

A History of
**Wenham's First
Church**
Beginning 1638

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Jack E. Hauck



Wenham's First Church

One of the first to preach a sermon, to a gathering of Christians, in this area (*Wenham*), was Hugh Peter.* An Anglican clergyman, Rev. Peter spoke on the north side of The Great Pond (*Wenham Lake*), on a low conical hill. On a Sunday, probably in 1638, in his sermon Rev. Peter drew from John III, verse 23 (*"In Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there."*) From this sermon, the area became known as Enon, and the body of water known as Enon Pond.⁹

The conical knoll was about 35 feet high. It was grassy and clear of trees and shrubs on all sides; the side facing the pond abruptly dropped down. Calling it a pulpit was quite appropriate. A little more than two hundred years later, Peter's pulpit disappeared. An ice company bought the land and removed the knoll, in order to lay a railroad track spur to connect its ice-houses, to the main railway line.⁹

Rev. Peter spoke at the Great Pond, because there was not a meeting-house in the area. The low, treeless knoll provided a good location from which he could be heard and seen. For their Sabbath services, the local people, farmers, traveled to the distant Salem meeting house. The first Puritan meeting house, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was erected in Salem, MA, as a Congregational church.³

* *The Reverend's name was not "Peters," as cited in many references, but was "Peter."*

On Jan. 2, 1642/3, Enon, which was then called Wenham, received twenty acres “of ground being laid out of eyther side of ye Meeting House. Ten acres given by Mr. Smith out of his farm and laid out by him beginning with the bounds at ye upper end of Phineas Fiske lot and so to ye swamp, and the other ten acres given by Mr. John Fiske being laid out joyning to it on the other side of the Meeting House.”^{1, 5}

On Jul. 1, 1644, “a public assembly met at Wenham to witness the formation of a church there. But the magistrate and elders invited to attend on the occasion, think that the candidates are not sufficiently prepared and they advise a postponement of the service, which is accordingly done.”^{1, 5 *}

Churches were not lightly formed, in those days. Initial attempts to form a Wenham church did not succeed. However after a second trial, on Oct. 8, 1644, a church was formed, and John Fiske⁺ was made pastor. This was the twenty-fifth church of Christ, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.⁵

In the beginning, the church chose its minister without asking for concurrence from the town. In 1641, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties stated, #95, ¶ 3 “Every Church hath free liberty of election and ordination of all their officers from time to time, provided they be able, pious and orthodox.”

The Wenham church comprised seven families, all represented by men, as well as Joseph Batchelder's wife, making eight members, in all. The following month, November, other wives were admitted, and a year later, the membership had increased to nineteen.⁵

John Fiske came to New England on the sailing ship Mary Ann, in 1637, with his widowed mother (*she died on the voyage*), his wife, Ann Gippes, his brother William, and his sister, Martha. Initially, John Fiske assisted Rev. Hugh Peter, at Salem.⁵

Fiske moved to the part of Salem called Enon, when the Salem selectmen, on, Jul. 12, 1637, gave him a grant of 200 acres, for a farm in Enon. Fiske was accepted as a townsman. On Nov. 2, 1637, he was made a freeman.¹⁵

Besides being the church pastor, John Fiske was the first town clerk, constable and doctor. His brother, William, ran the ordinary or public house.⁵

1st Meeting House

The early settlers did not differentiate between ecclesiastic and civic rule. They met at the same meeting house to worship God and to discuss town government.

In Myron O. Allen's history of Wenham, he wrote that the town's first meeting house was on land given to the Town, and supposedly, near the cemetery on land of the Henry Tarr. (*Today this is the Wenham Country Club.*)² It was built circa 1641.

* Perley lists fifteen families living in Wenham, in 1644.⁵

+ The name “Fiske” also was spelled, “ffiske,” and “Fisk.”

There are two understandings of where the first meeting house stood.

According to some, the meetinghouse was about where the Wenham clubhouse now stands, i.e., just above the 4th tee, and behind what now are 104 and 106 Main Street. But, others strongly believe the meetinghouse stood behind what are now 104 and 106 Main Street, on a slight rise, which today is behind the 7th tee.⁵ What is now a driveway between 104 and 106 Main Street was originally a path, called the Way to the Meeting House.

Support of this location comes from Dr. Allen who wrote, in 1880, about the meeting house, saying "*The first, which was probably designed to be merely temporary, is supposed to have stood on or near the spot occupied by that built in 1664, viz., upon the eminence near the house now belonging to Mr. Henry Tarr. ... The road, then, passed from the pond along a valley somewhat to the east of the present road, where it now lies, and was carried directly over the eminence upon which the church was built and nearly over the spot now occupied by the town house.*"⁶

Wherever the first meeting house may have been, it was a small, square, wooden, "temporary" structure," with no windows, and a thatch roof.* It was unheated, so for winter church services, members would go to Rev. Fiske's house, which was about a half-mile away.¹¹ Considering that there were about twenty members, his house must have been quite crowded.

The exact location of Rev. Fiske's house is not known, but Lillie deduced that it "*was on the present Main Street, somewhere between the first meeting house and the Claffin-Richards House (built c. 1660).*"²⁴

The first Sabbath service at the first meetinghouse likely was held on the first Sunday, in the first month of 1642. This would have been Mar. 2, 1642.¹⁹

Some subsequent Sabbath services, "*by reason of the season,*" – a very cold meetinghouse - were held in the home of Rev. John Fiske, as he wrote in his journal.¹⁹

Attesting to the openness of the structure, in the Jul. 14, 1645 town record, there is a partial statement that someone was appointed to, "*keep the dogs out of the meeting house and if he doth it truly for every dog that he doth drive out he shall have six pence per year for a dog.*"²

Seven of these men were members of the first church in Wenham. At the time, to be a recognized church it was necessary to have seven "pillars."⁺ The "pillars" of the church," who signed the original covenant, Oct. 8, 1644, and thereby became the first full members were the following: Esdras Reade, probably a relative of Rev. Hugh Peter, whose wife Elizabeth, formerly had the surname of Reade; James Moulton, first of the name in Wenham; Joseph Batchelder, first of the name in Wenham; Phineas Fiske (*Capt.*), cousin of Rev. John Fiske; James Fiske, nephew of Rev. John Fiske and son of Phineas; William Fiske, brother of Rev. John Fiske; and William Geare, first of the name in Wenham.¹⁹

* Since the enlarged second meeting house was 24-foot square, the first meeting house likely was smaller.

+ The basis for seven members comes from Prov. 9, 1: "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars" KJV

Ten days later, Oct. 18, 1644, the full members and Rev. Fiske held the first official church meeting, for conducting church business.¹⁹ The first entry in the church diary kept by John Fiske records a business meeting, after the afternoon religious service. Following much agitation, it was left to further deliberation, but it was agreed "*that considering the paucity of ye numbers, a great trust was laid upon the members to attend all meetings ... it was later resolved to speak by way of teaching and prophecy, as it seems ye scope of ye place.*" *⁴

To be a voting church member, a person had to be a male over twenty-one, own land, and be a freeman.

In the fall of 1654, Wenham's church faced a major problem. A group from Chelmsford came to Wenham and asked Rev. Fiske to return with them to be their pastor. Rev. Fiske informed the church that he would be leaving, but not until the coming year. In 1656, the Wenham church dismissed Rev. John Fiske, and fourteen members and seventeen families from the church.¹ However, William Fiske did not go to Chelmsford, with his brother.

