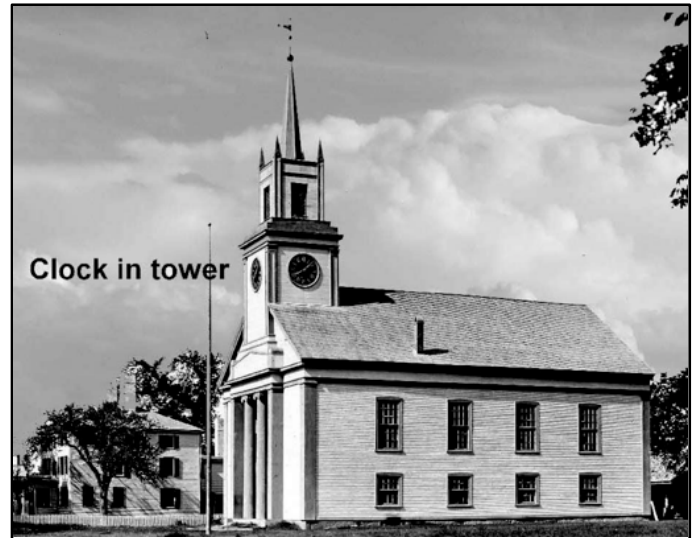




1762 meetinghouse, 60 ft. long, 44 ft. wide and had 26 ft. high walls. Doors were on both ends and a main entrance at the front. Annex had stairs to the gallery.

Drawing, Hamilton Historical Society, modified



Clock in tower

Meetinghouse, 1893

Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

First Congregational Church of Hamilton Meetinghouses



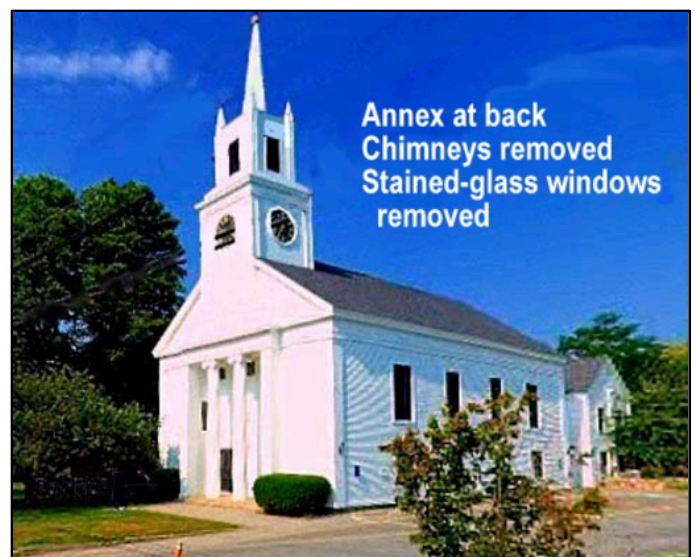
1843 meetinghouse, 72 ft. long, 40 ft. wide and 26 ft. high walls and a 2-story Greek portico, capped Ionic columns. Pipe chimney on roof. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society, 1880



Second Chimney
Stained Glass Windows

Meetinghouse, 1990

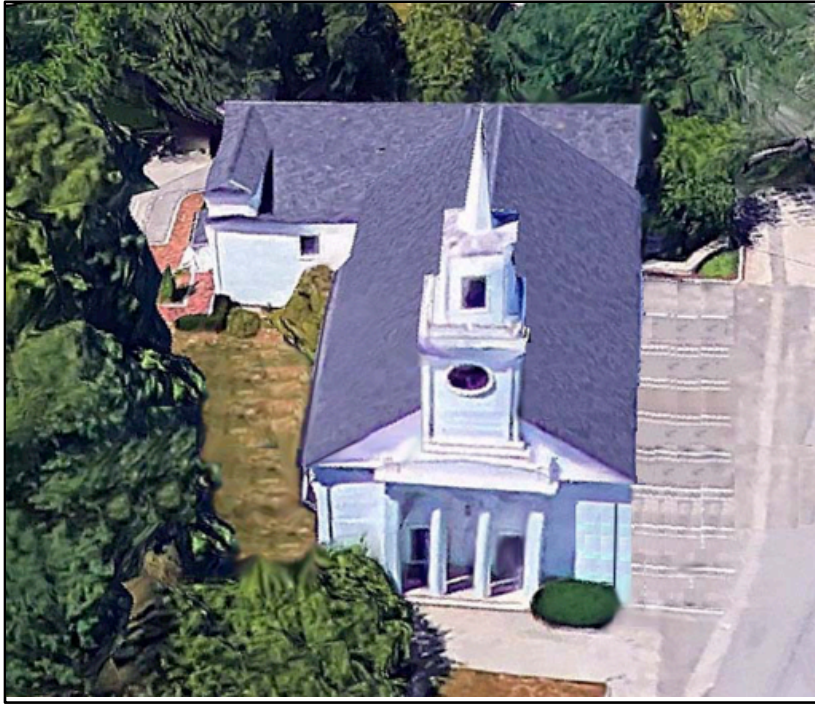
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



Annex at back
Chimneys removed
Stained-glass windows removed

Meetinghouse, 2018

Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



Built in 1843, the First Congregational Church in Hamilton meetinghouse remained little changed on the exterior, for more than a hundred years.

In 1888, the town built a turret clock in the tower below the belfry, which has a 1785 bell from the previous meetinghouse.

In 1977, a 2-story annex was built at the back of the building. It was enlarged in 2006.

Photo, Google, 2019

History of ...

First Congregational Church of Hamilton Meetinghouses

(A history of the Hamilton Congregational Church meetinghouse, with some comments concerning the church, i.e., the members and programs. Deut. 8, 2: "You shall remember all the way your God led you.")

In the 1600s, Ipswich was one of the Bay Colony's largest towns. On the south side, about 5 miles from the Ipswich River, it bordered the Town of Salem.

Part of the area below the Ipswich River, what is now Hamilton, originally was called the Hamlet. It was part of the First Ipswich Parish and covered about 8,100 acres. *(A parish, covering a geographical territory, was a unit of both civil and religious authority.)*

Church membership and attendance was compulsory for everyone living in Ipswich. There was only one denomination. By Massachusetts law, only the sick and disabled were excused and there were fines for not attending.⁵⁴ The Colony required towns to pay, out of local taxes, for pastors and the upkeep of a meetinghouse.

The Ipswich meetinghouse was on a hill roughly a half-mile north of the Ipswich River, the highest point in the town. Built in 1634, it was on what became known as the Meeting House Green. Townspeople came here for both civic and religious meetings.

By the 1700s, the church attendance law often was not enforced. Many people lived far from the Meeting House Green.

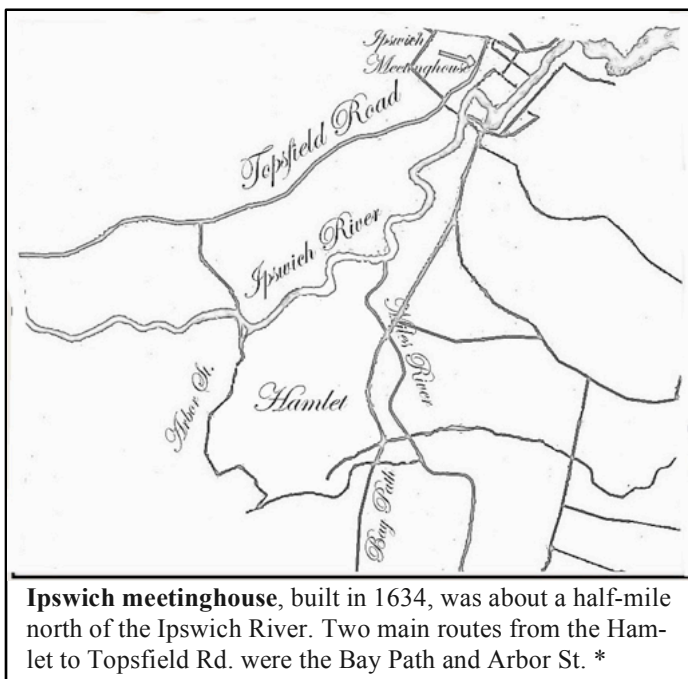
Settlers living in the Hamlet had two main ways to the Ipswich meetinghouse:

In the western section, people, on horse-drawn wagons, went north on Arbor Street (*now Highland*), across the Ipswich River to Topsfield Road and then east to the Meeting House Green.

In the center and eastern sections, people went north on the Bay Path and across the Ipswich River to reach the Green. In 1642, The Bay Colony, of which Ipswich was part, officially laid the Bay Path that originally was an Indian trail.¹⁰

For people living in the Hamlet, getting to the Ipswich meetinghouse on the Sabbath was very difficult. Depending on the season, the dirt roads were muddy, icy, snow covered, blocked with fallen trees and rutted. A few creeks and rivers had to be crossed. There was the chance of meeting hostile Indians. Disabled wagons could block the narrow paths.

* Current Gregorian calendar begins Jan. 1. Previous Julian calendar began Mar. 25. Following the change, in 1752 by the colonies, dates for Jan. to Mar. often showed two years.



In the late 1650s, Ipswich allowed some families in the 3rd district, the Hamlet, to worship at the Wenham meetinghouse. In 1658/59,* the "neighbors," as they were called in Wenham, began contributing financially to support the Wenham church.¹¹

In January 1679/80, the neighbors, having grown in numbers, asked the Wenham church for more space in the meetinghouse. They received "the west gallery (*balcony*) and two seats next to the stairs, on the right hand of the coming in of the south door, for their wives."⁷⁰

A group of Hamlet men (65), in 1712/13, representing forty families at the Wenham meetinghouse, petitioned Ipswich to become a separate parish and to build a meetinghouse.⁹⁸ They said the Wenham meetinghouse was too small to accommodate them.⁸

Ipswich replied that the Hamlet petitioners had to erect a meetinghouse and, then, call for an Orthodox Congregational minister to be their pastor.⁶⁶ Further, Ipswich required the Hamlet petitioners to pay to Ipswich an indemnity (*compensation*) of about £910, for support of Ipswich paupers, its Ipswich preacher's salary and other town expenses.¹

On Jun. 15, 1713, fifteen Ipswich families gave up their rights (*allotted space and pews*) in the Wenham meetinghouse. Four months later, on Oct. 3, 1714, the Wenham Church dismissed eleven males and seventeen females, with twenty-four "covenanters," to form a church in the Hamlet of Ipswich.^{11, 13} For their pews in the Wenham meetinghouse, the Hamlet members received about £40.² (*It was a common practice for families to have a registered deed for a numbered pew in a meetinghouse.*)

* Maps, drawings and photos by J. Hauck, unless otherwise indicated.

Prior to leaving, the Hamlet paid the Wenham church a third of the annual meetinghouse expenses, and their share in its repair, and the pastor's salary.¹²

Members of the Third Church of Christ in Ipswich held their first legal meeting Mar. 1, 1713/14. Later that month, they elected a moderator, clerk, three officers, tax collector, treasurer and two "keepers of order in the house of God." All the positions were only for "the ensuing year."¹⁰⁹

First Meetinghouse, 1714

The Hamlet built its first meetinghouse, at the corner of the Bay Path (*now Bay Road*) and Farms Road (*now Cuter Road*), in 1714. It was on common land of Ipswich and directly across from a cemetery, also common land, created in 1706. Ipswich proprietors granted the right to the land to the Hamlet parish. The Bay Colony previously granted rights to proprietors and permission to grant the land to others.

