war he had several narrow escapes from death due to disease and accidents, including the accidental discharge of his musket while the muzzle was nearly under his chin. These episodes had a profound effect on Hallock's spiritual beliefs and the need for repentance to be "prepared for death at any time". Later, he frequently referred to his personal wartime experiences in his sermons.

Following the Revolution there was a "spiritual awakening" in New England, with frequent revival meetings by itinerant ministers; Jeremiah traveled as far as six miles to attend such meetings almost every evening and was said to have exhibited outstanding powers of "fervent and affectionate exhortation". Probably influenced by these early experiences, as a pastor Rev. Hallock gave strong encouragement to youth meetings and evangelism. In 1780, encouraged by his friends, he enrolled in Rev. Timothy Dwight's school in Northampton, Massachusetts. (Dwight was later to become the president of Yale College). With only the bare minimum of elementary education, Jeremiah found "the dry study of Latin a great trial" and despaired of ever becoming a Christian minister; however, he soon pulled himself out of his depression, continued at his academic studies for a full year and then pursued further lessons with Rev. Mr. Strong of Williamsburg, a nearby town to his home.

In March 1781, Jeremiah Hallock made a public profession of faith and joined the church in Goshen; the next year he began a personal journal, in which he recorded not only significant events of his life, but also his innermost thoughts and resolutions. Cyrus Yale quoted at length from this journal in his book, so that even though the original journal has disappeared, we have ample evidence of the true character of Rev. Hallock. The journal lists twenty-four resolutions, which Hallock regularly renewed every Saturday evening for the rest of his life. Examples of some of these include: "1. I am resolved to avoid all known sins, and to practise all known duties; to read the word of God and other good books, and go according to the light I find in them. ...7. I am resolved to be careful of another's character, and to say nothing against him directly or indirectly, unless I think the interest of religion and the honor of God call me to it. ...8. Resolved, never to look upon myself to have attained, but to press forward....15. I am resolved not only to preach what I find agreeable to the word of God to others, but to endeavor to practise it myself....22. Resolved, to watch in the day of prosperity, lest I forsake the Lord."

From May to October 1783 Hallock studied under Rev. Abraham Fowler in West Simsbury (now Canton), Connecticut. Besides meetings on the Sabbath and lectures, he attended three or four conferences or prayer meetings a week; when there was no minister present young Hallock substituted with his own prayers, readings of scripture and remarks. Mr. Edmund Mills preached in West Simsbury that summer and Jeremiah comments in his journal; "Heard Mr. Edmund Mills - dull for the most part - find I have a dreadfully wicked heart - some profitable discourse at night - think I have some sense of my dependence on God - had a conference this evening - people appeared very attentive." Hallock noted that about the middle of August, Mercy Humphrey "obtained hope" (was converted). The significance of this entry is that a short time later Mercy became Mrs. Jeremiah Hallock. Jeremiah then spent two months with Rev. Mills of Torrington before heading home to Goshen. As was his lifelong custom, he stopped to confer and attend religious meetings with various ministers along the way. He evidently much preferred such lodgings to more public houses - "Lodged at Sheffield. Here I was peculiarly tried with a rude, profane company, which made me desire that I might be made as faithful in the service of the Lord, as they were in the service of Satan."

Further study by himself and with Rev. West of Stockbridge concluded his preparatory education of four years and he applied for a license to preach the gospel, despite his lack of public education. Hallock was sorely tried by delays, including a major snowstorm, before he was granted the long-sought examination and license in April 1784.

He now gave himself wholly to his new and, to him, delightful employment. For several weeks he preached in various towns around Goshen and visited house-to-house. His style of preaching was described as slow and unanimated, with very distinct articulation. He was not an eloquent preacher, but, as Cyrus Yale writes, "there was a certain indefinable charm, that riveted every eye and ear - a power that reached and moved the soul. Almost immediately after he received his license Hallock received invitations to supply the pulpit in West Simsbury and also in Goshen, where he had lived since childhood. Soon thereafter he received other invitations to preach in Lee and Ware, Mass. After spending twelve weeks in the latter place he turned again towards his friends in West Simsbury.