During the initial period after Rev. Fiske had left, the duties of a pastor were often provided by a local theological student, Antipas Newman, the son of Rev. Samuel Newman.⁶ He became the steady pastor, but was not ordained until Nov. 8, 1657.¹⁷

Though the church was greatly weakened by the loss of a majority of its members leaving for Chelmsford, the remaining members rallied together, to support their new pastor. To assist him, the Wenham church, soon after his arrival, appointed Esdras Reade as the first deacon.¹⁹

Soon after the departure of Rev. Fiske and the others, some settlers from the southern end of Hamilton (*then a part of Ipswich, and called The Hamlet*) began worshipping at the Wenham meetinghouse. With this, the church began to strengthen. The "neighbors," as they were called, are first mentioned as contributing to the support of the church, in 1659.⁵

On Aug. 21, 1663, after five meetings, the townspeople cancelled plans for repairing the old meetinghouse. A new meetinghouse was to be built. Plans called for the second meetinghouse to be a single-room structure, with a second-floor gallery around three sides of the building, and the pulpit on the north side. There were to be two sets of stairs leading to the galleries.¹⁹

Here, all the town meetings and public assemblies were held, and, at times, it appears also to have been used as a school.^{2, 5, 6}

The second meetinghouse was built about where the Civil War Monument now stands.^{2, 16, 19} According to a map drawn by Philander Anderson, in 1831, which shows the location of the third, fourth and fifth meetings houses, the second meeting house likely was sideways to Country Road (*now Main Street*).²⁵

* Original church records from 1643 to 1847 now are at the Congregational Library, 14 Beacon St., Boston, MA.

On Jan. 1, 1665/6, the town made a land trade with selectman Austin Killam. He received "*all that land more or less that lyeth betwixt his farm and meadow, upon condition that the town shall forever enjoy all that parcel of land, which the meeting house stands upon, being about 30 poles (a "pole" equaled 16 1/2 feet) from the northwest corner of said meeting house, upon a line to the northeast corner of Mr. Newman's leantoo (stood near the site of the Wenham Tea House), betwixt that line and his ditch, except a passage from his bars directly to the highway.*"²

The street in front of the Hobbs house and the fifth meetinghouse is a portion of the original *right of way*, which Killam was given to get to his farm.¹⁹ Killam Way wound in front of Judge Nathaniel Brown's house (*now the Hobbs house*), behind the north side of the second meeting house, and then turned out (*about the end of Monument Street*) to Country Road (*now Main Street*).

With Wenham having a larger meetinghouse, worship services likely were conducted along the basic order of Congregationalists.

At nine o'clock, on Sundays, the people were called to the meetinghouse, by the ringing of a bell. The people sat, the men on the one side and the women on the other, in an order of civil and social dignity, as arranged from year to year. The children were seated by themselves, under care of a tithing man.¹⁴

The minister sat at the communion table, which was in front of the pulpit. The minister only went up to the pulpit to deliver the sermon.³⁶

Sabbath morning worship began with a solemn prayer, by the pastor. The congregation stood with their arms raised above their heads, a sign of offering themselves to do God's will.³⁵

Next, the pastor read a chapter of the Bible and explained it. Church members were allowed to add their views on the scripture.

Then, the pastor read a Psalm, line by line, with each line being sung by the congregation. The pastor read a lengthy sermon. The service ended with a long prayer by the pastor.¹⁴ During the prayer, the people were allowed to pass forward to the minister written notes, with the names of persons or issues for remembrance in his prayer.³⁵ Following a blessing, by the minister, the congregation slowly filed out of the sanctuary, passing by the communion table. On the pastor's chair, there was a basket or box where contributions could be made.³⁵

Attending Sabbath services was testimony of the congregation's devotion to the Lord. In the winter, the meetinghouse was very cold; in the summer, it was very hot and insects were all about. The family members were separated. Everyone sat up very straight. Nodding off would be met by a hard poke of the tithing man's wooden rod. When the congregation stood for a prayer, the hinged-seats would clatter, as they fell back against the high seat back.

The pastor kept a constant vigil on the congregation remaining awake. And, the service would last for up to three hours.

Church records do not indicate when the meetinghouse was first heated. However, Frederick Batchelder, Sr. said, "the congregation during the long sermons carried heated soap stones in their hands and stones covered with heavy carpet to keep their feet warm."³⁴

In the winter, some women brought, to the meetinghouse, small foot-stoves: they were metal boxes with four legs. The boxes, before leaving home, were filled with hot coals.¹⁷ Obviously, there was little concern about possible fires erupting in the pews.

No one had a clock with them, which meant the only indication of time was an hour glass that was on a desk below the pulpit. A deacon, sitting beside the desk, turned the glass, as the sand ran out. Preachers were known to ask the deacon to turn the hourglass on its side, for they wanted to complete their sermon, without the congregation being distracted.¹⁷

Besides the morning service, there was an afternoon service, usually at 2 pm. When there was inclement weather, the time between services was shortened. The pastor began the afternoon service with a lengthy prayer, which was followed by a psalm. Next, the pastor preached a sermon. The service concluded with a prayer, from the pastor, and a benediction.¹⁴ Sometimes, following the afternoon service, there would be a general meeting.

In colonial days, church members were allowed to chastise fellow members, who they believed had "gone astray." In all cases, the matter was investigated. Those who were chastised had the opportunity to defend themselves or to "humble themselves," and mend their ways.³⁵

Between services, those living nearby went home, for their mid-day meal. Others likely went to a near-by noon-house or ordinary. For Wenham church members, next to the church there was an ordinary. The original ordinary was owned by William Fiske, brother of the first pastor, Rev. John Fiske.⁵

At both the morning and afternoon services, alms were collected. Financial support of the church also was obtained through church-family contributions and tax rates applied to all residents: the latter being very disturbing to some that were not church members.¹⁴

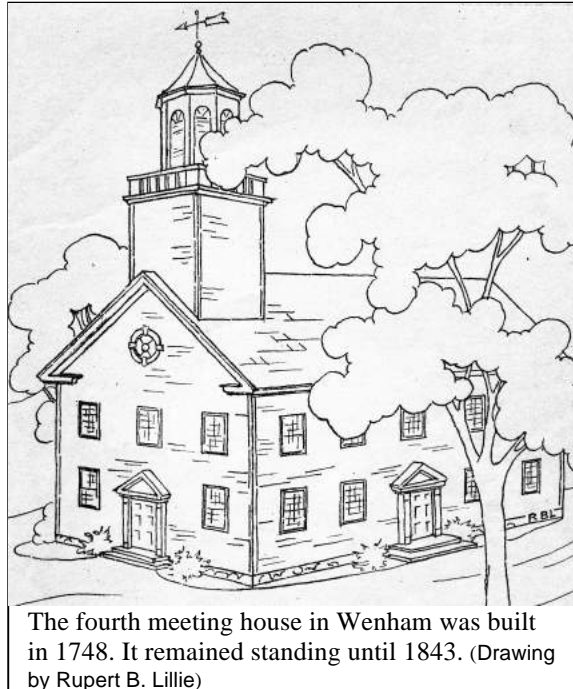
The Lord's Supper was usually celebrated once a month, at the close of the morning service.¹⁴

Rev. Newman died Oct. 15, 1672. He was forty-five years old, and had ministered the Wenham church for seventeen years.^{1,5}

Prior to the calling of Rev. Gerrish to succeed Rev. Newman, the Wenham church had not provided a town-owned house – a parsonage - for its minister, as was required by a 1647 law of the Massachusetts court.¹⁴

The town first considered building a parsonage for Rev. Gerrish, but later decided to acquire Robert MacClaflin's house, which was next to the town common, and expand it. In 1673, the town of Wenham obtained the MacClaflin's house, built circa 1690, and his land.¹⁰

At an October 1687 Wenham town meeting, where it is said that all the inhabitants reportedly were present, the moderator asked the people "to declare their minds whether they would build a new meeting house and admit our Ipswich neighbors to join with them in the work."² They agreed and became part "owners" of the meeting house.



