

John Tufts, Music Educator, Minister, “Me Too” Character

John Tufts, West Newbury’s pioneer music educator, was born in Medford, MA, on May 5, 1689. He was the oldest living son of [Peter Tufts](#), a prominent landowner and civic leader in Medford, and Mercy Cotton Tufts, who came from a family of ministers.

Tufts graduated from Harvard in 1708 and was ordained as minister of West Newbury’s First Parish on June 30, 1714, in the wake of the raging [Thirty’s Years Quarrel](#) over the location of the Town’s first meetinghouse. His [Main Street parsonage](#), now on the National Register of Historic Places, had been completed in [1711](#), and his parishioners built a barn for the parsonage [1714](#). In November of 1714, Tufts married Sarah Bradstreet, whose [family farm](#) in what is now Rowley is also on the National Register.

According to most [music historians](#), it was in 1721 that Tufts (whose musical background is unknown) published *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, [North America’s first music textbook](#). His simple musical notation included a Mi. Fa. Sol. La. method for pitch and a system of the letter F with varying punctuation to mark a note’s duration. This innovation made him the “[most significant figure in American music education for the next 100 years](#).” Prior to Tufts’ publication, Puritan church music consisted of a handful of psalms, discordantly voiced in tunes variously recalled by each individual singer.

Although Tufts had an ally in [Thomas Symmes](#), the pastor in neighboring Bradford (now Groveland), Tufts’ musical methods were not immediately accepted. According to one [recounting](#), “Women fainted, men left the church. Ministers protested against the innovation and called it the work of Satan and a profanation of the Sabbath.” In 1723, the [New England Chronicle](#) opined that “if we once

begin to sing by rule, the next thing will be to pray by rule and preach by rule and then comes popery.”

From its bitterly contested beginnings, the First Parish continued in contention. One of Tufts’ surviving works, published in 1725, was unpropitiously entitled, *Anti-ministerial objections considered, or, The unreasonable pleas made by some against their duty to their ministers, with respect to their maintenance answered....* In 1731, a good number of Tuft’s flock departed for another new [Second Parish](#).

[Joshua Coffin’s history](#) of the Newburies, drawn largely from diaries, letters, and municipal and church records, contains a remarkable description of Reverend Tufts’ “Me Too” episode: “*February 26th* [1738]. On this day a council was called ... to take into consideration ‘the distressed state and condition of ye second church of Christ in Newbury by reason of their reverend pastor Mr. John Tufts being charged by a woman or women of his indecent carriage and also of his abusive and unchristian behavior towards them at several times and so forth.’”

Whatever occurred was serious: the council considering his behavior comprised 10 ministers and 20 delegates. Tufts refused to participate in the proceedings, “vehemently opposed the swearing of the witnesses against him,” and quit. On March 2nd, the church refused to recommend him “as a christian minister.” Rather than delve into substantive offenses, a tortured technicality was offered as explanation: because he “had never been admitted as member of the second church, a recommendation and dismissal [allowing a transfer of membership to a new church] would not be proper.”

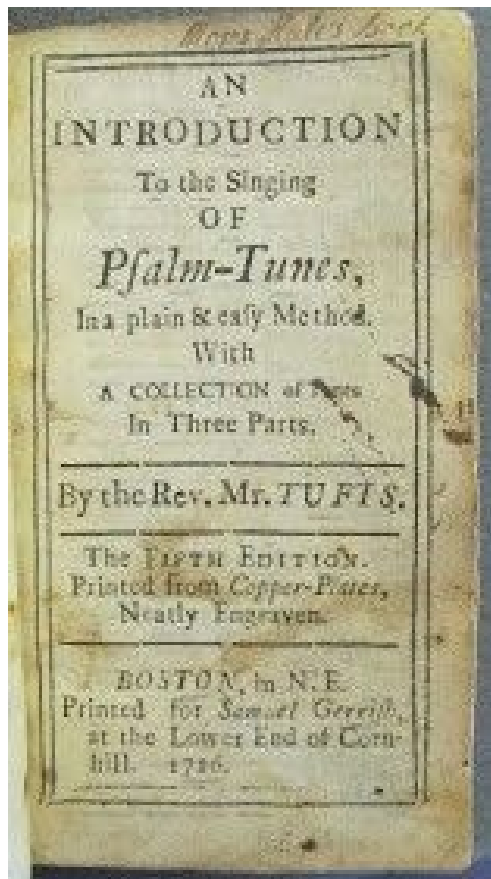
John Tufts then moved to Amesbury. Probate records called him a “shopkeeper and gentleman” upon his death there on August 17, 1750.

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Rev. John Tufts House, 750 Main Street,
Source: Historic Sites Survey



Tufts' musical text, cover, Source: [Pinterest](#)



Pages from Tufts' book Source:
[Rosenbach Museum blog](#)