The Hamlet's inhabitants contributed, via a ministerial fee, to building the meetinghouse.⁵² The parish owned the meetinghouse.⁹⁸

Much of what is known about the Hamlet's first two meetinghouses comes from a Rev. Manasseh Cutler sermon, given at the Hamlet's 100th anniversary.⁶⁶

The first structure, according to Rev. Cutler, was a single-story building, 50 ft. long, 32 ft. wide with a 20 ft. post (*height from foundation to roof eave*).⁶⁶ Like most meetinghouses of the time, the rectangular building had a door at each end and a large door in the side facing the Bay Path.⁶⁶ It likely had a pediment above the front door. Men entered through one side door and women entered by the other. The pastor, deacons and prominent men entered through center door, called the "door of honor."⁶⁹

The building had a tower on the south end.⁴ This was a watchtower, essential to public safety during the times of Indian unrest. (*Some reference sources refer to a turret on the building.*)¹¹⁰

Other descriptions of early 1700 colonial meetinghouses mention steep gable roofs with wood shingles, timber frames, small casement (*some twin*) windows, with glass panes, unpainted tapered clapboard siding and field stone foundations.

While there is no mention of them in the Hamlet's records, outhouses likely were built behind the meetinghouse.

An open hearth for heat was not in the building.⁸ The inhabitants probably thought that the building, used for the most part only on Sundays and never overnight (*parish government generally met at the homes of office holders*), did not justify the expense of a large fireplace and chimney. Further, if a chimney were built in the middle of the building, as was common for houses, it would block some from seeing the pastor.

The windows had lozenge-shaped, translucent panes, set in lead cames. There were two long narrow sashes, opening in the middle, top to bottom.⁵²

Early colonial architecture was plain, functional and practical to the point of being austere. There were no signs of this being a religious building. The meetinghouse, fairly rough on the inside, did not have a ceiling, the rafters were exposed.⁸ There was only one nondescript meeting room.

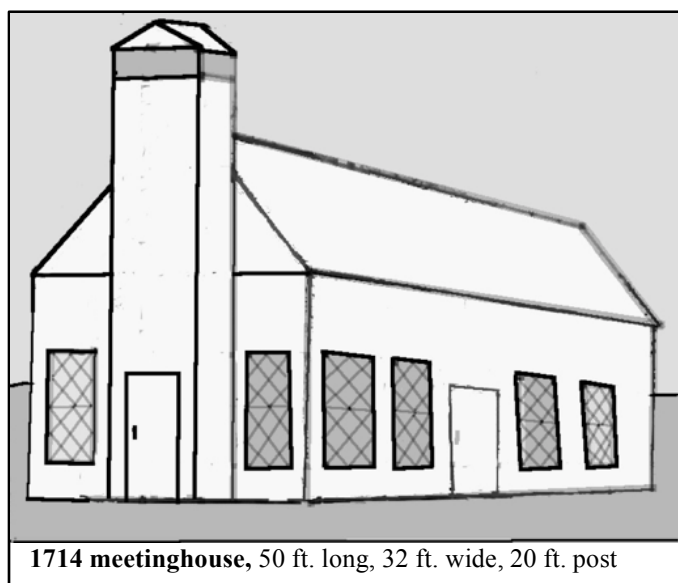
Descriptions of other meetinghouses, built around that time, mention metal sconces, with candles, on the walls; wide-plank flooring; bare walls; and a table and bench, in front of rows of bench pews. The minister sat at the table (*"minister's table"*), along with Church deacons. He only went to the pulpit to deliver his sermon.^{69, 36}

Rev. Cutler did not describe the first pulpit, but it likely was simply a narrow high table on a low platform. It was important for the minister to see the entire congregation and for them to see him.

In 1715, inhabitants voted to allow pews to be built.¹¹⁰ There were four sections of pews: two center rows, separated by a wide aisle called the "Great Alley," and rows by both sidewalls.

Based on the meetinghouse's width (50 ft.), the center rows, likely were 10 ft. wide and both side rows were 8 ft. Each side aisle likely was 3 ft. wide. Pews were along the front entrance wall. The pews were simple benches, planks with legs. Married men and women sat in separate sections. Young children sat in a group, under the care of the tithingman.⁹

In winter months, some women brought small footstoves from their homes. These were metal boxes with four legs and contained hot coals. Worshipper's put their feet on a wood stool, called a cricket, which was placed over the box.¹⁷



There is no mention of there ever being a fire in the 1714 meetinghouse. Quite amazing, considering the many hot-coal foot warmers.

No one chose where to sit. Four men were appointed, by inhabitants, "to seat persons as they see moot for their convenient accommodation."¹¹¹ People were seated in an order of civil and social status.⁹⁸ Prominent church members sat at the front.⁸

Everyone sat up straight. A tithingman enforced conduct in the sanctuary. Nodding off would be met by a swipe of the tithingman's feather-tipped rod.⁵²

The tithingman, employed by the parish, had several other duties, including enforcing the Sabbath's travel ban (*only to and from church allowed*)

The parish employed, during a Sunday service: a watchman, in the tower, to warn of an Indian attack.

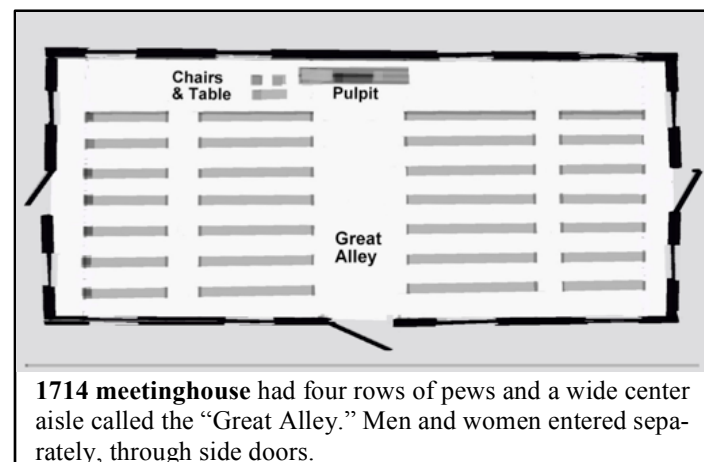
Collectors, appointed annually by Hamlet residents, appointed three men to obtain a ministerial tax, paid by the Hamlet's residents. It paid for the pastor, tithingman and the watchman. The tax also paid for a Church sexton, who cared for the cemetery and grave digging and meetinghouse maintenance. The Hamlet's covenanters controlled the minister's fees.⁹⁸

The Hamlet's population, in 1714, was between 700 and 800.⁶⁶

The original Hamlet congregation, covenanters, had 58 members, most of them (32) were women and 49 were former members of the Wenham church. Also joining the Hamlet congregation were a few parishioners from the first and second churches in Ipswich.^{8, 66} Also attending Sunday services were children, servants and non-covenanters.

To accommodate worshippers coming by wagon, members were allowed to build stables, at the back of the meetinghouse.¹⁴⁰

The local Congregational Church, as it does now, ruled itself. No outside authority or governing body existed. Decisions of doctrine and practice originated from within, but only by male communicants.



The combination of this polity and families remaining in the area, generation after generation, led to few changes in church services and the meetinghouse.

The first pastor was 26-yr. old Rev. Samuel Wigglesworth. He was a small man, of "gentle demeanor." Born in Malden and a Harvard medical graduate, he first came to the Hamlet, in 1710, to be its doctor. He stayed for a year, before going back to college to study theology.⁸ Wigglesworth returned to the Hamlet, in early 1714, to apply as the pastor.^{66 8}

To build a house (*the Church did not have a parsonage*), unmarried Rev. Wigglesworth, in May 1714, bought property next to the meetinghouse. The church gave him £100 to buy it and to build a house. In his first year, the Hamlet paid him 60£, with a third being in the value of grain and wood.⁹

On Oct. 12, 1714, church covenanters (*communicants, accepted church members*) elected Wigglesworth their pastor, following his signing of the church covenant.⁶⁶

Two weeks later, Oct. 27, an ecclesiastical council met. It consisted of the elders and delegates of the first and second churches in Ipswich, and of the churches in Wenham, Rowley and Topsfield. The Hamlet church was accepted by the council, and designated the Third Church of Christ in Ipswich. After reading the church covenant publicly to the assembly, the council ordained Wigglesworth as the pastor.⁶⁶

At the time, Rev. Wigglesworth was single. In 1715, he married Mary Brintnal, of Chelsea.^{2, 8}

In 1720, Richard Hubbard sold to "All Inhabitants in the Precinct in Ipswich Called the Hamlet" half an acre along the Bay Road for the building of a parsonage.³³ The lot was next to the meetinghouse property. Rev. Wigglesworth later built a 2-story house on the property.

In addition to the pastor, the church had two deacons: Jon Gilbert and Matthew Whipple.⁶⁶ They assisted the pastor in conducting the Sunday service, questioned potential new church communicants and oversaw maintenance of the meetinghouse.

The Sabbath began with a nine o'clock church service. The tithingman alerted parishioners to the services. It was the custom of the time to blow a horn a set number of times.⁵² (*Other alerts had a different number of horn soundings.*)

Worship began with a solemn prayer by Rev. Wigglesworth. The congregation stood, with their arms raised above their heads, offering themselves to do God's will.¹⁰ Next, Rev. Wigglesworth read and explained a chapter from the Geneva Bible. After which, Communicants could state their views on the scripture.⁵² The Geneva Bible, the first English Bible to use verse numbers, aided in the discussion of specific verses.

A deacon read, line by line, a psalm from "The Bay Psalm Book," with the congregation chanting each line in unison. This was called "lining out." Many parishioners did not own a psalm book.⁵²

The New England psalm book, printed about 1640 in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was known as the Bay Psalm Book. It was a metrical psalter and contained 150 Bible psalms.

Everyone was encouraged to sing, however, they were asked to follow certain rules: Pronounce words articulately and with proper emphasis; not to pronounce words that began with a vowel as if they were a consonant; never sing beyond normal voice (*some singers believed they sang better if they sang loud*); sing from the chest, not from the throat or through the nose; avoid vulgarity of manner; not be overly fond of trills, graces and divisions; and sing without affectation.⁵⁷

After the congregation "sang" a psalm, Rev. Wigglesworth read (*his voice moderate*), a lengthy sermon, often lasting more than two hours.⁵² The small meeting room ensured everyone could hear him. There is no mention, in parish records, of there being a sounding board above and behind the pulpit.⁸ This was a device for amplifying a minister's voice.

Rev. Wigglesworth, a Calvinist in his sentiments, had a clear voice, though not strong and "spoke with such earnestness as to command attention."³

The service ended with a long prayer by Rev. Wigglesworth.⁹ During the prayer, people were allowed to pass forward notes, with the names of persons or issues for remembrance in the prayer.¹⁰

Following a blessing, by Rev. Wigglesworth, the congregation filed out the side doors, first passing by the "minister's table." On his chair, there was a basket or box, where contributions could be made.¹⁰

Most financial support of the church came from a ministerial tax applied to all the Hamlet's residents. Some church members also gave additional contributions of money and food.⁹

The morning service often lasted more than three hours. A deacon, sitting by the minister's table, turned an hourglass, each time the sand ran out.¹⁷ Repeated turning of the hourglass demonstrated the preacher's extensive Bible knowledge.³²



Hourglass, on minister's table, showed sermon length. A deacon turned it each time the sand ran out. Photo: Unk.

The Lord's Supper usually was celebrated once a month, at the close of the morning service.⁹ Communicants, men and women separately, passed by the minister's table to receive the sacraments.

In the winter, the meetinghouse was very cold; in the summer, it was very hot and insects were all around; birds flew among the rafters; and in the spring, rain leaked through the roof.

The Church took the Bible literally: the Sabbath was "a day of sacred assembly." (Lev. 23, 3) There were two sessions: morning and afternoon, the latter usually at 2 pm. The afternoon session, which followed an "intermission," was a continuation of the morning service.¹³⁷ Between services, those living nearby and friends went home, for the mid-day meal.