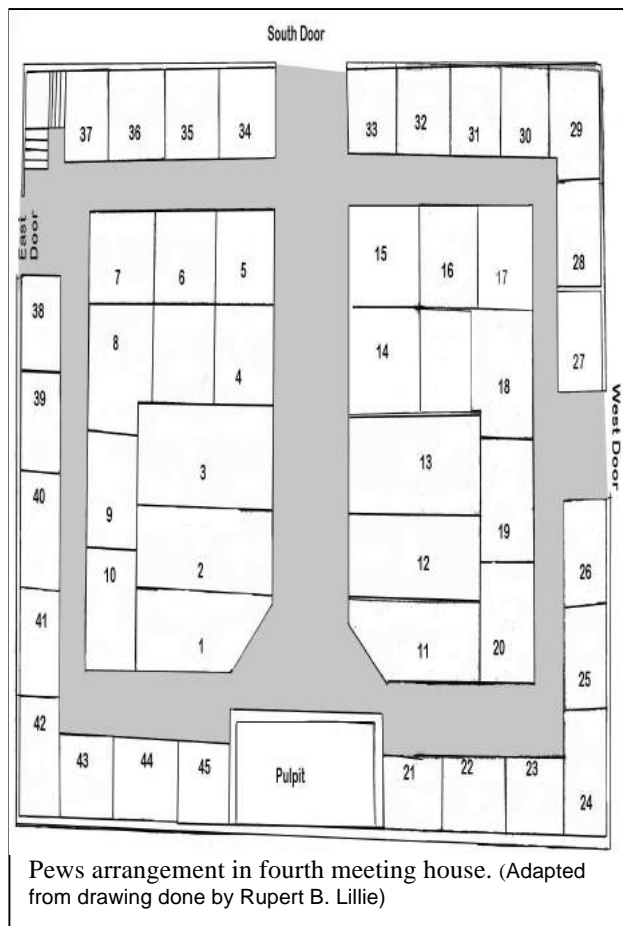
The second meetinghouse was to remain in use until the third and larger meeting house could be erected. The third structure house was a little east of the second one (*further back from the highway, now Main Street*).¹²

There was a belfry, atop which was a weathervane.² Made of sheet-metal, the weathervane had the year "1688" cut from it. (*The weathervane is now on display, at the Wenham museum.*)^{26, 19}

The plan for the third meetinghouse was similar to that of the second structure: three galleries and the pulpit on the north end. It had a pitch roof. Also, the pews, like those of the second meeting house, were high-back, box-pews, with "suitable banestors (*spindles*) to exceed six inches," in the upper portion of the pew's walls and doors."¹⁹ This design allowed the people sitting behind the pew to see the pastor.

On Jun. 15, 1713, fifteen Ipswich families that were church members gave up their rights in the Wenham meeting house. In total, they were paid £39, 11s, 9d.^{2, 6} Four months later, on Oct. 3, 1714, eleven males and seventeen females, with twenty-four "covenanters," were dismissed from the Wenham church, to form a church in Ipswich Hamlet (*Hamilton*).^{5, 15}

Thus, it was just over seventy-five years since the area – a part of Ipswich called "The Hamlet" - was settled, that it had its own church. In effect, Wenham was the mother of two new Congregational churches – Chelmsford and Hamilton – in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



The fifth pastor of the church was Rev. John Warren, being ordained Jan. 12, 1733/4. Rev. Warren was very involved in the Great Awakening. At a meeting in Boston, Jul. 7, 1743, the revival movement was warmly supported by one hundred and thirteen pastors.⁶

The existing meetinghouse was to be removed to make room for the new structure. The fourth meeting was also to be parallel to Country Road (*now Main Street*). Being late in the year, the matter was deferred until the next spring.²

Dea. William Porter bought the town's third meetinghouse. He moved it and its weathervane to his property (*today 79 Main St.*), to be a carriage shed.

The shed was there, for one hundred and seventy-five years, until it was taken down, by Jake Barnes, around 1922. He saved the timbers and weather vane. Ogee beams, from the old church, were placed in Burnham Hall, at the museum. Also, the weather vane is at the museum.⁷

The fourth meetinghouse was the most impressive and largest structure built thus far in Wenham. Atop the front, there was a twelve-foot square base tower; an octagonal belfry with louvered openings on each face; an octagonal steeple; and a weathervane.²⁰

At the front, there was a single door, with windows on each side, and three windows at the gallery level. Over these windows there was a circular (*oculus*) window.²⁰

On the east side, of the main floor, near the front side, there was a door. At both ends of the main floor, at the front side, there were stairs for access to the galleries.²⁰

The seats, in the fourth meetinghouse, were very comfortable. The seats in the first meetinghouse were long, narrow, benches, made of rough, hand-hewn planks, which had dowel-like legs, and had no back support. The fourth meeting house had high-back box pews, with cushioned, broad, bench-seats. Some pews had a long, low foot-rest.¹⁶ However, the pews did not have doors.³³

Rev. Joseph Swain was ordained Oct. 24, 1750, as Wenham's sixth minister.⁵ The tenor of church activities changed significantly under Rev. Anderson's stewardship. He strongly supported the more aggressive evangelism associated with the period of the Second Great Awakening. While at Wenham, he ardently promoted revivals of religion among the people.²⁷

On Jun. 10, 1805, Rev. Rufus Anderson, the pastor of ten years for the North Yarmouth, ME church, became the eighth minister to the Wenham church. During his ministry, the church changed how people were admitted to the congregation. In the past, it was the custom to require a written "relation of experience," from all who wished to unite with the church.

A significant event affecting churches in Massachusetts happened in 1810. The Massachusetts General Court passed the Religious Freedom Act. With this legislation, taxes could no longer be used to support the churches. The bill also allowed people to withdraw their membership and worship where and how they pleased.¹³

In 1824, the 1811 Religious Freedom Act was extended to all denominations. With this action, voluntary churches received corporate rights, breaking connection that once existed between the public church and the state. By the 1820s, Massachusetts had relinquished control over the formation of these corporations in the realm of religion.

During his pastorate in Wenham, Rev. Anderson developed close ties to the founders of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He attended the first ordination of American missionaries, at Salem Tabernacle Church, in 1812.²⁷ Church records for the years following Rev. Anderson's arrival have many references to contributions for foreign missions.³⁰ The World Missionary Society was formed in 1810.

On Apr. 20, 1822, after the communion service, the church remained to make arrangements for opening a Sabbath school. "It was agreed that the church should be considered an organized body to patronize and superintend it."¹⁵ Church records show that a Sunday school may have been started earlier. "In 1815, Miss Elizabeth Shaw taught a day school and a Sabbath class, in the ancient house west of the town hall."^{6, 19}

The Sabbath school was considered second in importance and usefulness only to the worship in the sanctuary. The Sabbath school began the next month, May, 1822. At first, only held during the summer months, but soon the Sabbath school continued for the entire year.⁶ Attendance at the Sabbath school generally was greater than church service attendance.