Although he had always expressed a desire to be an itinerant minister, after considerable soul-searching, agonizing and prayer, and repeated appeals from the parishioners, Jeremiah Hallock agreed to come to West Simsbury as a full-time minister. He was ordained here in an impressive two-hour service on Oct. 26, 1785. Soon thereafter he adopted for his motto, "What can I do for God?" His subsequent life shows that he must have repeated this question every morning to direct his activities of the day. (back to top)

Mercy Humphrey She married Jeremiah Hallock in the spring of 1786. She was the daughter of Oliver Humphrey of West Simsbury and sister to the wife of Rev. Abraham Fowler, with whom Hallock had read divinity. At this time he stated, "As I have now entered a scene of new cares, so I would resolve to be more watchful and prayerful. And whereas I have had three stated times for prayer in twenty-four hours, I am resolved to add two more, until I shall think it my duty to alter; so that my stated hours of prayer, if the Lord will, shall be six o'clock and ten o'clock a.m.; one o'clock, six o'clock, and nine o'clock p.m. O that I might be sincere in these duties." We do not know how well he kept this resolution but his widow, when asked, said that he "seemed to be always praying". Over his lifetime Rev. Hallock revised his list of resolutions several times, but never to make them easier to follow; rather he chastised himself for not obeying them to the letter and usually added more stringent requirements. Rev. Hallock was obviously gaining a favorable reputation for his religious endeavors and knowledge; on September 10, 1787 Yale College conferred on this largely self-made minister the honorary degree of Master of Arts. His journal entry concerning this honor was: "O that I might see in this the kind hand of Providence, be made more humble thereby, give God the praise, and have my heart lifted up in his ways."

Over the next few years the Hallocks produced two sons and a daughter. Sarah, the youngest child died at the age of fourteen. Jeremiah Humphrey Hallock, educated at Williams College, became a distinguished judge in the Circuit courts of Ohio and died at the age of fifty-seven. William Homan Hallock continued to live in Canton Center as a farmer and respected member of the community. The Hallocks also took in several needy children from time to time, and often provided a home for them for many years. Frequent visits by friends, relatives and wayward strangers enjoyed the results of Jeremiah's labors in the vegetable garden and Mercy's hours in the kitchen. He mentioned once in his journal that they had given away more than fifty meals in the previous week.

Apparently there were times when Jeremiah suffered from illnesses that made him very aware of his own mortality. Each of these episodes seemed to make him more dedicated to his ministerial calling. "What if I die? God and the church shall live; therefore all will be well. ... I find idle hours the most irksome, and am resolved to endeavor to be in some active service for God while I live." He set aside one day a month for fasting although he did postpone it on occasion so as not to offend others who might have prepared for him a meal. He continued to make short tours around western Connecticut and Massachusetts, visiting fellow ministers and preaching in their churches and at conferences. He was instrumental in establishing a monthly conference of regional ministers, the first such in the nation, and rarely missed such sessions even though they often required twenty or more miles of travel by horseback.

Hallock believed in setting a good example to his parishioners; we read in an account book of the First Ecclesiastical Society of West Simsbury; "1896 - Messrs. George Humphrey, Thomas Bidwell and Solomon Everest were appointed by the church to wait upon the Rev. Mr. Hallock and Return him thanks for his Repeated Generosity in giving ten pounds of his salary to the parish." Ten pounds was a considerable amount for this small-town preacher. In 1802 his salary was listed as \$233.34 a year plus 24 to 30 cords of wood. By 1814 he received \$266.67 annually and this was continued until his death. An average wage for a laborer at that time was about 75cents a day.

Hallock had clearly defined concepts of right and wrong and never feared to express them. Once when happening in on a dancing school being held in the conference house across from the church, he said distinctly that all who attended were "in the broad way to hell." He told one of his deacons afterwards, "I didn't know but they would kill me for it; but then I thought, if they did, they could only kill the body." During this time there was a definite decline in religious fervor throughout the region but about 1798 there began an era of revivals, often with religious meetings every day. Rev. Hallock was quite encouraged by this "awakening" and published a lengthy narrative of testimonials in The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine. He was not even disheartened by the death of his only daughter on May 15, 1799, finding comfort in her apparent religious conversion in the few days before her demise.