In some parishes, but not in the Hamlet, there was a "noon-house" near the meetinghouse. It was a refuge for the chilled worshipers between church services. Alice M. Earle, in "Sabbath in Puritan New England," wrote that a noon-house was "a long, low, mean, stable-like building, with a rough stone chimney, at one end."⁵²

The pastor began the afternoon service with a lengthy prayer, which was followed by the reading and chanting of a psalm. Next, the pastor preached his second sermon, which generally was shorter than the one in the morning. The service concluded with a prayer and a benediction by the pastor.⁹

In 1723/24, the parish approved the purchase of a "suitable" new pulpit.¹¹³ At the time Abraham Knowlton, an Ipswich cabinetmaker known as "a master of his craft," built pulpits for local meetinghouses. He likely built the Hamlet's pulpit.⁹⁵

The parish also approved the building of seats and banisters, not pews in the south gallery.¹¹³

In early 1727/28, the call to worship switched, from a horn, when the Hamlet meetinghouse had its first bell. Ipswich gave the Hamlet an old school bell. Rev. Wigglesworth had it hung from the tree branch near the front of the meetinghouse.⁴

Ringling the bell communicated various messages, including Indian attacks, in addition to alerting inhabitants to church services.

The Hamlet replaced the bell, in September 1732, with one from England.¹¹⁴ The bell cost £60, a large sum for the time. Despite weighing 300 pounds, the bell continued to be hung from a tree limb.^{4, 190}

A later addition to the meetinghouse was a ceiling, made of wide boards. Laid above the rafters, it provided protection from leaky roofs and droppings from birds perched on the beams.

The congregation size remained fairly stable during the church's first decade. However, following a strong earthquake, at 10 p.m. on Oct. 29, 1727, the number of parishioners, according to Rev. Manasseh

Cutler, increased by about a hundred during the year after.^{4, 66} (Ex. 19:16) (*This would have made for a very crowded 1,500 sq. ft. building.*)

The 1727 bell was damaged, in 1742 (*perhaps the branch on which it was hung broke*). When repaired, it was hung in a newly built belfry, above the tower on the west side of the meetinghouse.¹¹⁵

There was another Sabbath earthquake in 1744. Happening during the afternoon service. Rev. Wigglesworth, not a revivalist, calmly said from the pulpit, "There can be no better place for us to die in, than the house of God."³ There are no reports of either earthquake damaging the meetinghouse.

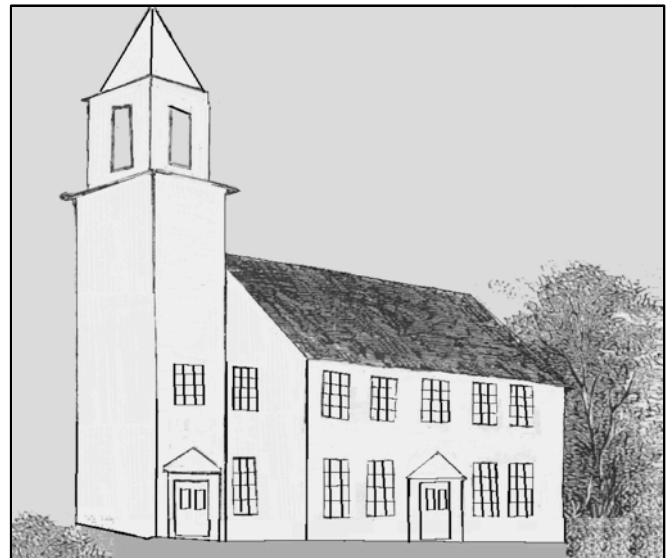
Increased government activity and the Hamlet's population brought a need for a larger meetinghouse. However, twice in 1760, inhabitants voted against money for building a new meetinghouse,¹¹⁶ before approving it in 1761.¹¹⁷

Second Meetinghouse, 1762

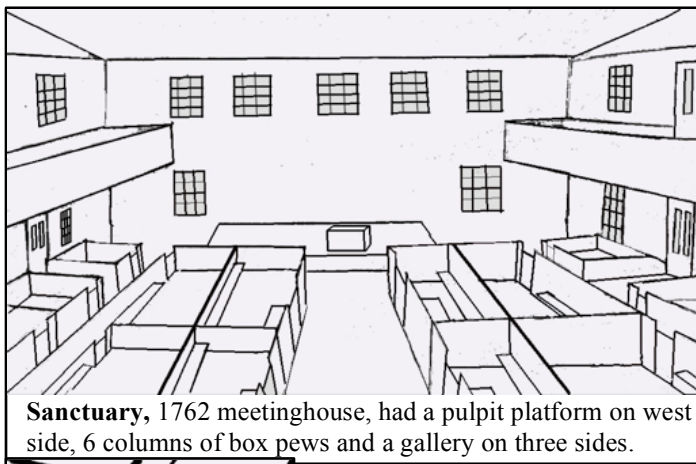
The Hamlet "pulled down" the 1714 building, in June 1762.¹¹⁸ A larger meetinghouse for "public worship" replaced it, on the same site and in the same orientation.⁶⁶ Parishioners paid for the construction.⁸

It seems that the roof, siding and windows were in poor condition, for only aged and refined timber from the first meetinghouse were used to build the new structure.⁶⁵ Milled from old-growth forests, these beams and posts had unique grain and color, and provided structural and dimensional stability.

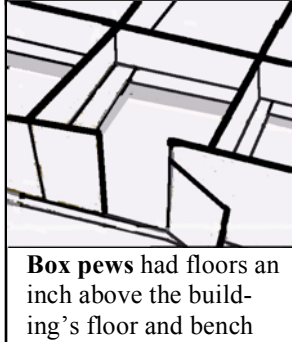
The 1762 meetinghouse had a 2-story porch on the north side and a porch with a tower, belfry and spire on the south. Both porches had ground level doors and access to the sanctuary and stairs to a gallery. There also was a center door, main entrance, on the Bay Path side.⁸ It had a shallow porch, with a peaked roof.¹⁰⁷



1762 Meetinghouse, wide side faced Bay Path.



Sanctuary, 1762 meetinghouse, had a pulpit platform on west side, 6 columns of box pews and a gallery on three sides.



Box pews had floors an inch above the building's floor and bench

Compared to the first meetinghouse, the 1762 building was 10 ft. longer (60 ft.), 12 ft. wider (44 ft.) and walls 6 ft. higher (26 ft.).^{66, 133, 118}

Like its predecessor, it had unpainted horizontal clapboard siding and two rows of sash windows.¹³⁴

Unlike the 1714 meetinghouse, the 1762 building had

a steeple with a weathervane (*unknown design*).¹⁰⁷

The meetinghouse did not have a chimney for it, too, was unheated.⁸ The foundation, called underpinning, was fieldstone.¹³⁸

The meetinghouse still had only one room, with 4 columns of seats: a wide center aisle, with rows on both sides and a single row along both sidewalls.⁸ Peculiarly, the wealthy, who for many years preferred center sections in the 1714 meetinghouse, switched to the side sections, where the poor and working classes originally sat.⁸⁵

The center rows were 12 ft. wide and both side rows were 10 ft. wide. The center aisle was 4 ft. wide and the four side aisles 3 ft. The rows had benches with back supports, providing parishioners with comfort, while sitting through the long services.⁸⁴

The pew's seats had hinges, to allow raising them, when occupants stood for prayers and psalms.^{69, 63} When the seats were lowered, a clatter of wood hitting wood probably filled the building. A verse from an 1891 history of New England churches is:

When at last the loud Amen,
Fell from aloft, how quickly then,
The seats came down, with heavy rattle,
Like musketry in fiercest battle."⁵²

There is no mention, in the parish's annual reports, of how the pew arrangement affected government meetings held in the building. Elected officials and guests likely sat in the pews.

The tall pulpit, on the west side of the meetinghouse probably was the same one acquired in 1724. It was in front of the raised platform, and next to a table and chairs facing the main entrance.

The pulpit, being on a broadside of the 44-ft. wide meetinghouse, insured that the congregation was within hearing distance of the minister. There was a sounding board.⁶³

Being 6-ft. higher than the 1714 building, the new structure had space for a gallery along the north and south ends and on the east side (*front of building*). Only the gallery on the east side had sash windows. The Church assigned seats in the gallery to single men, women and indentured and slaves.^{69, 45, 63}

Asher Benjamin in his 1833 book, *Practice of Architecture*, wrote, "The interior of a church would have a more chaste and correct appearance without galleries. ... Where the society is large, they cannot all be seated on the main floor of the building near enough to the speaker to hear his voice distinctly; and the increased expense of erecting a building of sufficient size without galleries is considerable. It is seldom, therefore, that we see a church of any significance free from this encumbrance."⁸⁷

During the early years of the 1762 meetinghouse, a small group of men, seated in the gallery, sang psalms, with the accompaniment of a bass viola.⁸ The so-called Lord's fiddle, was considered more fitting than the higher-pitched violins, for "they savored too much of low, tavern dance-music."⁵² The Church stored the viola in a gallery closet.¹³⁵

For lighting during late afternoon services and evening meetings, the 1762 meetinghouse continued to use candles placed on wall sconces.⁶³

Rev. Wigglesworth died in 1768. During his service of 54 years, he preached on about 2,800 Sundays. His successor, Rev. Manasseh Cutler, estimated 560 people (*communicants*) were admitted to communion, there were 1,203 baptisms and 648 deaths.⁶⁶

At burials in the 1700s, the coffin was not brought to the church, nor was there a church service. Nothing was read from the Bible at the gravesite, but the minister often attended. Friends, family and minister gathered, at the tolling of the meetinghouse bell. They followed the coffin, from the decease's house to the graveyard.⁴

The Third Church of Ipswich (*the Hamlet Society*) called several pastors before, in 1770, Manasseh Cutler accepted.¹²¹ Born in Killingly, CT, in 1744, he preached for 6 months, as a candidate. On Sep. 11, the Congregational Society (*elders and delegates of the first and second churches in Ipswich*) ordained him a minister and installed him as pastor.¹⁵⁷

The Hamlet Society (*Church*) had 68 communicants, including 47 women.⁶⁶ A religious society was a community group that entered into a legal arrangement, according to specific modes of worship.

Worshippers must have been astonished on seeing their new minister standing on the raised pulpit platform. Much taller than Rev. Wigglesworth, Rev. Cutler wore a long black Geneva cloak and black skullcap.

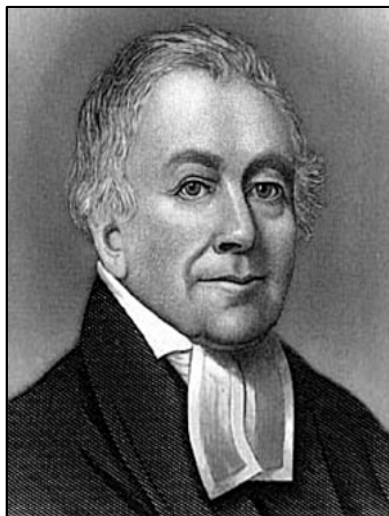
Their attention also was likely drawn to Rev. Cutler's ordination service. The singers (*not yet called a choir*) sat at the front of the gallery. Rev. Cutler had them sing, an anthem, "I was glad when they said unto me," an adaptation of Psalm 122, in which is written, "Let's go to Yahweh's house!"¹⁴ Some Federalist members may have recognized it as a Church of England coronation piece.

Hymn singing gained acceptance in many colonial churches, during the 1738 tour of the fervid English preacher George Whitefield. He used Isaac Watts's hymns in his service. However, the Hamlet church opposed singing hymns, keeping to psalms sung in metrical form.

Rev. Cutler brought a major change to the Hamlet's church service music. On Mar. 4, 1772, the "Parish voted to use Dr. Isaac Watts' psalms and hymns."¹⁴ Two months later, the Parish purchased 120 Watts' psalm books.¹⁴

At the same 1772 meeting, members voted to resume giving contributions at the services, a practice halted in 1763.¹⁴

Another notable change, during Rev. Cutler's time as minister, came on his first Christmas in the Hamlet, Dec. 26, 1773. In what for the time was a bold action, Rev. Cutler, preached a Christmas sermon. Massachusetts' law forbade celebrating Christmas at government buildings.



Rev. Manasseh Cutler served as pastor for 53 years, from 1770 to 1823. Photo, Ohiohistory

¹⁴ "whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by for-bearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, upon any such account as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for every such offense five shillings, as a fine, to the county."

The Church received, in 1774, a large folio (17- x 10-

in.) illustrated Bible from Mrs. Martha Cogswell Whipple, wife of Dea. Matthew Whipple.¹⁴ The leather-covered pulpit Bible very likely was imported from England.