In 1823, a Wenham Ladies Society was formed. It was not a church organization; however, many of its activities were centered on acquiring money to buy things needed by the church. A main interest of the society was “*in educating pious youths in the gospel ministry.*”⁶¹ The “Ladies Society” became the “Women’s Association;” in 1947¹⁹

In 1831, there no longer was just one church in Wenham. That year, Wenham had a second church. A Baptist church was organized Oct. 12, 1831, in the east part of the town.¹⁵

The meeting house became a piece of property, when, in 1833, Massachusetts made a law requiring town governments to have dedicated meeting places, i.e., town halls. The result was the formation of church societies and church parishes.

That year, 1833, The Congregational Society of Wenham was formed.

The Bill of Rights now recognized “*the public worship of God and instruction in piety and morality as promoting the happiness and prosperity of a people, and the security of republican government,*” but gave the Commonwealth no duty to enforce such worship or instruction. By this amendment, religious societies “*have the right to elect their pastors or religious teachers, to contract with them for their support, to raise money for erecting and repairing houses of public worship, for the maintenance of religious instruction, and for the payment of necessary expenses.*” The Commonwealth was totally released from any responsibility for assisting and promoting churches.¹³

Legal steps had to be taken to officially state that all church property belonged to the church, rather than to the town (*parish*). But, state government, having long held the power of telling churches how to operate, resisted efforts of church independence. Government was not about to recognize the right of churches (*societies*) to own property.

In 1833, the Wenham Congregational Church became a parish society, the “First Parish and Society in Wenham.”³³ The parish organization continued until 1924, when the church was incorporated.²⁴

Further, an 1833 amendment to the state constitution disestablished the Congregational Church as its favored church. The amendment stated that “*all religious sects and denominations shall be equally under the protection of the law; and no subordination of any one sector denomination to another shall ever be established in law.*”

Forty-one years earlier, Dec. 15, 1791, the U.S. Congress adopted The First Amendment to the U. S. Declaration of Independence, which says Congress “*shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*”

Why did Massachusetts wait over forty years to amend the state constitution?

Some state legislators, including those in Massachusetts, saw the U.S. Constitution amendment as meaning the national government will “*make no law regarding the establishment of religion.*” The amendment did not prohibit the states from doing so, and several states maintained their “established churches” for years. One-by-one the states began disestablishment of their state religion. Massachusetts was the last state to do so.



Vestry on Arbor St., directly behind meeting house, 1856.

Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum

In 1833, the First Church in Wenham Congregational Church, Rev. Ebenezer P. Sperry pastor, had a new record book, Vol. I, which began “The first annual meeting of the parish.”²

No longer were church and town working in concert.

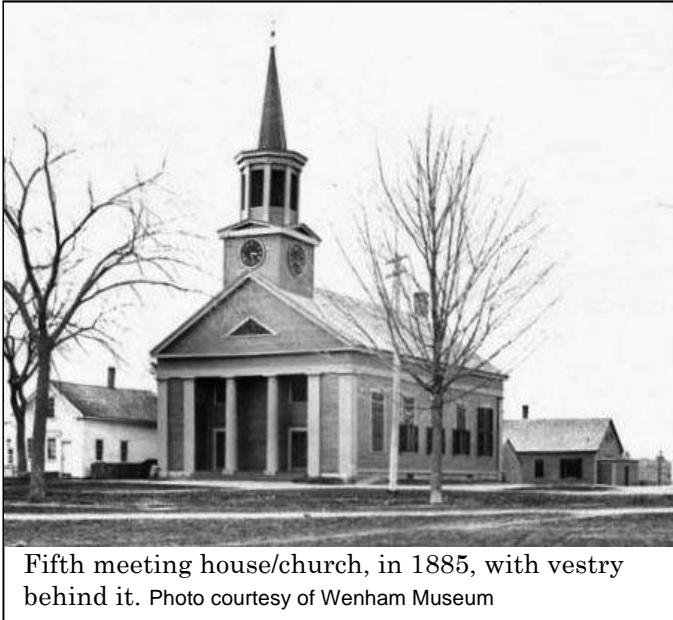
On Mar. 10, 1835, the Wenham church organized a parish for the purpose of carrying on the religious work.³³

Also in 1835, a vestry was built on the west side of the common.⁷ It was a simple one-story, one-room building, with a wood-burning stove. The church leased the land for \$2 a year.¹⁹ Town meetings also were held in the vestry. When the town hall was built, in 1854, this practice stopped, for the most part. However, when space was not available, at the town hall, town meetings were held in the vestry.²³

Shortly after Rev. Sperry’s departure, a unanimous call was extended to Rev. Daniel Mansfield, to become the eleventh pastor of the Wenham Congregational Church. Rev. Mansfield and his family lived at the Claffin-Richards parsonage. He was the last pastor to live there, for a new parsonage was built during his ministry.

Early in the ministry of Rev. Mansfield, 1840, a Maternal Association was formed: they met once a month. This appears to have been the first women’s group established within the church. (*The Wenham Ladies Society was formed, in 1823, was not a church organization.*)

At quarterly meetings of the Maternal Association, children attended.¹⁵ The “Maternal Association” basic credo was “*to bring our children early into the fold of Christ and fit them for usefulness here & glory hereafter.*” They put similar emphasis on the importance of bible study, family worship, parental discipline, and prayer in “training up” Christian children.



Fifth meeting house/church, in 1885, with vestry behind it. Photo courtesy of Wenham Museum

In 1843, the town erected the 5th meetinghouse, alongside Arbor Street, a little behind where the fourth meeting house stood.

The fifth house was built forty-four feet wide, sixty feet long, and the walls were thirty feet high. It was built upon a flat foundation, with no basement. It had only one gallery, at the south end, facing the pulpit. There was a tower, belfry and steeple.¹⁶

Rupert B. Lillie described, in 1973, Wenham's fifth meeting house as being *"architecturally, neither a meeting house nor a 'Colonial church.'* *The building has the feature of the inset portico, or porch, with two columns of the Doric, or Greek order, of architecture, supporting the attic or gable end of the building, usually called the pediment (gable).*

"There are flat pilasters or wall columns, at each corner of this original building. Also, there is a pilaster on each side of the front, inset portico, to carry out the symmetrical balance of the whole.

"Above, there is a broad frieze, with a heavy cornice, just under the eaves, running around the three sides of the building. The entire siding of the front was done through the use of flat, joined-planking, painted to appear like stone.

"The whole effect was to give the appearance of the front as a Greek temple, surmounted with a triangular pediment.

"The wall behind the pulpit was framed with flat, wall pilasters, between which hung a large, crimson dorsal. Hanging in front of the dorsal was a wood cross.

"The framing Doric pilasters are on high bases. They support the very fine plaster, molded, frieze of foliage and fruit with the Greek cornice, above.

"There was a wall pilaster at each end of the gallery. The first organ (1851-1910) was in the gallery.

"There was a broad frieze, with a heavy cornice, at the ceiling level around the walls of the sanctuary. A low-curved ceiling of plaster was above the cornice.

