

PLYMOUTH CHURCH - 175 YEARS OF MAKING HISTORY: THE DODRANSBICENTENNIAL

In 2022 Plymouth Church celebrates its 175th anniversary of making history - past, present and future. The continuum of the Church's commitment to justice and its active engagement with the spiritual, political and social issues characterizing the various periods of its distinguished history now requires some additional semantic punctuation in the form of a new anniversary appellation. If twenty-five years ago Plymouth Church observed its Sesquicentennial [*i.e.*, its 150th anniversary], what linguistic descriptor should now follow in the sequence of commemorative notation?

The designation of a significant anniversary using a Latinate formulation is traditionally determined by the numerical chronological existence of the entity. Centennial celebrations (100 years) and bicentennial celebrations (200 years) routinely come and go for some long-lived institutions and are conveniently designated using the above terminology. The off-year anniversary moments, however, are no facile matter. How to formulate linguistically 125, 150 or 175 years of longevity (favorite commemorative anniversaries) can often require an additional exercise in Latinate logic that often tests the expertise of the most seasoned Latin scholar or even the hardened Google addict.

Although the term terquasquicentennial [parenthetically cited by William Safire in his column, "On Language" (*The New York Times Magazine*, February 12, 1995) as a suggestion of the lexicographer Robert L. Chapman for a 175th anniversary designation] almost immediately appears to the discerning mind as *le mot juste* - while sliding deliciously and trippingly

from the tongue - it must contend with several other proposed lexical rivals such as quintaquinquecentennial, septaquinquecentennial, demisemiseptcentennial and quartoseptcentennial in this congested arena of imaginatively conceived Latinate definitions, all variously championed by an assortment of contemporary wordsmiths.

In the final analysis, however, all of these proposed descriptors must be discarded as artificial composite neologisms which ultimately fail the test of morphological deconstruction and consequently must yield to the primacy of the linguistically authentic Latinate formulation now adopted by Plymouth Church (and historically by other institutions of identical longevity): the **Dodransbicentennial** – a term not only philologically accurate but also felicitously enhanced by its double dental fricative, a gentle labial plosive, a couple of sibilants and a total avoidance of anything guttural!

To provide a succinct Wikipedia *explication de texte* for dodransbicentennial: *dodrans* is a Latin contraction of *de-quadrans* which means “a whole unit less a quarter” (*de* means “from”; *quadrans* means “quarter”). Thus 175 years is a quarter century less than the next whole (bi)century [200 minus 25 = 175].

So, fortified by this etymological gloss, Plymouth Church invites all members, friends and visitors to follow the schedule of events and participate in the current **Dodransbicentennial** observance as Plymouth Church now celebrates 175 years of making history – past, present and future.

~ Joseph Louzonis

Dodransbicentennial Essay Series | 1 | January 20, 2022

*A supplementary historical footnote: the *dodrans* was a small bronze coin minted only twice within the history of the Roman Republic. It was valued as three quarters of what was then called the *as* (i.e., a quarter less than the whole). *Dodrans* as a unit may also refer to a time span of forty-five minutes (three quarters of an hour) or a length of nine inches (three quarters of a foot).