Rev. Cutler served both the Hamlet's spiritual and medical needs. In 1776, when the Hamlet's only doctor left to serve in the Revolutionary War, Rev. Cutler studied medicine, so the Hamlet would have medical care during the doctor's absence.²

Many new psalm books appeared around the time of the Revolutionary War. While some churches began to use the more melodious psalm and hymnbooks, the Hamlet's did not.¹⁴

Major changes inside the meetinghouse, in 1778, were the elimination of separate seating for men and women and the Church selling floor spaces, each called a "room," for communicants to build box pews.¹⁸⁶ Deeds were issued for the sites. Rows were divided into room for two pews, side by side. A committee sold the pew rooms to the highest bidders.¹⁸⁷ The high bid was for a pew next to the Great Alley: it sold for \$65.¹⁴⁸

The Hamlet required that all the pews were to be of the "same fashion."¹⁴⁸ Possibly, there were concerns that pew designs would be very ornate and the walls too high.¹²⁰

The box pews had a floor that was an inch above the building's floor.¹⁴⁸ This provided insulation from the frozen ground during the winter. Further, during the winter, parishioners continued to bring heated foot warmers. The box walls contained the heat.

There was a change, in 1785, to the meetinghouse bell. The Hamlet, at the annual parish meeting, voted to sell the 1727 bell and replace it with a new bell that would be easier to ring.⁴ Pulling a rope, tied to a wheel on the headstock in the belfry, rang the bell.

The bell was rung many times, on Dec. 3, 1787, when 45 men of the area left from the meetinghouse to settle what became Marietta, OH.¹⁴

Rev. Cutler, a strong supporter of veterans of the Civil War, led a veterans group that purchased territory northwest of the Ohio River. The veterans, using their otherwise worthless civil war compensation money, bought the land. Cutler, the agent for the Ohio Company, obtained a contract for a million acres, at \$1/ac. Half a million more acres were added, as allowance for possible unusable land.¹⁴

Rev. Cutler also was very active in efforts to have the Hamlet become "a separate and distinct precinct" from Ipswich." On Jun. 20, 1793, the Hamlet parish became the Town of Hamilton.⁶⁶ Rev. Cutler suggested the name Hamilton. He was a strong supporter of the Federalist leader, Alexander Hamilton, founder of the Federalist Party.³

The Third Church of Christ in Ipswich became the First Congregational Church in Hamilton (FCCH).

The 1762 meetinghouse, with its pews, continued to be the only meeting place for both religious services and for the town's civic meetings.

Commenting on church membership during his father's time as pastor of the Hamlet congregation, Temple Cutler wrote, "In 1799, occurred a marked revival, commencing among the young people of the congregation, and resulting in very considerable additions to the church."¹⁰⁴

Hamilton's population, at the start of the 19th century, was in the mid 700s. In the next 50 years, it grew to nearly 900.⁶⁶ People moved from the cities to jobs at the town's large estates that needed workers and craftsmen, for their fields and houses. Merchants came to supply their needs.

By the start of the 19th century, the 1762 meetinghouse likely had a new wood shake roof, new siding, flooring and doors. The original casement windows also were probably replaced with sash windows. However, the building still was not heated.

Rev. Cutler said that during the first 28 years of the Church's existence in the Hamlet, there annually was an average of 22 baptisms. He added, "Taking the average numbers for the following 26 years, there were, during the 54 years of my predecessor's ministry, 1,203 baptisms."⁶⁶

The meetinghouse did not have a baptism font. The minister used a small bowl with water.

By 1811, Rev. Cutler was holding Bible study classes for young people, right after the Sunday afternoon service. There were 40 to 50 students, most were girls. Rev. Cutler read a Bible chapter and asked the young people to explain the meaning.⁶⁹ A

few years later, he began catechizing children, in the district schools.⁶⁶

In 1814, Rev. Cutler, in a 100th anniversary commemorative discourse, reviewed the Church's religious history, principally focusing on ecclesiastical matters, with some comments about meetinghouse changes.⁶⁶

He noted that the "commodious" 1762 meetinghouse "having been lately well repaired, affords a hopeful prospect of remaining a convenient temple for the worship of the Most High, for many years."¹⁰⁴ (*No details remain of these repairs.*)

Rev. Cutler's reference to "temple," with regard to the meetinghouse, indicates how the building was understood to be a place of religious worship. He also used the word "sanctuary" one time, "I have been sustained in the services of the sanctuary..."⁶⁶

Concerning church membership, Rev. Cutler said, during the first century, there were 736 communicants, 2,266 baptisms and 1,196 deaths.⁶⁶ In 1814, the FCCH had of 73 members, of whom 28 were men and 45 women.⁶⁶ (*The first Hamlet congregation had 58 members, of whom 32 were women. No data were found on the total number of the church congregation, i.e., members and attendees.*)

Rev. Cutler, in his 1814 discourse, rhetorically asked the congregation, "Can you then feel unwilling to lay yourselves under obligations to give your children a religious education, and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"⁶⁶ (*Eph. 6, 4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*)

Rev. Cutler, at the close of afternoon services, had been meeting, in the meetinghouse, with girls from the congregation. He questioned them, concerning his sermon.⁸ In his 1814 discourse, Rev. Cutler made no mention of religious education for boys.

The possibility of having a Sunday school began in May 1818. Miss Abigail Paget of Charlestown, SC, while visiting Mrs. Mary L. Faulkner, the wife of Hamilton's doctor, suggested such a program. They brought their idea to Rev. Cutler. With his approval, they urged parishioners to send their children, boys and girls, to the Sunday school, held during the week, likely at the meetinghouse. Some accepted.⁸

Mrs. Faulkner became the first superintendent. Classes consisted mainly of reciting Bible verses. Attendance was low, until Rev. Joseph B. Felt, became minister and named Nathaniel A. Lovering as school superintendent.⁸

Rev. Joseph B. Felt, the church's third minister, was accepted on Jun. 16, 1824.⁶⁹ Born in Salem in 1789, he graduated from Dartmouth, in 1813.⁶⁹



First three pastors lived in a house next to the meetinghouse. Built, in 1715 by Rev. Samuel Wigglesworth, it was next owned by Rev. Manasseh Cutler, who added a third floor, and next by Rev. Joseph B. Felt, in 1845.

Photo, 1880, Hamilton Historical Society,



Rev. Joseph B. Felt served as third pastor from 1824 to 1834.
Photo, ref. 201

When Rev. Felt arrived, the Church had 15 male and 38 female communicants.⁴ The single-story, 2,600 sq. ft., 62-year old meetinghouse was adequate for the small congregation.

A major change in the relationship between Church and State occurred during Rev. Felt's pastorate. In 1829, the FCCH became a Massachusetts corporation. The First Congregational Parish of Hamilton

(FCPH) took ownership of "all the lands in such town except such inhabitants and such lands as do belong in some other parish or religious society."⁴⁴

The FCPH owned the meetinghouse land, a small lot behind it, on what is now Cutler Rd., and a long stretch along Main Street, next to the Wigglesworth/Cutler house. By Massachusetts' law, a body of religious believers can own property and the corporation members are not liable for corporate debts.

The Board of Directors, by the new law, managed all affairs of the Corporation, including management of properties and structures. The articles of organization established the powers of the directors.

The Sunday school became quite large during Rev. Felt's pastorate. In 1833, it had 91 students.⁴ *(There were more Sunday school students than church members.)*

Rev. Felt continued as minister until 1833, when he resigned, due to poor health.¹⁴¹ The FCPH had 21

male and 64 female members. The total was about 65% more than when Rev. Felt began, nine years earlier, in 1824.⁴

After leaving the FCPH, in 1834, Rev. Felt, a distinguished member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, published a comprehensive "History of Ipswich, Essex and Hamilton." It has brief comments on the first and second Hamlet meetinghouses.

The fourth minister, accepted in 1834, was 26-year old Rev. George W. Kelly.⁶⁹ Born in Virginia, he graduated from Ohio University (1830), and from Andover-Seminary (1833).⁵⁵ Rev. Kelly remained the pastor until 1850, when he resigned, also due to poor health.¹²²

Rev. Kelly's 16 years¹⁴⁴ with the FCPH were very active for the Church. Massachusetts was experiencing the second great religious awakening, which was characterized by enthusiasm, emotion and a strong appeal to the spiritual.

Rev. Kelly continued with Rev. Felt's efforts to increase Sunday school participation. In 1835, Sunday school had 15 teachers and 134 members.³ Classes likely were held, on different days, at the center schoolhouse on Main Street.

During Rev. Kelly's pastorate, the 1762 meetinghouse, still without heat, likely was in need of major refurbishing. However, with limited funds available, there were only a few minor changes.

A new source of Church income, in 1835, was the taxing of the pew sites owned by members. This was pursuant to the Massachusetts Society Statute Act of 1835, Chap. 81.⁹⁶

More funds were gained in 1836, when the Parish sold some parsonage land on Main St.¹²³

The Parish, in 1840, appointed a committee to evaluate the condition of the nearly 80-year old meetinghouse.¹²⁶ The committee reported, in 1842, that the bottom rows of windows were in bad shape and the belfry in dangerous condition. They said the meetinghouse was "unsafe for public worship because of the steeple."¹²⁵

The Parish appointed a committee of five to develop three building plans to be considered: "floor over" (*remodel*) the building, "cut down" the building and build a new structure.¹²⁵

A month later, the Parish resolved to remodel the existing meetinghouse; however, the building was to be turned so that a narrow side faced the main road. Further, the "upper part" was to "be finished for a room for public worship."¹⁷⁰

A matter not resolved was who owned the meetinghouse land.¹⁷⁰ Originally, this was Ipswich common land that Ipswich commoners gave the Hamlet precinct for building a meetinghouse, when the Hamlet was "set off."¹⁹²



FCPH owned a long stretch of land along Main Street from the meetinghouse, at the corner of Farms Road, to what, in 2020, is Cutler Park.
Photo, 1893, Ham. Hist. Soc.

Third Meetinghouse, 1843

Remodel? Only the 1840 bell and some of the wood frame of the previous building remained.⁸

Hamilton's previous meetinghouses were of fairly simple Colonial architecture, outside and inside. The only outward sign of affectation was the steeple, added in 1762. The early church considered deviations from simple architecture as extravagant and heathen.

Such was not the case in 1843. The meetinghouse had a steeple with a tower, a belfry and a spire. The tower was about 7 ft. above the gable roofline and it had a Mansard roof.¹⁴⁴

A belfry, with a new bell, was above the tower.¹³² Pinnacles projected from the four corners of the belfry, perhaps in reference to Luke 4, 9.

The hexagonal steeple, about 10-ft. high, had a tin-coated steel covering. Four support columns for the steeple are within the building. Two columns are in the building's front wall and two pass through the balcony down to the foundation.

The weathervane likely was the same type as that on the 1762 meetinghouse; however, the design is indiscernible in an existing photo.⁴⁵

The steeple (*tower, belfry and spire*), on many colonial meetinghouses, was based on steeples built in England, by Christopher Wren, in the late 1860s. The steeple, pointing skyward, was a symbol of heavenly aspirations of those worshipping in the building.

The most noticeable change to the previous meetinghouses was the 1843 meetinghouse's Greek portico (4-ft. deep, 20-ft. wide and 24-ft. high), with its two fluted columns with Ionic crowns. Flat pilasters are on both sides of the portico and on the building's four corners.

A wide trim band (*entablature*), is above the columns and on the other sides of the building. It has a projecting border (*cornice*) near the low-pitched roofline. There also is a plain horizontal band (*frieze*). Below the frieze, there is a molded trim (*architrave*). Below the tower's bottom edge, above the portico in the tympanum, there is a pediment relief.

The Hamlet meetinghouse, according to Ed-

mond W. Sinnott's 1963 "Meetinghouse & Church in Early New England," was modeled, in its Greek revival architecture, after a 1755 meetinghouse in Groton, MA.⁶⁰ However, a significant difference is the Hamilton building's tower extends into the tympanum.