*“The pulpit-desk was original with the church building. Its design repeats the exterior design of the front of the church. The desk has a deep, inset designed panel in the front, with two Doric, fluted columns, completely in the round. The top edge of the desk was crowned with a strong, Greek cornice on three sides.”*²⁴

The pulpit was raised above the floor, at the front of the north wall, to enable the minister to speak directly to those in the galleries, as well as those seated in the main body of the sanctuary. The pulpit had a slanted, wood sounding board, above it, to project the pastor’s voice.¹⁹

On the main floor, there were seats in front of the pulpit, for the selectmen.¹⁹ Pews were along both the east and west walls, as well as on both sides of the pulpit. The pews on each side of the main aisle, called the “Great Alley,” were a little lower, being on the main floor. On the west side, there were seven seats for men; on the east side, there were seven seats for women; “Each Butting on the grate South alley.”¹⁹

The fifth meetinghouse was dedicated Dec. 20, 1843.² Cost of building the structure, \$4,000, was well covered by the sale of pews. The cost for making all the pews was \$5,002, and they were sold for \$34,204.^{16,6}

When the fourth meetinghouse was dismantled, pew owners were paid a total of \$196.75.¹⁶ The value of the pews, \$34,204, would become a significant factor three years later, when on Mar. 10, 1846, the church “Voted to assess a tax on the Pews in the Meeting House, at their original appraised value, of ten per cent.”³³

The fourth meetinghouse, per se, was sold for \$99, to Perley Tapley, of Danvers, who was a skilled mover of buildings. He, in turn, sold it to Charles Lander, of Salem, who owned the ice business on Wenham Lake. Later, he had it moved to the shore of Wenham Lake, near the highway, where it served as an ice-house. A small belfry and bell were added, for summoning employees. Along with other ice-storage sheds, the old meetinghouse burned, in 1872.^{9,19}

On Apr. 8, 1847, Rev. Mansfield died. During his ministry, his health never was strong. He died at the early age of thirty-nine, and in the eleventh year of his ministry.

The pastorate, at the Wenham Congressional Church, was soon replaced. It was filled on Oct, 27, 1847, when Rev. Jeremiah Taylor was ordained and installed.

Upon Rev. Taylor’s arrival, the church decided that the Claflin-Richards parsonage was “inconvenient and not well suited for such a purpose,” and it was sold.⁶ Church records do not explain what was meant by “inconvenient and not well suited for such a purpose.” However, by 1847, the Claflin-Richards house was nearly one hundred and sixty years old and very likely needed to be greatly updated.

In 1849, to build a new parsonage, the Wenham Congregational Society bought, from Mrs. Mary Ann Richards, a pie-shaped piece of land that was behind the town common. Rufus Dodge was the builder, and the contract was signed, on Jun. 25, 1849, with the specification that the construction would be completely finished within three months (*Sep. 15, 1849*).⁷ Quite likely, the church wanted their pastor and his family to be settled before the cold of Fall and Winter.

It was a two-story house, with a one story ell, shed and barn. There were two open porches, one across the front and one on the south end, three chimneys and seven fireplaces.⁷

First Organ

In November 1851, the church purchased their first organ. The committee of "*Messrs J(ohn) Porter, F(rederick) Hadley & J.A. Putnam Bought of Parkman & Greenwood One Church Organ \$700.*"¹⁶

Rev. Jeremiah Taylor, was chiefly responsible for the securing of this first organ. It is stated that it "*was procured – by private contributions*"⁶

The organ was placed in the center of the gallery, with choir pews on both sides. It was placed against the south wall, between the two small windows. It was a cabinet organ and stood as high as the cornice, which surrounded the sanctuary walls.⁶⁰

In 1853, the townspeople decided it was "*necessary and expedient to enlarge our meeting house.*" At the time, church membership was seventy-five.

The meeting house was enlarged by cutting it in two, moving the pulpit end back fifteen feet, and inserting a fifteen foot section, the equivalent of one bay of twenty pews, in between the two halves.^{2, 5} (*In April 2012, when exterior paint was stripped, vertical seams in the building from the 1852 expansion were visible.*)

Back in 1833, the General Court of Massachusetts mandated that town meetings were no longer to be held in a church meetinghouse. The state and town governments no longer supported the church, nor were they associated with any church.

Never ones to rush to decisions, Wenham, twenty-one years later, in 1854, voted (*79 to 61*), at the meeting house, to build a combination town hall and school building.¹¹

In 1856, the vestry again was relocated. The town moved it, at its expense, to a lot that was purchased on Arbor Street, at the north end of the meetinghouse.¹⁶ This new site was purchased by the "Ladies' Society," of the church.¹⁹ In 1947, upon learning that there was no deed for the property, the Women's Association (*successor to the Ladies' Society*) gave to the church a quitclaim deed for the chapel and the land it was on.²²

Also in 1856, The First Parish and Congregational Society in Wenham re-organized, under new bylaws.⁶ No longer able to obtain financial support

from town government, churches formed societies to be responsible for the provision and maintenance of their meeting houses.

Open seating came to the Wenham First Church, in 1869. On Apr. 20, of that year, the church "*Voted that the Parish pews in the church be made free for one year, and that all persons disposed to make any of their pews free, will hand the numbers of the same to the Parish Committee, and that the Parish Committee post up a list of the numbers of the pews made free, in the entry of the Meeting House.*"³³ (Some church pews, including those at the First Church in Wenham, still have numbers on them dating back to that practice.)

Many Wenham families continued to consider their former pews still was where they, and they alone, were to sit on Sundays.

The policy of free pews had begun back in the 1840s, at some congregational churches, in New England. However, this practice was very slowly accepted by many other churches. It was not until the 1930s when open seating became universal. Open seating gave rise to the term "free church." *

In May 1867, a clock was placed in the meetinghouse tower. The idea for the clock went back to 1780, when Dolly B. Clark suggested this be done. Alterations to the church tower were made by Dea. William B. Morgan, and the clock began ticking and chiming.

Two years later, Mar. 2, 1869, Perley wrote that the clock was offered as a gift, "*by the enterprise of some of the citizens,*" to the town. From that day on, the ringing of the church bell, at noon and 9 p.m. was discontinued. Today, you only will hear the bell being rung on Sunday mornings or for momentous events.⁷

The church also provided care and maintenance of the clock. On Feb. 7, 1870, is the first record of "Care of Town Clock - \$20."⁷

In the latter part of the 19th century, becoming a member of the Wenham church was much easier than it was in the 17th century. On Mar. 27, 1843, "*Voted that every person duly qualified to vote in the town affairs having subscribed and paid a sum of money for the support in the ministry in the congregational society in Wenham, within two years, shall be considered and held as members of said society, until the society, at a regular meeting, shall otherwise determine or they having filed a certificate with the clerk thereof showing his wish to withdraw from said society.*"³³

On Apr. 4, 1871, the church "*Voted to grant to the Town of Wenham the privilege to erect and forever maintain, in the "Park" belonging to this Parish (situated in front of the meeting house), a Soldier's Monument to the memory of the men of this Town who died in the service of their Country during the Great Rebellion of 1861-5; Upon the condition that the Town, above named, shall erect and forever maintain a suitable fence around said "Park."*"¹²⁴

* In minutes of the 1873 Annual Meeting of the General Association of the Congregational Churches, a "free" church described itself as being a church "without pew rents."

Quite clearly, during the latter part of the 19th century, the Wenham church began to hold more social activities at the meetinghouse. In 1889, a kitchen was added to the vestry, which was then called the chapel. This is the first time that the building was referred to as the "chapel." The first supper held at the chapel was on Oct. 29, 1889 ¹⁹

On Oct. 3, 1891, Arthur N. Ward, the twenty-second pastor, was ordained. A noteworthy development during Rev. Ward's ministry was a significant increase in women becoming involved in both church and civic activities. Earlier in the 19th century, 1823, a Wenham Ladies Society began. ¹⁹

At a special parish meeting on Mar. 24, 1896, it was voted to allow women to be full church members. Up to this point women could not vote on church matters. ⁷ (*Twenty-four years later, August 1920, women won the right to vote in national and state elections.*) ³³

Since 1833, there was a law in Massachusetts separating church and state. Quite apparently, this law was not being fully recognized in Wenham, at the end of the 19th century. For, on Dec. 24, 1896, "*Christmas Eve was observed by a very pleasing entertainment in the Town Hall. After the reading of appropriate selections of scripture, and prayer, by the pastor, Rev. A. N. Ward, the children of the Sunday School, under the leadership of Mr. Ivory Quimby, gave a very creditable presentation of the Cantata, entitled Judge Santa Claus, A New Departure.*" ³³

In July 1904, Rev. Dr. Walter S. Eaton became 24th pastor of the Congregational church in Wenham.