In 1801 the newly established Missionary Society of Connecticut requested Hallock to make a four-month missionary tour of northeast Vermont, then a sparsely settled wilderness. He traveled on foot and on horseback over a thousand miles, preached ninety-six sermons and helped establish two new churches. In a letter home he wrote: "Tell Deacon Bidwell, Deacon Mills, Deacon Humphrey and Dr. Everest, they twine about my heart, and I should be glad to give each of them a letter; but I am so taken up, I can hardly get time to read my usual chapters in the Bible." Despite the arduous nature of

this missionary tour, Jeremiah was in his element; he had often expressed a desire to be an itinerant preacher, and now he had the opportunity. In 1807 he again spent sixteen weeks preaching and proselytizing in northern Vermont. During these periods his home pulpit was supplied by various other ministers.

His son, Jeremiah, entered Williams College in the fall of 1806. Several of the minister-father's letters to young Jeremiah are included in Rev. Yale's book; the letters are full of advice such as the following: "as a student, be faithful according to your health and strength; shun dissolute and evil company. For Jesus' sake, respect your tutor, the president, and all the faculty of the college; conscientiously obey all their positive commands, and the laws of the institution. Strive to form the habit of rising early, and be at your post at recitations and prayers. See that you do not despise the kind hints, warnings, and admonitions of the president or any of the authority. Be a helper - the scholars make the college. Be economical of your time and money. Your money is Christ's, the most of it being the contributions of God's people for the support of the gospel; let nothing be lost." Son Jeremiah received his degree in September 1810. His father commented that the total cost of this education over five years was six hundred dollars and hoped that "he may be called of God into the gospel ministry"; however in 1811 young Jeremiah went to Hebron to study law with Judge Gilbert. Said father in his journal, "I have longed and prayed that he might study divinity, and be a minister of the gospel; I have felt exceedingly unwilling to have him go into the profession of the law. I consider it a scene of great temptation, and tremble for fear he will be led astray and lost." He wrote his son, "We have received no letter from you, but wait for one with anxiety. We wish to know how you like your new situation - what is the state of your health - what your temptations are, and how it is with your mind - whether you have tender serious thoughts, or are left to uncomfortable and alarming stupidity." Unfortunately we do not have the son's reply.

With respect to the War of 1812 Jeremiah expressed the view of many other New Englanders when he wrote: "--heard that war was declared against England. It much affected me. It appears to me sin and folly to enter into this war. His second son, William Homan (usually called "Homan"), served forty-five days with the military in New London. He was sent there with the local militia unit which, it is reported, grudgingly went on active duty to protect that area of the coast. (back to top)

Doctor Solomon Everest's daughter Sarah, despite the ministrations of her Father, Dr. Solomon Everest, died in 1813 of a typhoid fever-like illness. This loss had a profound effect on Reverend Hallock and he often referred to the circumstances of her death in later sermons and letters. Seventeen year old Homan was shortly thereafter taken ill by his sister's sickness and everyone despaired of his life. The father's prayers were long and fervent, with much reference to Homan's sinfulness, but even more confessions of his own unworthiness and weakness in not being willing to give up his son, if it were the Lord's will. Soon both mother and father became ill but all three eventually recovered. Rev. Hallock was unable to preach for sixteen Sabbaths; this, and one other single Sabbath and a few weeks before his death, were the only occasions in his entire pastoral life that Hallock was prevented from preaching. While the minister was confined to bed the ecclesiastical society voted to build a new meeting house, as the first one, built in 1763, was in bad repair and was too small for town meetings. The present Canton Center Church building was erected on the site of the old meeting house and completed in less than a year. Church services were held in Rev. Hallock's home during the construction period.

Reverend Hallock preached the dedication sermon for the new meeting house on Jan. 5, 1815, including the wish that "we shall find this place on the Sabbath, and at other seasons, as the house of God and the gate of heaven.". This sermon was published, an unusual practice at that early date. In October that year Jeremiah wrote his son in Ohio, "Your grandfather Hallock has fallen asleep....He was eighty-five. Last summer he raised a plenty of provisions for his little family with his own hands...Your grandmother Humphrey has been very sick; I think she appears more and more like a shock of corn fast ripening for eternal rest. She is a bright example of patience." Hallock, himself, suffered off and on with numerous infirmities and ten years before his death confided to his absent son that "I feel as if I should not be able to endure much longer." His health always seemed to be marvelously restored, however, whenever there was an awakening of religious fervor in the community. He would claim to be at death's door and then a week later write, "My general health is better; on the last two Sabbaths, with the intervening week, I was enabled to preach nine sermons, praised be the great Physician of soul and body."