Three small, 6-pane, casement windows are at the top of the portico, facing the street and a casement window halfway up both sidewalls.

The portico has two black doors that open out. Both have twin beveled glass panes, and door handles on the left side. The Church no longer required men and women to enter separately, nor was there a center "door of honor."

The Church reoriented the new meetinghouse to have the narrow steeple side face County Rd. (*became Main St., in 1890*). Possibly, this was done to allow for future enlarging the building, on the rectangular lot.

The 1843 building was 12 ft. longer (62 ft.), 4 ft. narrower (40 ft.), but had the same height (26 ft. walls), as the 1762 structure.⁶⁶

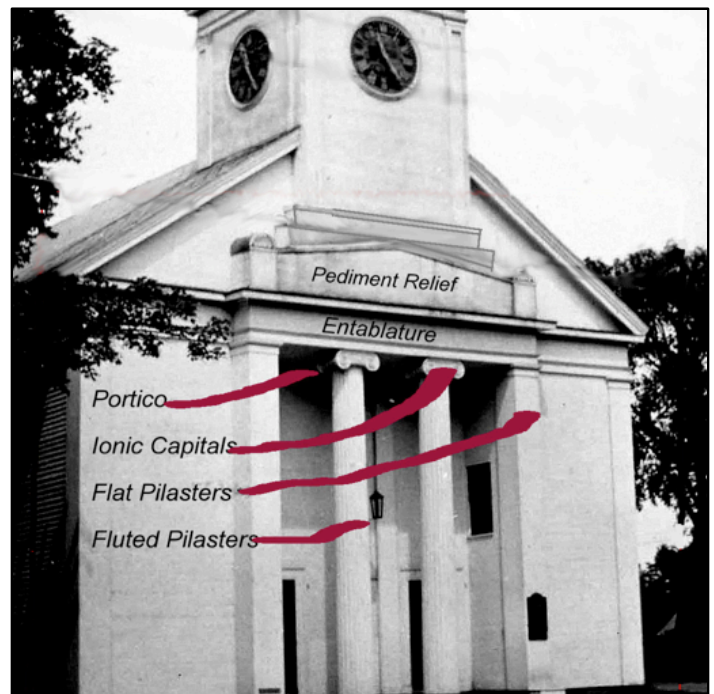
The FCPH added a 5,500 sq. ft. second floor, 8 ft. above the original ground floor.⁸ The upper room became the "place for public worship." (*There are no reasons cited in historic documents for creating an "upper room for religious purposes." In the New Testament, the upper room was where Jesus and the apostles celebrated the Passover.*)

Some towns added a lower floor to the meetinghouse for government meetings.⁸⁶ However, this was not the stated intent of the Hamlet, in adding another floor. The new ground floor room, called a vestry,⁷⁰ initially was intended for religious use.



1755 Groton, MA, meetinghouse is similar to Hamilton meetinghouse, built in 1843. However, a significant difference is the Hamilton building's tower extends into the tympanum.

Photo, Wikipedia



Meetinghouse portico.

Photo, Hamilton Hist. Soc., c1930

Crucial to adding the sanctuary floor was the post-and-beam building's 26-ft. posts. Typical of the time, the meetinghouse's heavy (8-in. sq.) posts extended from the foundation to the roof eave. Joists for the sanctuary's heavy (8-in. x 12-in.) floor beams were secured to the posts and two rows of five support columns placed beneath the raised floor beams.

The portico's doors opened to a narrow foyer at the front of the vestry. Stairwells, at both ends of the foyer, led to a sanctuary foyer and a gallery (balcony).

The 4-ft. deep portico and the 6-ft. deep foyers accounted for most of the building's 12-ft. extension.

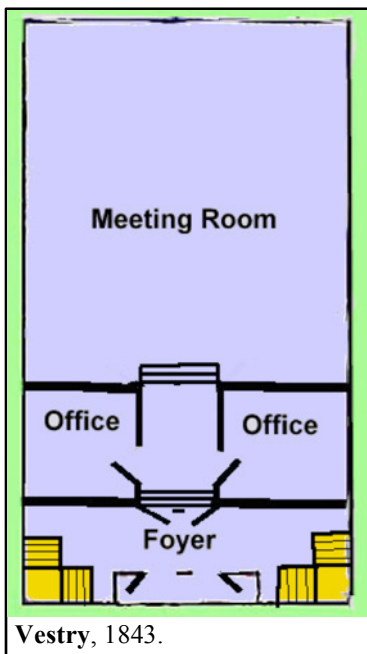
A double door on the back wall of the vestry foyer opened to a few stairs down to a short hallway between two small rooms, at the front of the vestry hallway led to a large meeting room that reached the back of the building.

The Church built the large meeting room for fellowship following the Sunday services. The two small rooms served as offices.

A distinct change, from the 1762 meetinghouse, was the new building's two rows of windows. The sanctuary's windows were directly above the vestry's windows, but each two rows of panes taller, 12 over 12. The vestry's were 8 over 8, with 7-x9-in. panes.⁶⁹

The building continued to have clapboard siding, but for the first time painted, likely white. The siding began at ground level, covering the foundation, typical of buildings of the time. Wood shakes covered the open gable roof.

An 1880 photo of the meetinghouse appears to show the trim to be a different color from the main part of the building. However, Church records do not mention the 1843 meetinghouse ever painted more than one color.¹³¹



In place of the 1762 meetinghouse's field-stone foundation, the FCPH laid "the foundation of the house with cut stones." (*I Kings 5, 17*) With the 1843 building being bigger, the large granite blocks provide greater long-term stability than a mortar-bound field-stone foundation.

There also were significant changes to the sanctuary.

Two doors, in the second level foyer, open to aisles in the sanctuary. The Great

Alley was gone. The center section was 13 rows of two abutting pew sections, with aisles on both sides. There were no aisles by the walls.⁸

The FCPH did not transfer the box pews from the 1762 meetinghouse. The Church appraised the old pews, most in poor condition, and sold them, and gave money to owners and heirs.¹⁶⁹

The large upper room, the sanctuary, had 78 bench pews. They were painted white, except for having varnished end caps on the aisle panels and backrests.⁸ Each pew, on the aisle end had a small metal numbered plate on the upper corner of the seat back.

To recoup some of the construction costs, the FCPH auctioned the new pews to church members.¹⁴² Some pews were held from the auction for use by those unable to buy seats. Bidding was for the pew location.¹²⁰ This money, called "choice money," was added to a pew's appraised value, which ranged from \$25 to \$75. The total appraised value of the pews was \$4,000. Pew sales came to \$4,430; individual pew bids ranged from \$39 to \$96.⁸ The surplus pew income went toward finishing the vestry.⁸

At the front of the meeting room, the FCPH built a 3-ft. high platform, about 15 ft. wide and 8 ft. deep. From the beginning, the raised area for the pulpit, furniture and other items related to worship, was called a platform, not a stage. The latter has the connotation of being used for entertainment.

Neither a cross, nor a communion service, was at the front of the sanctuary. Historical documents do not mention why there was not a cross behind the platform. It may have been based on scripture, Exodus 20, 4. (*"You shall not make for yourself any carved image."*)

The 1724 mahogany pulpit (79-in. wide, 30-in. deep and 84-in. high) was in front of the platform.⁶⁹ On the top of the pulpit, the pastor could spread the large folio Bible and other documents.

Stairs, facing the pews, were at both front corners of the platform. Ornate chairs, on the platform, had cushioned seats, the first in the sanctuary.

Unlike the 3-sided gallery in the 1762 meetinghouse, the 1843 building only has a gallery at the east end. About 15-ft. deep and the full width of the meetinghouse, the balcony has several rows of bench pews. The gallery extends above a row of pews at the back of the sanctuary.

Sanctuary lighting continued to be candles placed on wall-mounted sconces and the chandeliers.⁶⁹ Gas lighting, very popular at the time, was not used.

The sanctuary continued to be unpainted.¹²⁷

In 1843, heat finally came to the meetinghouse.⁸ The new building had a large wood-burning box stove, at the back of the sanctuary, near the north wall. A chimney pipe extended straight above through the roof. However, the top of the pipe was below the roofline, which reduced the stove's draw and, thereby, its efficiency.

While the new meetinghouse was being built, Sunday services were held in the center school-house, on Main Street, near Bridge Street.⁸

The Church dedicated the meetinghouse on Oct. 5, 1843. It cost \$4,428.58. (\$125,500, 2020 equivalent.) The Church provided all the money.¹⁴⁵

Perhaps to avoid confusion and arguments, the FCPH deeded small lots, to some members to build stalls, at the back of the meetinghouse, off of Elm Street (now Cutler Rd.). The stalls stored horses and carriages during services.⁸

The need for funds likely led the Church, in 1844, to rent to the town, at \$20 a year, an office in the vestry for use by the selectmen.¹³⁹ Further, to accommodate the annual town meetings of the town, the FCPH built a platform, at the back of the vestry.¹⁷³

In 1845, the town began holding its annual meetings in the vestry's large room. It paid for using and cleaning the room, after the meeting.^{95 70} Previously, town officials often met in the sanctuary. The town government's continued use of the church house was contrary to an 1833 act of the General Court of Massachusetts that separated Church and government

(Massachusetts was the last state to disestablish the church from the state.)

Seating apparently was not a problem in the new meetinghouse. The FCPH voted, in 1845, that the gallery was only to be used, on Sundays, by the church singers.¹²⁸

Also in 1845, the FCPH voted not to re-shingle the meetinghouse. Apparently, to minimize costs for building the 1843 meetinghouse, shingles from the previous 1762 building were used.¹²⁸



Chimney, 1843 meetinghouse, was below roofline.

Keeping costs down also may have been the reason the FCPH did not paint the meetinghouse interior. However, the Church, in 1850, painted the interior, probably white, and also whitewashed the vestry's stonewalls.¹²⁷

Needing funds, the FCPH, in 1836, divided a stretch of its land along Main Street, the parsonage property, into five lots for sale.¹²³ A group of church families, in 1850, purchased one of the lots for use as a private cemetery. The town's only cemetery on Bay Road, across from the meetinghouse, had little space left for more burial plots. The new burial lot was named the Wigglesworth Cemetery.⁶⁸ *(Rev. Wigglesworth was not buried here, but in the town cemetery across from the meetinghouse.)*

About 1845, Church officers allowed Sunday school classes to be held in the vestry, rather than in the sanctuary.⁸ Singers also were allowed to practice in the vestry.¹²⁸ Reducing sanctuary maintenance likely was the reason for the changes.

FCPH records have numerous references to maintenance costs of the 1843 meetinghouse. The town, i.e., church members and all other Hamlet residents, gave funds for church expenses, such as apparatus, heat, salaries and construction.⁸

The FCPH, in 1850, painted the interior of the 1843 meetinghouse, probably white, and whitewashed the vestry's stonewalls.¹²⁷

Not a problem for the Church was pastor turnover. The FCPH installed Rev. John H. Mordough, as the pastor, on Jun. 12, 1850.¹²⁷ He remained until April 1861.⁶⁹ For the first 136 years, the Church had only five pastors.

However, pastor tenure soon became a problem. During the next 100 years, there were 26 ministers. Church historian George Sprague commented, in 1964, "Some men were well liked, others found it more difficult to please the people and some even antagonized whole groups with their methods or their thinking."⁸

Apparently, the meetinghouse's heating problem led the selectmen to use a kerosene burning stove, in the office they rented. However, in 1852, the FCPH forbid the use of heating oils in the vestry.¹³⁵

Town government meetings continued to be in the meetinghouse, despite an 1833 act of the General Court of Massachusetts separating church and government. Civic government no longer was to be under the control of the church.

The 1852 FCPH report has the first mention of a choir: previously, they were called "singers."¹³⁵ Perhaps the early distinction was based on the word "choir" not being in the Bible.

The Church began collecting, in 1854, an offering following communion. Soon after, the Church expanded the collection practice to every Sunday.¹⁷¹

The Church addressed the heating problem, in 1856. The FCPH built a 10-ft. wide cellar, under the full width of the east end of the vestry,¹³⁰ and put a wood-burning furnace in it.⁸ Access was through a floor hatch, in the vestry. Heat rose through supply ducts to vents (*aka, registers*) in the sanctuary and vestry. However, the furnace used the previous pipe chimney that did not extend above the roofline.