Rev. Dr. Eaton had a strong interest in the welfare of the young people of the town. He also was very active in Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, which had begun on Jun. 26, 1888, during the pastorate of Rev. Woodell.

On Oct. 28, 1904, "*Dr. Eaton stated that he had obtained permission from the Parish Committee to have the use of the Chapel one evening in each week for a Boys Club Room, and proposed getting a piano for the use of the club.*" ³³ Rev. Eaton put into action God's calling, let the young come to me.



Etta Gray property became parsonage in 1965. Photo Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle

Before the arrival of Rev. Dr. Eaton, the Wenham Congregational Church and Society conveyed the parsonage property, to the town. This was a pie shaped lot on a low rise, behind the town common. It was purchased from Mrs. Mary Ann Richards, in 1849. ⁷

It was decided to build a new parsonage on a lot on Arbor Street, to be purchased from the Boston and Northern Street R. R. Company.”³³ The lot was the back section of the previous street car-barn lot.

At a Sep. 4, 1906 church meeting, members learned that the cost to build the new parsonage would be \$4,500. The initial parsonage plan was revised, in order to reduce the cost: “*not to cost over \$4,000.*” A parsonage was built, in 1906, at 10 Arbor Street. The cost was about \$3,000.³³

Thus, nearly three years after his arrival, Rev. Dr. Eaton, during the first week in February 1907, moved into the new parsonage.³³

In 1910, Rev. Dr. Eaton suggested that a committee be appointed to procure and install a new pipe organ. He contacted Andrew Carnegie, the philanthropist, about making a gift to the church to acquire the organ: an \$800 donation was provided.⁶⁰



In 1910, the church purchased an Estey organ (*Opus 831*), 1911. Photo Wenham First Church

On May 1, 1912, Rev. Frederick M. Cutler was ordained as the 25th pastor of the Wenham Congregational Church.⁶⁹

The first of Rev. Cutler’s many contributions to the town was the organization, later in 1912, of a Boy Scouts troop. He served as scoutmaster for Troop 1, which met at the Wenham First Church chapel. This was not unusual, for many scout troops also held their meetings at the local church building. The connection between scouting and religion is clearly evident in the Scout Oath, which begins with, “On my honor, I will do my best. To do my duty to God and my country, ...”

In 1913, the plaster ceiling in the sanctuary began cracking and chips were falling on the congregation. A metal ceiling was installed, covering the original frieze.²⁴ Also, for the first time, there was electric lighting in the meeting house: the gas lighting was replaced.⁶⁸

On Sep. 8, 1924, The Society Committee of the church delivered to The First Church in Wenham Congregational, Inc. the deed to the church building and other properties “necessary to convey all the real estate and personal property” held by the Society.”³³

Then, on Sep. 23, 1924, the "First Church in Wenham, Congregational" was incorporated.^{7, 16} Under United States Code (“U.S.C.”) (IRC) § 501(c)(3),



Meeting house, in 1908.
Photo courtesy of Wenham Museum

became an organization exempt from taxation. Thus ended the Congregational Society of Wenham that had begun in 1833.

Also, in 1929, the national Congregational association merged with the General Convention of the Christian Church, to form the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches, the GCCC.

Congregational Christian Churches formed in 1931, with the merger of the General Council of Congregational Churches and the General Convention of the Christian Church.⁹⁶ However, the Wenham Congregational Church did not join.

In 1934, during the pastorate of Rev. Rev. Arthur B. Ransom, the 29th pastor, for the first time, the church clerk began typing records rather than writing them by hand. (*Ed. Note: for those of us who research hand-written church records, this event is very significant.*)

On Sep. 1, 1936 Rev. Vaill, became the 31st pastor of the First Church in Wenham, Congregational.²⁹ At the time of his ordination, supporting membership of the church was one hundred fifty-two.⁴

Not long after the arrival of Rev. Vaill, early signs began appearing of another war in Europe. On Oct. 25, 1936, Germany and Italy announced an axis alliance.

The Wenham church also made an alliance in 1937. Having not joined the Congregational Christian Churches, formed in 1931, six years later, Feb. 17, 1937, the Wenham Congregational Church established "direct fellowship with the Essex South Association, the Congregational Church of Massachusetts, and the National Council of Congregational and Christian Churches of the U. S. Article III, By-Laws."³³

While young people in Europe were faced with being drafted to fight a war, those in Wenham In 1938, the Young Methuselahs, a church organization of young people, began. This was not a group looking to live over nine hundred years (*Methuselah lived 969 years*), but rather young people wanting

to walk in the original ways of the Lord. Rev. Vaill, a young man himself, sought to direct the young people of Wenham toward peace, not conflict.

One of Rev. Vaill's first efforts was to have young people be active participants in the church. In June 1938, the church voted an amendment to the By-Laws "allowing any member or contributor of 18 years may be allowed to vote at any church meeting."³³

Beginning in early 1942, two hundred-eighty men and women left Wenham to serve their country, in Europe and the Pacific; seven died: Stuart E. Barton, Carl D. Campbell, Benjamin E. Cole III, Pierre B. Erhard, James B. Ginty, Paul L. Sawyer, and William A. Trowt, Jr. Many others were wounded.²⁸

Sunday attendance dropped to a mere handful. The church seemed about to expire completely. The churchmen's club was suspended after Pearl Harbor.¹⁶

In the fall of 1942, Rev. Vail suggested to the church's young peoples' group, the Young Methuselahs, that they send a mimeographed letter to all the young men from the town, who were in the service. However, group of people in town took the idea and began writing "Wenham Wanderings," a quarterly newsletter that brought Wenham a little closer to the men and women in the service and shared information that they mailed to the newsletter. Mailing the newsletter lasted until the war was over. Delano Kennard, was the editor, Mrs. William Campbell, was the assistant editor and treasurer, Mrs. Ernest Gregory took care of circulation, along with Mrs. W. Arthur Trowt.²⁸

On Sunday Nov. 22, 1953, the First Church held a dedication service for the renovated parish house and extension behind the church building. The parish house was renamed the Mapleville Chapel Association Hall. A Mapleville Chapel plaque was unveiled in the parish house. Rev. King presided.³³ Likely, formers members of the Mapleville Association, having sold their former meeting house to the town, had become active members of the First Church.



In 1953, the vestry (*right*) was raised and a kitchen and hall built underneath. A connection, built between the sanctuary and the vestry, provided office and classroom space. Photo Microsoft and Navteq

On Jan. 16, 1962, the church voted unanimously that they associate and affiliate with the United Church of Christ. (UCC).⁷

Also in 1962, the church undercroft was excavated.⁷ The project took just over two months to complete. The undercroft provided space for a large Sunday school room, choir room, and much needed storage space.