We do not have record of the total number of children that Jeremiah and Mercy Hallock took into their household and raised to adulthood, but there were a great many. One of these was Owen Brown, later to become the father of the famous John Brown of Harper's Ferry. Owen even sent his son to Rev. Hallock for advice about possibly becoming a Christian minister. Rev. Hallock is known to have kept in touch with many of his foster children, usually signing his letters, "From your affectionate parents, Jeremiah and Mercy Hallock".

He continued to be active in general affairs of the Congregational church and was appointed to make the consecrating prayer at the ordination of Messrs. Bingham and Thurston as first missionaries to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) on Oct. 3, 1819. As Cyrus Yale writes: "We now find him, under the pressure of more advanced years, still in the harness, laborious as ever for the honor of Christ and the salvation of souls, praying more earnestly for divine aid, and making increased effort to fulfill the responsibilities of his station." The last general revival of religion in which Hallock took part occurred in 1820 and 1821, when despite his age and infirmities he visited two churches a week with three meetings in each place, often twenty or more miles from home. To his flock and to other ministers he appeared indefatigable, yet his

journal reflects his fatigue and feebleness and often a sense of hopelessness. That he was a success in these revival periods there is no doubt: in 1821 alone, fifty-six persons joined the Canton church. In 1822 he received a letter from a pastor in Ohio telling of the conversion of Jeremiah's son, Jeremiah. As one might expect this was a cause of much rejoicing in the Hallock household.

Hallock's sermons are said to have been remarkably appropriate and well-adapted to the circumstances of his people. He once said to a friend, "I never preach against card-playing, because the people of Canton would inquire what it is. "He was not averse to pleasant anecdotes but Yale says that" facetious as were some of his anecdotes, they were always so modified by a peculiarity of manner quite past description that the smile they brought on the face was without levity in the heart of the listener." It was also said that "his wit was sanctified." The images that he used in his sermons were well-defined and vivid; they were seldom secondhand, but came from his own experience and imagination. Hallock was not just a Sabbath preacher, but was everyday effective and eloquent in his words and actions.

By 1825 Mrs. Hallock was failing, often being unable to attend church meetings; her condition was described as "dropsy" (probably kidney failure) and she was not expected to recover. But by the end of the year she was able to travel with Jeremiah for a visit to his brother Moses, in Plainfield, Massachusetts. However a journal entry soon noted: "Feb.2. We returned to Canton, and found all in outward peace; but poor Mrs. Hallock is no better. I fear she is sinking and drawing near to death. But it is a pleasing thought, that Jesus holds its keys. By reason of the cold on Tuesday, I am so lame I can hardly get about."

As Mrs. Hallock slowly improved, Jeremiah himself grew weaker and with difficulty dragged himself from his bed to church meetings. His last public service was Holy Communion on May 21, 1826. On June 20 he suffered a stroke, from which he rallied several times and even conversed with family and friends and on his death bed gave his blessing separately to each person present before he expired on June 23, 1826, after the longest ministry in the history of the First Congregational Church of Canton Center. Mrs. Hallock lingered in a state of poor health and finally died in November that same year.

The epitaph on Rev. Hallock's gravestone in the Canton Center cemetery reads:

The grave's the pulpit of departed man  
From it he speaks His texts of doctrine are  
Thou, too, must die and come to judgment

Rev. Jeremiah Hallock  
died June 23, 1826, AE 68  
In the 41 year of his ministry

He shone with distinguished piety  
humility and heavenly wisdom  
Sound in doctrine, faithful and  
Unwearied in the service of his  
Lord, and deeply solicitous for  
the salvation of precious souls, &  
the immortal interests of his beloved people.  
He made full proof of his ministry.

May his mantle fall on his successor

Note: Hallock's successor was Rev. Jairus Burt. A mantle is carved on the top of the obelisk stone marking Jairus Burt's grave in the Canton Center Cemetery.