In 1858, fifteen years after the first painting of the meetinghouse, the FCPH repainted the exterior and re-shingled the roof.¹³¹ Money for the project, \$700, may have come from a tax the Church assessed on the pews.^{143, 131}

In 1859, the Church removed the sanctuary's box stove, but did not remove the chimney pipe from the roof, likely to not incur the repair cost of the roof.

The Church turned its attention, in 1864, to the music used during services. The FCPH bought a box organ. Member and non-member subscriptions (*pledges*) provided the funds. As was done in many meetinghouses of the time, the Church put it in the gallery.⁸ Luther Preston played the first organ.¹

Also in 1864, Dea. Choate Burnham, upon retiring as the Sunday School Superintendent, paid for buying religious books for use by the Sunday school classes.¹⁶⁴ The FCPH placed bookcases in the vestry meeting room.⁹⁰

Church officers, in 1850, began holding meetings and conducting church business in both the vestry, and the pastor's house.¹⁷² The large area next to the offices became known as the fellowship room.⁸ The vestry also provided space for files, tables, chairs and supplies that could not be kept in the sanctuary.

A Music Committee, appointed by the FCPH in 1870, began selecting music for Sunday services. The pastor was not a committee member.¹⁴⁹

About that time, Church records begin to have more names of women members involved in activities and governing.

A group of churchwomen, in 1872, petitioned members to pledge donations to build a Church-owned parsonage,¹⁴⁹ at what is now 610 Bay Rd. Pledges exceeded the cost by \$2,625: the Church used some of the excess, in 1877, to build a barn, behind the parsonage.¹ The pastor rented the parsonage for \$50/yr.¹⁵⁰

In 1875, some churchwomen began raising money by holding public suppers, in the vestry.⁸ In 1877, the supper funds allowed repairing the meetinghouse and repainting, in 1878.¹⁵¹

The Church, in 1879, expanded the vestry platform and, to improve ventilation, replaced the vestry's

casement windows with sash windows.¹⁷³

Also, beginning in 1879, major changes came to the sanctuary, changes that continued its embellishment. The Church installed a metal ceiling, embossed with a pattern.[~] Stronger joists allowed the addition of the suspended metal ceiling. Painted white, the metal ceiling emulates the splendor of more expensive plasterwork. The tin-plated steel added some fire protection, important with the many kerosene lights on the walls. The tin coating protected the steel from corrosion caused by rainwater leaking through the roof. The curved ends and corners, which gave the appearance of a vaulted ceiling, improved the sanctuary's sound performance.

Ornate chandeliers hung from the metal ceiling. Each had kerosene lamps, with bowl-shape glass shades, a brass fuel bowl and frame.

The metal ceiling was not the only distinct sanctuary change. The wall behind the pulpit was frescoed.¹ The classical mural depicted a chancel with three ionic columns, a skylight above and an apse at the back.^{1, 8} To the right of the platform, there was a large plaster wall relief with a Bible verse, John 3, 16.

Padded Victorian chairs were on both sides of the platform and one in front of the fresco. The chairs were for the pastor and two deacons.

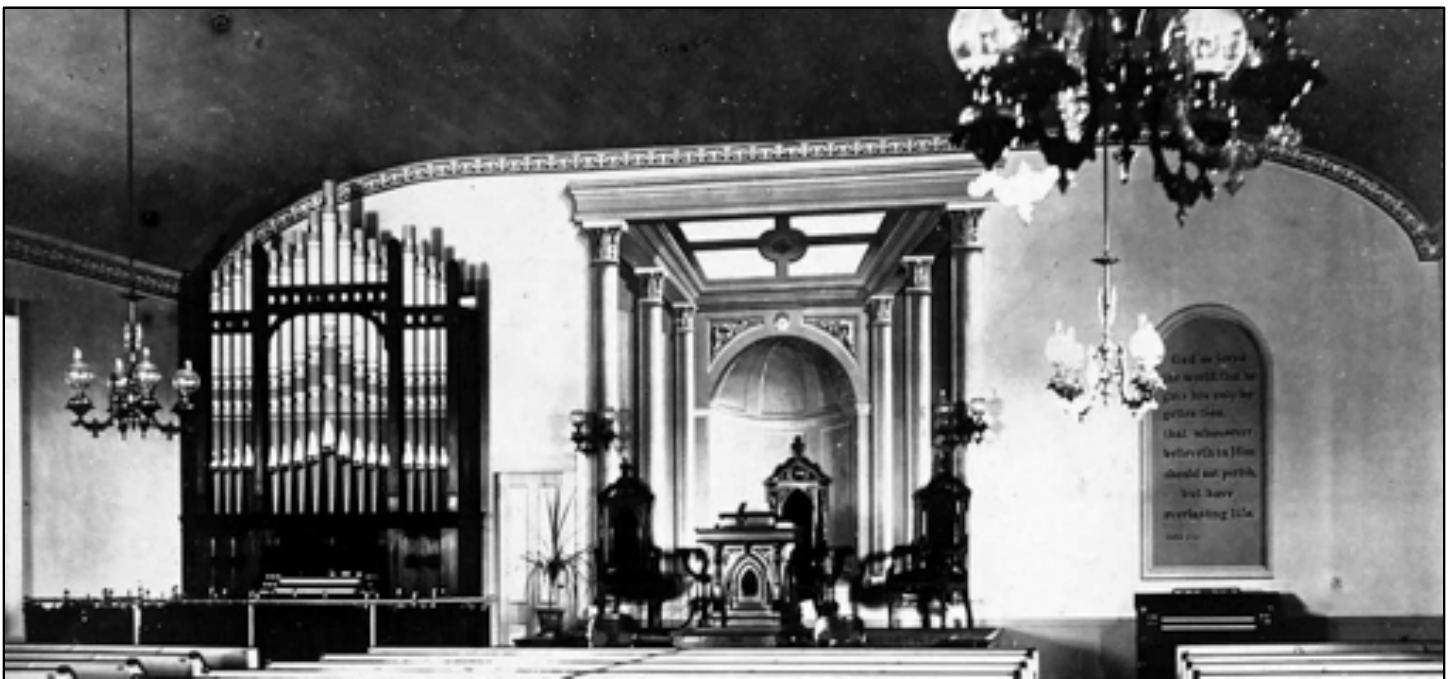
By 1880, the church considered the wide 1724 pulpit was "out of style. Likely, after more than 150 years it was in need of repair. It was replaced with a smaller, ornate pulpit.^{69, 173} A wide, padded deacon's bench was at the back of the platform.⁸⁹

Businessmen, involved with FCPH, led the Church, in 1883, to dissolve the 1829 incorporation. The Church changed from being a parish to a society, the First Congregational Society of Hamilton (*FCSH*).¹⁶⁰ This was not just a minor name change.



Vestry cellar, vestry to right and above, had a furnace.

Photo, 2013, FCCH



Sanctuary wall, at start of the 20th century, had fresco mural and large plaster wall relief having Bible verse, John 3, 16. Victorian pulpit and three chairs from 1843 were in front. On left was new organ and to right, beneath relief, a piano. Photo, 1898, Ref. 8,

The Parish conveyed the property to the Society. *(A religious society is the incorporated congregation of a religious group, which acts as a legal 'person' that exists separate and apart from its members.)*

The Society (*both church members and contributing nonchurch members*) became responsible for raising money for church salaries, building care and all the other material matters.⁸

The need to reincorporate, according to historian Daniel E. Safford, was that, "There was great uncertainty as to who, if anybody, constituted its (*Church*) legal membership." Through the incorporation, the Parish and the Society entered into a compact defining the Society's rights.^{3, 98}

There was no doubt as to who owned the horse stalls behind the meetinghouse. In 1715, The Church issued deeds to the owners to build horse stalls. In 1885, the owners converted the fenced stalls to sheds.¹⁰⁸

Also about 1885, the Church began having entertainment programs in the vestry, such as social gatherings and guest speakers. Performances were held on the platform, at the back of the vestry. For seating, the vestry had rows of triple-seat deacon benches with upright backs and arm rests.⁹⁰ They were painted white.

A couple of years later, 1887, the Church began charging a "hefty" admission fee of \$3 (\$27 in 2020 currency).¹⁶³ There was year-round entertainment, for the FCSH installed a steam-heating furnace, in the cellar.¹⁶⁶ With it, a new piece of "furniture" appeared. Ornate cast-iron radiators were beside the walls of the sanctuary and vestry. Congregants soon learned

not to touch these attractive, but very hot fixtures.

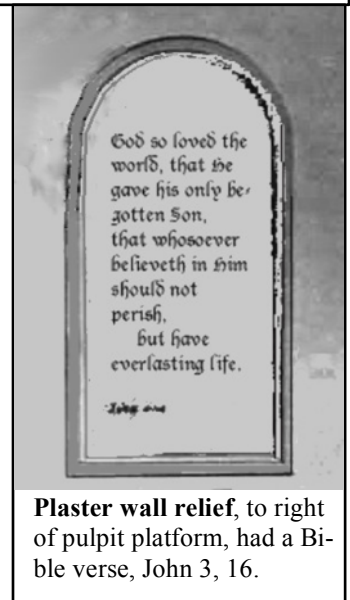
In 1897, more prominence came to the sanctuary, when the FCSH replaced the balcony's small 1864 box organ with a large Rostron Kershaw pipe organ and console (*key desk*).

The organist faced the choir sitting inside a railing-enclosed area in front of the organ.¹⁶³ The relocation of the organ from the balcony, allowed the organist to see the singers and improve music and singing harmony.

To the right of the organ, there was a door to a 2-story 6-x10-ft tower, attached to the back of the meetinghouse. It contained, on the upper level, the pipe organ's bellows. Two "bellows boys," hidden from view, steadily pushed, by hand, long levers to pump air to the organ's wind chest.⁶⁹

The tower had on the lower level, in addition to stairs, a 2-seat pit-latrine and a door to the vestry and a door to the outside.²⁰³

Money to buy the large pipe organ came from a subscription letter that women distributed to members. Large contributions very likely came from the many wealthy family members, who were summer residents.¹



Plaster wall relief, to right of pulpit platform, had a Bible verse, John 3, 16.



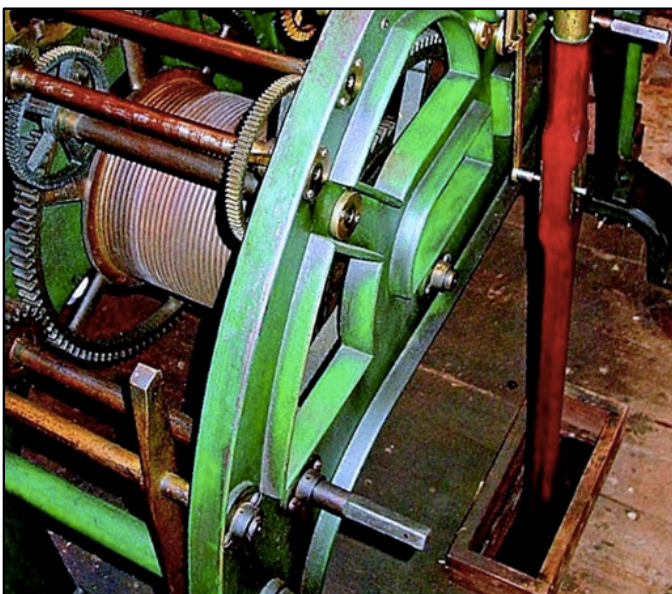
Weather vane, installed after 1880.

Photo, 2013, FCCH



Bell, installed in 1843.

Photo, 2013, FCCH



Clock gears, installed in 1888

Photo, 2020, Gordon Harris



Steeple, built in 1843.

Photo 2019.