Also that year, December 1965, the First Church acquired, for \$22,500, its fifth parsonage property. It was the Etta Gray property (17,000 sq. ft.) and house on 11 Arbor St. (*the old Henry Dempsey house*), which is directly behind church vestry.²¹

The practice of providing a free place for the pastor to live had begun in 1630. However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, many pastors did not have a need for a parsonage.

A significant event occurred at the start of 1967. At the Jan. 17 annual meeting, the First Church in Wenham amended its constitution to allow women to be called deaconesses and to serve on the diaconate. Three women became deaconesses: Eva M. Burnett, Aurielia M. Woodbury, Thelma C. Scott.³³

Beginning in 1965, the church held an Easter-dawn service on a low hill behind the Wenham Country Club. This site has long been known as "Tarr's Hill."¹⁹

The following year, on Feb. 1, 1968, Rev. Warren H. Johnson began his pastorate to the First Church in Wenham.²⁹

As church attendance and membership grew, so did other activities during the week. In particular, there were more social events. In 1982, the 1953 kitchen in the vestry was renovated.⁷

As part of a bicentennial program, in May 1976, the First Church in Wenham reenacted a colonial church service. Many members dressed in colonial garb and the service followed that of the church in the 1600s. The church program had information about the colonial service.³⁶

A major addition was made by the Elizabeth Perkins Harold Chapel Planning Committee. In 1986, the Elizabeth Perkins Herald Memorial chapel was created and dedicated in the upper hall, and the reception hall completed.³³

While deaconesses had been serving on the Deaconate since 1967, there still was the distinction between men, deacons, and women, deaconesses. On Jun. 4, 1986, at a Diaconate meeting, it was requested that the male/female distinction on the Diaconate be eliminated and that there be twelve members. The majority was in favor of the change, therefore a proposal to amend the Constitution was drafted for a vote at a subsequent meeting. At the time, it was required to have six deacons and six deaconesses. On Jun. 15, the church voted that their objective was to have six men and six women on the deaconate, and that at no time shall either sex have less than 4 members of the diaconate.³³

Four years later, on May 1, 1990, the Deaconate included men and women, with no distinction, i.e., deaconess or deacon³³

In April 1988, the church once again refurbished the sanctuary. There was some talk about replacing the tin ceiling, however, the Sanctuary Committee opted to keep the tin ceiling and paint it. The window drapes were removed and replaced with four-fold raised panels and painted shutters.³³

The church expanded, in 1991, their membership to children fourteen years old, when they had completed confirmation. This was an amendment many Protestant churches were making to recognize a coming of age.

A year later, on Apr. 19, 1992, Rev. Johnson retired as pastor to the First Church in Wenham. His service of twenty-four years is the third longest in the history of pastors at the First Church.²⁹ The Wenham church would be without a settled pastor for over two years.

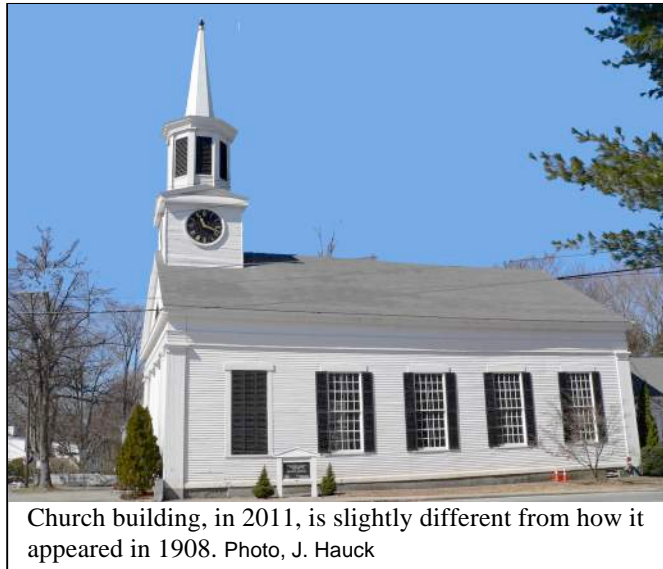
On Nov. 20, 1994, Rev. Ann G. Abernethy became the pastor of the Wenham United Church of Christ.³⁷ In November 1993, following a candidating sermon, the Wenham church called Rev. Abernethy to be their pastor. After taking a seven-week sabbatical, she began her ministry in Wenham.

Her arrival was preceded, in the Wenham First Church, by an interim minister,³⁷ Sunday, Apr. 26, 1992, who was also a woman, Rev. Susan Remick. She led the way to the church's calling a woman to be the called pastor. *³³

Rev. Abernethy was not the first woman to preach at the Wenham Church. Apr. 26, 1908, "Dr. Eaton, having been suddenly called to the sick bed of this father, the morning service was ably conducted by his wife, who read the sermon, which had been prepared for the day. Text Mark 9:50."³³

During Rev. Abernethy's time as pastor, the church started televising their Sunday Services. The first cameraman was Brake Barbar. He was followed by Fred Hale.

A Board of Trustees oversees the care, custody and general upkeep and repairs of church property, including buildings, parsonage, and all other property and equipment.



Church building, in 2011, is slightly different from how it appeared in 1908. Photo, J. Hauck

* In 1853, Antoinette L. Brown was ordained by the Congregationalist Church, in Butler, NY. However, her ordination was not recognized by the denomination. She quit the church and later became a Unitarian.

Pews are not owned by families, but by the corporation, with no special designation as to where people may sit.

During Rev. Abernethy's ministry, a significant program was begun to enlighten the congregation on issues of sexual diversity. This was the beginning of a process by which the church would become an "open and affirming" congregation. Congregations, within the United Church of Christ, become open and affirming when they fully include gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons, into their church.³¹



Rev. Mike Duda, 2011
Photo First Church in Wenham

Rev. Abernethy's ministry also saw the initiation of a Grants Program, through which people could make applications and receive funding for special projects, often of a mission nature.

When Rev. Abernethy, in 2004, left the First Church in Wenham an interim minister, Rev. King remained as interim pastor until 2006. The next interim pastor was Rev. Michael Duda.

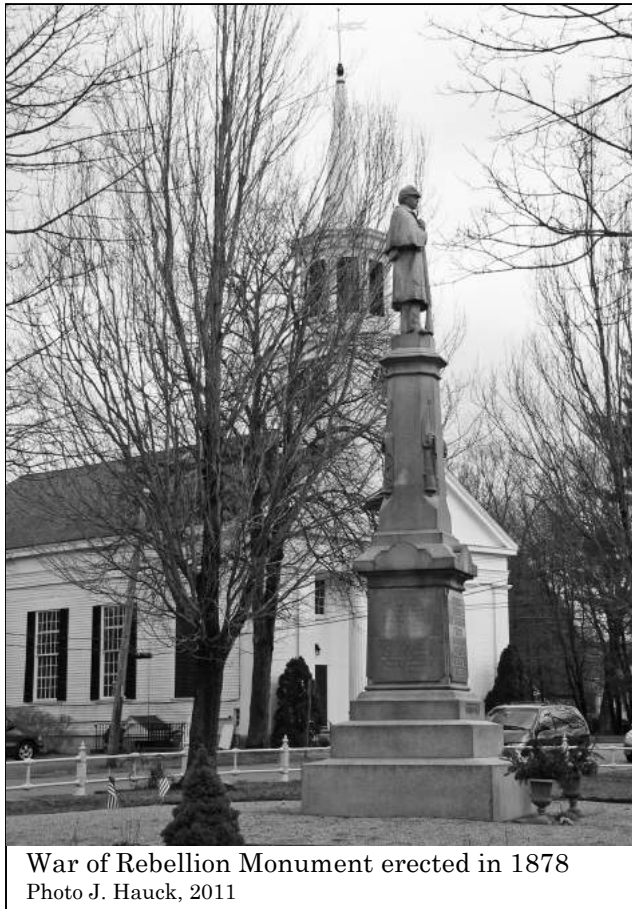
Following Rev. Duda's preaching at a Sunday service on Mar. 26, 2006, he was invited to settle as the pastor. Then, on Apr. 6, 2006, Rev. Duda, with unanimous approval of church members, became the pastor for First Church in Wenham.