Tower, back of meetinghouse

Photo, H-W Chronicle, 1977

Many changes to of the meeting-house, in the late 1890s, reflected the change in the people living in the town. In the 1860s, the start of regular train service, from the city of Boston, allowed wealthy families to establish a prestigious summer residence in rural Hamilton.

A matter soon confronting the FCSH was the continuation of two Sunday services. In 1888, when the

FCSH called Rev. James Alvard to minister the church, he accepted the call providing he would preach only one sermon on Sundays.¹⁶⁵ Rev. Alvard stayed until 1893.⁶⁹

New to the meeting house, in 1888, was a clock the town installed in the steeple.^{25, 159} It was made by the E. Howard Clock Co. of Boston.⁸

Known as a turret or tower clock, it originally had weights suspended on wire cables wound on a metal barrel. The descending weights turned the barrel that powered a wood pendulum, which through gears moved the clock arms. Weekly winding of the drum raised the clock's weights.⁵⁸ George T. Litchfield, the Town Clerk, was the first person responsible for care of the clock and he did so until he died in 1910.²⁵

Church records, in 1887, mention buying books for "a Sabbath school library."¹⁷⁴ They likely were added to those Dea. Choate Burnham bought in 1864¹⁶⁴ and kept in bookcases in the vestry meeting room.⁹⁰ As yet, the vestry did not have a dedicated library.

Perhaps in an effort to improve the draw of the roof chimney, the church repaired it in 1891, but did not extend its height.¹⁸⁵ This was four years after the Church installed a new furnace in the cellar.

The FCSH, in 1892, began using envelopes for Sunday service donations.¹⁵³ By this change, member contributions became private and inconspicuous. (*Matt. 6-1-4*)

In the 1860s, the start of regular train service, from the city of Boston, allowed wealthy families to establish a prestigious summer residence in rural Hamilton. Businessmen commuted daily, while their families enjoyed going to Pleasant Pond, Wenham Pond, Chebacco the exclusive Myopia Hunt Club.

The Church greatly relied on contributions from the summer residents. In 1894, a call to them listed the needs of the society, and asked for their assistance towards defraying expenses.¹

More prominence came to the sanctuary, in 1897, when the FCSH replaced the balcony's small 1864 box organ with a large Rostron Kershaw pipe organ. It was placed, along with the choir, at the left front of the sanctuary.¹⁶³ This allowed the organist to see the singers. Behind the organ's pipes, boys pushing long levers pumped air to the pipes.⁶⁹

Money to buy the pipe organ came from a subscription letter that women distributed to members. Large contributions likely came from the many wealthy family members, who were regular summer residents.¹

In 1897, gone from the meetinghouse, after more than fifty years, was the town business office, in the vestry. The town built a "town house" (*town hall*) on Main Street, between the "church house and the center school."¹

With the new "town house," the town stopped renting the vestry office and using the large room for town meetings.²¹ What began as an \$8/yr. annual cost to the town had increased, by 1897, to \$50.⁸

However, the town clock remained in the church house steeple. The town still owned it and continued to pay for its maintenance.²²

The de facto separation of church and state did not result in the church putting a cross on the steeple. The weathervane remained. It has a unique design of an arrow on the windward side, ahead of 12 circles in two rows of 6 and a 6-point star. Church records have no mention of the design. However, studies of weathervane symbolism indicate the 12 circles may represent God's eternal (*circle*) absolute power and authority (*number 12*); the star symbolizes creation and its 6 points symbolize majesty, power, wisdom, love, mercy and justice.⁸³

The FCCH had a contractor re-shingle the roof in 1898¹⁵⁴ and likely replaced the 1843 building's original wood siding, before 1900. Also in 1898, the FCSH replaced the original portico front doors.¹⁶¹

20th Century: Many Changes

In 1900, the 1843 meetinghouse, with no trees around it, stood brightly on Main Street. Recently, 1898, a church member paid for painting the exterior white.¹⁶¹

During the previous decade, Hamilton's population grew by nearly 70%; it was more than twice the town's population, when the meetinghouse was expanded nearly sixty years earlier, 1843.²⁶ There were nearly 800 houses in the town.

The sexton rang the steeple bell an hour before the Sunday service, an indication of people living far from the meetinghouse.

The town's large population increase led some members to be concerned about increased health risks, to pneumonia, flu and tuberculosis, in particular. Sharing a communion cup was seen as a health risk.

In 1903, a group of women, called the King's Daughters (began in 1889), gave the Church individual wine cups to replace the common beaker.^{1, 167} They also gave two silver offering plates, to replace pewter plates.⁸

Church records do not mention when storage racks were attached to the backs of pews to hold communion wine cups, or when hymnal and Bible racks were affixed.

In September 1903, the FCSH suspended Sunday services to make major changes to the sanctuary.¹⁷⁹ A month later, services resumed. Most noticeable were the removal of the fresco and Bible verse relief).

The return to an unadorned wall likely was the church's desire to worship free of spiritual images and refocus on the original "Word-based" faith. Very pleasing to the congregation likely were the newly cushioned pews.¹⁶⁷

A memorial stained glass window, installed in the northeast corner of the sanctuary, was donated by a longtime church family.¹⁶⁷ In the next five years, three more church members donated stained glass windows, for the north side.^{69, 194, 195}

Another change early in the 1900s, one likely noticed by worshippers, was a switch from wood to coal for heating the building. ~ Smoke from a wood fire is moderately pleasant, but burning coal's odor is not.

There no longer were large stacks of wood behind the meetinghouse. Coal was dumped through a foundation opening into a bin in the cellar.



Electric chandeliers replaced elaborate kerosene chandeliers.

A change in lighting came in 1909. Electric lights were installed in the "auditorium" (*sanctuary*),¹⁵⁵ thereby allowing the replacement of the kerosene lamps. This was seven years after electricity became available on Main Street, and a year before the town hall had electricity.

In place of the previous four elaborate kerosene chandeliers, each with four large globes, chimneys and fuel tanks, the sanctuary had four electric fixtures. Each electric chandelier had eight small candle-like bulbs on plain brass fittings.

In 1914, to commemorate the 200th Church anniversary, the FCSH held two services, morning and evening, Rev. Joseph L. Hoyle, the 17th minister, gave the sermons, drawing upon Deut. 8, 2, "You shall remember all the way your God led you."⁵

The way forward, soon, was affected by major national events. First came World War I. 275 Hamilton men served in the military.¹⁰⁵ Next, there was the great recession. There were no significant changes to the church house during these prolonged periods of dire economics. (*In 1922, Sara Safford gave the FCCH historic photos and documents. These might have shown the building during the early 1900s, but subsequently they were lost.*)

In 1924, the poor condition of the 1885 sheds behind the meetinghouse came to the attention of the Church. Their removal was to be "immediate."¹⁵⁷ However, the sheds remained until 1944, when they were removed and a driveway built for cars using the shed area.¹⁸¹

In May 1927, to pay for salaries and maintenance, the FCSH sold the 1873 parsonage property on Main St.,³⁹ along with many silver service items.⁶⁹

Also in 1927, the Church dissolved the 1884 incorporation and re-incorporated as the First Congregational Church of Hamilton (FCCH),¹⁵⁸ a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt group of the State of Massachusetts. The FCSH turned over its properties, possessions and funds to the FCCH.⁸

The re-incorporation was in reaction to the 1909 Revenue Act. Tax-exempt charitable organizations became nonprofit organizations.

The new articles of incorporation also allowed all people attending the Church and regularly contribute money to be associate members that could vote on financial matters.¹⁵⁸

Amending the 1927 articles of incorporation, according to officers of the FCPH, meant that the Church and Parish were "virtually consolidated, so far as finances" were concerned. Both Church members and non-members met to discuss Church funding.¹⁵⁸

Another change coming from the 1907 addition of electricity to the meetinghouse came in 1927. The Church electrified the pump organ's bellows.⁸ Thus ended 30 years of "bellows boys" pumping to keep the music flowing.

≈ Editor's view based on available records.

The Kings Daughters, in 1907, were given control of church music.¹⁹⁸ By then, women were leading many church activities.

Economic pressure on the Church increased in 1933, when an amendment to the state constitution halted people paying taxes to support a church other than the one they were a member.

The town, using Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds and local workers began, in 1935, building a town water system, to replace individual property wells. In 1938, the town extended the water line into the meetinghouse.²⁹ Pipes distributed water to several parts of the vestry, which allowed the building, on the south side, of two small toilets.

The Church buried a septic leach field and tank on the south side of the church house.⁶⁷ The Church removed the outhouses behind the meetinghouse.

In 1937, the wide 1724 mahogany pulpit returned to the sanctuary.^{31, 69} Church historian Robert Sprague wrote, in 1964, “the trend of the times was for preserving older heritage.” The smaller 1880 pulpit and three chairs were moved to the vestry, for Sunday school and other uses.⁸

In July 1941, the FCSH carpeted the aisles, the area in front of the pulpit and the back of the sanctuary.¹⁷⁸ Gone were the sounds of shoes on wood floors, scratching, heel clicking and cane tapping.

A year later, 1942, the “magnificent old (1724) pulpit,” as recalled by Rev. Elmer Eddy, was refurbished and rededicated,¹⁸³

WWII, as was the case during WWI, brought an end to changes in the meetinghouse. The 100th anniversary of the 1843 meetinghouse was a simple candlelight evening service, on Dec. 12, 1943.¹⁸⁴

The Church, in 1944, placed a metal cross on the table in front of the pulpit. A member provided funds for the cross.¹²⁹ This is the first mention, in Church record books, of a cross being in the sanctuary.

The meetinghouse had a new coal-burning furnace, in 1949.¹⁷⁷ It was put in the northwest corner of the vestry.

Another change, following the war, was a new roof. This was a significant change. The roofs of the first two meetinghouses had wood shakes, as did the 1843 building. About 1950, the Church replaced the 1898 cedar shakes with asphalt shingles.² Cost was the deciding factor. Gutters remained wood.

Church records do not indicate when an hourglass stopped being used to monitor the length of sermons; however, likely around 1950, the FCCH placed a round electric clock on the balcony façade.² Once again, in the words of Rev. Cutler in 1814, the pastor had a “monitor, placed hourly before” him.²⁰

After the war there were frequent turnovers of pastors. From 1945 to 1970, the church had 8 pastors.⁶⁹

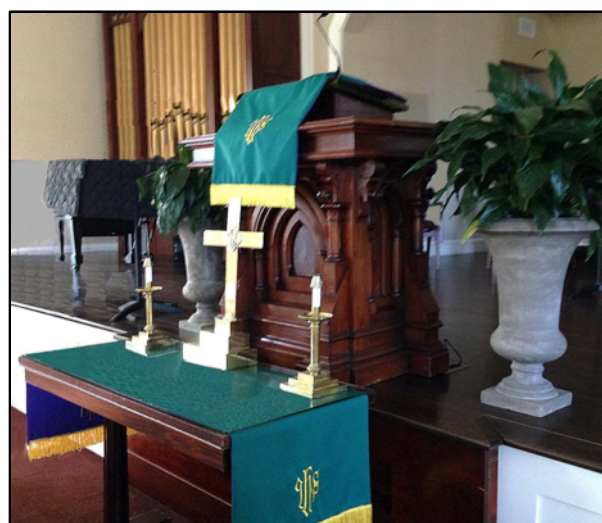
Membership declined.⁸⁹ This was not due to a decline in the town’s population. In 1950, Hamilton’s population (2,764) was 36% more than it was in 1940. Affecting FCSH congregation size was the town also had other Church denominations: Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian.

Nationally there was, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a major disagreement among Congregational Churches concerning the nature of local au-

tonomy. Three groups of congregational churches formed: United Church of Christ (UCC), National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) and the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC, 1948). The FCSH began to be associated with the UCC, in 1961.¹⁸⁰

The UCC’s use of colors for altar cloth and pulpit hangings, to differentiate liturgical seasons, was adopted by the FCSH. To mark the religious seasons, there is a different color communion tablecloth and pulpit scarf: white (*innocence and holiness*) for Epiphany, Christmas and Easter; green (*life*) during Pentecost and; purple (*penitence and mourning*) for Lent; and blue (*hope*) for Advent.