With a home in Rockport, Rev. Duda and his family did not require the use of the Arbor Street parsonage. The parsonage, at 11 Arbor St., in which three families live, continued to be rented. It was first opened to rentals in 1870.

Two years after Rev. Duda's arrival, inspectors during a regular check of the church building discovered that the steeple's wooden baseboards were rotting. Rev. Duda was told that the steeple was unsafe.



11 Arbor St. parsonage
Photo J. Hauck



War of Rebellion Monument erected in 1878
Photo J. Hauck, 2011

Not wanting a repeat of the 1815 toppling of the spire, it was removed. In October 2010, the Wenham church had a new spire placed on top of its 160-year-old steeple.

We now come to the present, 2012.

Beginning 2012, the First Church in Wenham was a “family of five hundred and twenty-five adults and graduates of confirmation classes, four-teen-year-olds.”³² With this large size, the church began considering the hiring a second, full-time pastor.

In 2012, the meeting house was completely repainted. The bell tower will be done in the final phase of the project.

Other plans call for the possible expansion of the vestry and office area behind the sanctuary.

Since 1644, The Wenham First Church has had thirty-nine seated-pastors. During the 367 years, the longest serving pastors were: Rev. Joseph Gerrish, 47 years; Rev. Joseph Swain, 42 years; and Rev. Warren Johnson, 24 years.

During its history, the First Church in Wenham has been affiliated with: the Congregational Church, General Counsel of Congregational Christian Churches, Congregational Christian Churches, and the United Church in Christ.

As of 2012, there have been five meetinghouses, with the current one being the longest lasting: 168 years.

There are no complete records to update the 1845 data that Rev. Mansfield gathered on the number of baptisms, marriages, deaths and church membership, in town, since that time.

Over the nearly four hundred years that the First Church had existed in Wenham, there were many changes:

- Families now sit together;
- Pews are not owned by church members;
- Deacons sit with the congregation;
- Tithing men, with prods, do not roam among the congregation;
- Members are not required to believe literally the Bible.
- Members do not have to own property;
- Members include children 14 years and older;
- Music accompanies the choir and hymns;
- People wanting to be members do not have to personally describe their conversion experience to Christianity;
- The church accepts the New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*) of the Bible;
- The church is not required to own a parsonage;
- The church is a corporation of the State of Massachusetts and has a Board of Directors;
- Deacons are both men and women;
- The town does not pay for church operation;
- The town has no say in the selection of a pastor;
- There are Christmas and Easter services;
- Communion is not restricted to church members;
- Tithes and contributions are not set by the church, nor by the town;
- Voting at Town Meetings is not restricted to church members;
- Wedding and funeral services are held in the church;
- Women can speak at church services, vote, serve as deacons, and be pastors;

Updated 06-01-2014

Pastors

| Started | Ended | Pastor | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----|
| Oct. 8, 1644* | Nov. 13, 1655* | Fiske, John | Left | 01 |
| Nov. 8, 1657* | Oct. 15, 1672* | Newman, Antipas | Died | 02 |
| May 23, 1673* | Jan. 6, 1720* | Gerrish, Joseph | Died | 03 |
| Jan. 25, 1721* | Jul. 19, 1732* | Ward, Robert | Died | 04 |
| Jan. 12, 1733* | Jul. 19, 1749* | Warren, John | Died | 05 |
| Oct. 24, 1750* | Jun. 29, 1792 | Swain, Joseph | Died | 06 |
| 12/26/1792 | 10/22/1799 | Judson, Adoniram | Left | 07 |
| 06/10/1805 | 02/11/1814 | Anderson, Rufus | Died | 08 |
| 11/26/1817 | 09/08/1819 | Smith, John | Left | 09 |
| 03/29/1820 | 04/30/1837 | Sperry, Ebenezer P. | Left | 10 |
| 07/26/1837 | 04/08/1847 | Mansfield, Daniel | Died | 11 |
| 10/27/1847 | 09/10/1856 | Taylor, Jeremiah | Left | 12 |
| 04/29/1859 | 04/28/1867 | Sewall, John S. | Left | 13 |
| ??/??/1867 | ??/??/1868 | Childs, Alexander C. | Left | 14 |
| 04/29/1859 | 06/??/1870 | Joyslin, William R. | Left | 15 |
| 10/13, /1870 | 08/29/1876 | Wood, Will C. | Left | 16 |
| 04/03/1877 | 04/01/1878 | Clarke, Samuel W. | Left | 17 |
| 12/11/1878 | 08/04/1879 | Hart, John M. | Left | 18 |
| 03/05/1880 | 04/30/1884 | Childs, James H. | Left | 19 |
| 06/17/1884 | 11/01/1886 | Mitchell, John C. | Left | 20 |
| 07/03/1877 | 02/23/1890 | Woodwell, George M. | Left | 21 |
| 10/01/1891 | 04/01/1898 | Ward, Arthur N. | Left | 22 |
| 05/01/1898 | 12/27/1903 | Turk, Morris H. | Left | 23 |
| 07/??/1904 | ??/??/1911 | Eaton, Walter S. | Left | 24 |
| 05/01/1912 | 08/31/1917 | Cutler, Frederick M. | Left | 25 |
| 01/01/1918 | 03/01/1923 | Craig, Timothy C. | Left | 26 |
| 09/01/1923 | 11/ 15/1926 | Derrick, Thomas H. | Left | 27 |
| 01/01/1928 | 05/31/1930 | White, Harold | Left | 28 |
| 12/12/1930 | 12/02/1934 | Ransom, Arthur B. | Left | 29 |
| 03/24/1935 | 05/15/1936 | Koos, Earl L. | Left | 30 |
| 09/01/1936 | 09/15/1943 | Vaill, Frederick W. | Left | 31 |
| 12/01/1943 | 12/20/1944 | Higgins, Forrest C. | Left | 32 |
| 05/01/1945 | 05/20/1948 | Darby, William J. | Left | 33 |
| 09/01/1948 | 08/31/1953 | King, James | Left | 34 |
| 05/01/1954 | 09/30/1958 | MacLean, Wilfred | Left | 35 |
| 03/01/1959 | 08/31/1867 | Martin, Paul T. | Left | 36 |
| 02/01/1968 | 04/19/1992 | Johnson, Warren H. | Retired | 37 |
| 03/20/1994 | 05/16/2004 | Abernethy, Ann | Left | 38 |
| 04/06/2006 | | Duda, Michael | Current | 39 |

* Julian calendar, with April being first month of year

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- 34 - Highlights of 300 Years, Frederick Batchelder, Sr., Wenham, MA, Oct. 8, 1944
- 35 - Worship in the Colonial Spirit, May 16, 1962
- 36 – Reenactment of Colonial Church Service, Wenham First Church, May 1976.
- 37 – Private communication, Apr. 4, 2011
- 38 – Historic Wenham church gets a face-lift, Salem News, April 20, 2012
- 39 – Private communication, May 23, 2012.