Began as Third Church of Christ in Ipswich	
1713	Third Church of Christ in Ipswich (TCCI)
1714	Hamlet Parish in Ipswich (HPI)
1793	Town of Hamilton separated from Ipswich
1793	First Congregational Parish of Hamilton (FCPH)
1884	First Congregational Society of Hamilton (FCSH)
1929	First Congregational Church in Hamilton (FCCH)



Colors for altar cloth and pulpit hangings differentiate liturgical seasons.

In 1953, as part of a major sanctuary revision, the FCSH placed a large, burgundy, velvet curtain on the wall behind the pulpit.⁹⁰ It was a gift from a church family.¹⁷⁵ The back wall had been bare since the fresco was removed in 1903.

Another family, in 1953, gave the church a gold cross.¹⁷⁵ The 1944 cross remained on the table in front of the platform and at the foot of the pulpit. It was between a pair of brass candlesticks, given by another church member, in 1953.¹⁷⁶ A third church family gave the church two ceiling spotlights, focused on the cross and candlesticks.

The church placed a memorial desk, at the back of the sanctuary and, on it, a remembrance book for visitors to sign. Both were gifts, in 1953, from church members.¹⁷⁶

Two other gifts, in 1953, were an imposing mahogany baptismal font that was placed near the pulpit¹⁷⁶ and a grandfather clock, which at the donor's request, was put at the front of the sanctuary.¹⁷⁵ Rev. Cutler is believed to have owned the clock, when he lived at what is now 647 Bay Rd.⁶ Sometime after 1823, it was sold.

The town, in the early 1950s, declared that a traffic hazard existed at the intersection of Cutler Rd. and Main St., because of the angle of the intersection. As a result, in 1955, the town altered the angle that Cutler Rd. intersects with Bay Rd.¹⁹⁹

A change also was made in the meetinghouse's heating system. To reduce its operating costs, the church replaced coal with oil for heating and converted the 1947 furnace to burn oil." A large oil tank was buried under the parking area alongside Cutler Rd., eliminating the storage of coal and its odor in the basement.⁹⁰

A new influence on building changes came in 1956: the town created a system of building and electrical codes. At first, the Church believed it was exempt from the codes. Courts ruled municipal building laws are applicable to churches, providing they reasonably relate to public health and safety at a church building.⁹¹



Baptism font, annex, 2020.

One of the town's building and electrical codes pertained to egress lighting: it required

a light be on the exterior of all first-floor doors. The FCCH added a hanging light in the center of the portico.

New building materials brought several improvements to the vestry, in 1957. The Church installed modern soundproofing materials and new glare-free lighting.¹⁸²

The town's large population growth was not a factor affecting the church building. In 1960, Hamilton's population was nearly twice what it was in 1950. During the 1960s, the population increased by nearly a thousand. However, Church membership was not significantly greater.

The telephone came to the meetinghouse, likely in the 1960s, when the town's system switched to automated dial tones. The first phone probably was in a vestry office.

In 1964, the FCCH refurbished the sanctuary's Rostron Kershaw organ. More pipes provided a greater range of notes. Also, the console became electric, thereby allowing it to be movable and turned to face the choir. An anonymous Church donor funded the project.⁸

The music was greater, but near the close of the 1960s, on any given Sunday, attendance was no more than 30 to 40 people. About 1968, Church leaders and the pastor, Rev. Edward Marcus, met at a restaurant in Ipswich to discuss closing the church. They resolved, perhaps responding to II Corinthians (4-8), to continue.⁶⁹

Janice P. Pulsifer wrote in 1976 that thoughts of the church extinction would "have been considered a calamity to the town, a sign not only of moral, but of municipal decadence."

A prospect for new members came a year later, when Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) announced it would move, in 1970, to Hamilton from its Wenham campus. It planed to build, on the former Brown estate next to Bridge Street, a college graduate divinity school offering programs to earn a Doctor of Ministry, Master of Divinity, Master of Arts and lay ministry training.

The first GCTS President, Rev. Dr. Harold J. Ockenga, moved to Hamilton. A Congregational minister, he was, for many years, the pastor of Park Street Church in Boston (1936-69). In a 1969 newspaper article, Rev. Dr. Ockenga, said, "The college must relate to the community spiritually culturally, socially and personally."⁵⁷

Dr. Harold Ockenga certainly related to the community. For his residence, he bought the Wigglesworth property next to the church house.⁵⁶ In 1976, he bought 12 Cutler, which is directly behind the church house.⁴⁰

The next FCCH pastor, Rev. Ben W. Thurber, led the church from 1971 to 1982.⁶⁹ He was a member of the Church Cabinet, along with Church officers, chairpersons of all boards and committees and a member-at-large.

A new consideration affecting changes to the exterior of the meetinghouse developed in 1970. The Town established a Historic District Commission,¹⁹¹ with the authority to review all applications for permits to change the exterior appearance of structures or their demolition in the District. The meetinghouse is near the north end of the district.

In 1970, The FCCH built, in the vestry, its first "hard wall" nursery. It was large a room in the south-west corner. Previous vestry nurseries had rigid folding partitions and before that they were muslin curtains hung on wires.⁹⁰ The partitions reduced noise from other parts of the vestry.

The vestry, in 1975, also had: many classrooms, two toilets, a kitchen, a choir practice room, a furnace room and a foyer.

In 1975, the FCCH replaced the sanctuary's chandeliers.² The change came under review of the Massachusetts Building Codes, since that year the Town's codes became subject to state codes.

Also around 1975, the meetinghouse bell, after nearly 200 years of tolling the hours, had worn a deep ridge on the inside of the bell's soundbow. The town replaced the bell's hammer with a transmitter to simulate the bell sounds. A computer in the building activates the device to toll every hour, from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., every day of the week, except on Sundays, when it is quiet during services.⁹⁷

The Historic District Commission came into play when, in 1976, the FCCH announced plans to expand the building, for the first time since 1856. Upon review, the Commission issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for a substantial change in the building's outside appearance.

A year later, the FCCH built a 49- by 37-ft. 2-story annex, with a basement, at the back. The northeast corner was recessed to allow access to a door to the vestry furnace room that was below the

sanctuary's north-west corner.

While the vestry furnace system did not emit smoke, it did have a minor noise problem. During services, worshippers could occasionally hear a rattling sound." It was not from bones (Ezk. 37, 7), rather the rattle was from a damper chain closing and opening heat duct valves.⁹⁰

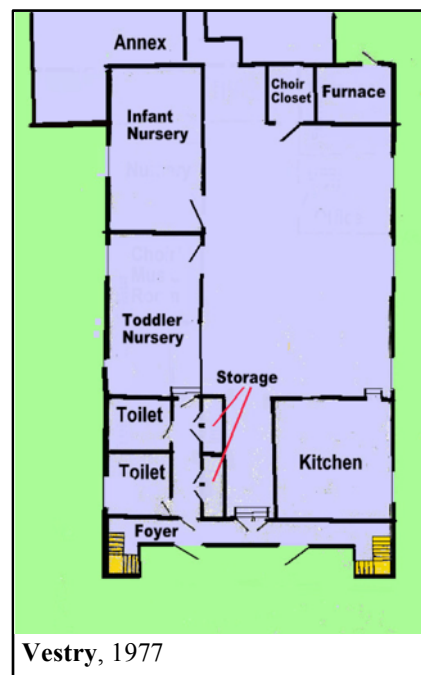
In order to build the annex, the FCCH removed the tower and brick chimney at the back of the meetinghouse and relocating the driveway. Further, the Church removed the pipe chimney near the front of the roof and replaced the entire roof.

The annex had windows on the north, south and west sides, ground level doors on the north and south sides and a below-ground door on the west side.

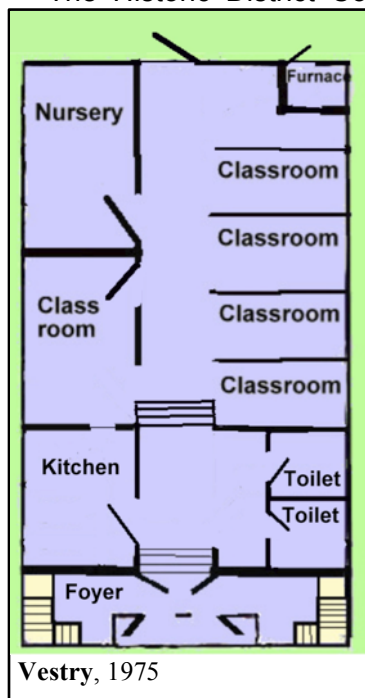
The annex basement, which has a concrete floor, is on the same level, as the dirt-floor vestry cellar, but they are not connected. Originally, the annex basement had a large activities room, stairs from the ground floor and a narrow heating system controls room. At the center of the west wall, there was a below ground door, with windows on both sides.

The basement did not have a furnace, because the annex was electrically heated. The controls were in a room on the basement's north side.⁹⁰

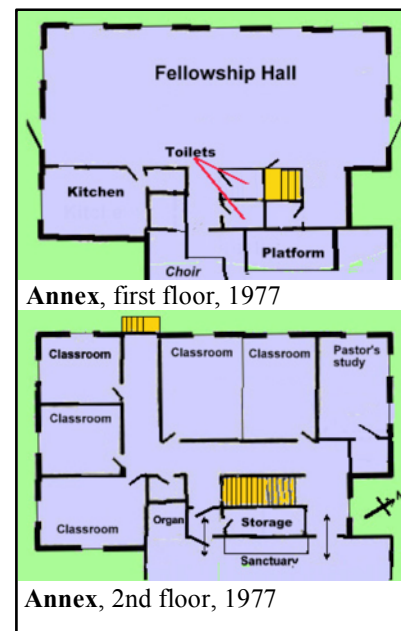
The ground level (first floor) had a large fellowship hall, a kitchen, stairs both to the upper floor and to the basement, an entrance from the vestry and doors on the south and north sides of the hall. Linoleum covered the floor. Chairs were stacked by the walls and collapsible tables stored in a room by the stairs.



Vestry, 1977



Vestry, 1975



Annex, first floor, 1977

Annex, 2nd floor, 1977

The upper level had: five classrooms, a pastor's study, stairs from the ground level and a storage room. Sunday school attendees ranged from about 90 to 100.⁹⁰ All the rooms and halls in the annex had baseboard convection heaters. At the end of a hall to the west wall, there was a fire escape.

The annex addition allowed many changes to the vestry, which included: a new choir/music room, an office and the return of a large activities area.

The front of the sanctuary had two doors. The door on the south side of the platform was mainly used by the choir to enter and leave the sanctuary. On the platform's north side, there was another door. Both entrances had three steps down into the sanctuary.

The sanctuary organ was extended into the annex, next to the south sanctuary door.

Such was the meetinghouse to greet the next pastor, the 31st. Rev. Dr. Harold Bussell, who arrived in 1983. Rev. Dr. Bussell had been Dean of Chapel at Gordon College, in Wenham.

The Church installed a second pastor, in 1984. Rev. Miles Hall became an associate pastor, serving with lead pastor Rev. Dr. Bussell.⁶⁹ The Church converted the classroom in the southeast corner to an office for Rev. Hall. The classroom next to Rev. Bussell's office became a secretary's office.⁹⁰

The Gordon Conwell Seminary connection continued with the following pastors: David Horn, 1987; Kenneth Swetland, 1996; Dorington Little, 1997; Robert Tansill, 1999; and Kevin Baird, 2002.

In 1987, the Church again began having two Sunday services. Both were in the morning, 8:30 a.m. and 11 a. m. During the week, there were programs in the annex and vestry.

With the introduction of evening programs, the Church saw the need for outside lighting. Electric lights were installed where cars parked off of Cutler Rd. and the paths around the building.

The hundred-year old steeple clock, in 1988, showed its age: one of the clock's weights broke loose and fell into the sanctuary foyer.⁵⁸ This occurred, as Sunday worshippers were leaving.⁸⁹

The floor and roof of the tower and foyer were damaged. The town paid for the building's repairs, but the clock was not fixed. It was set to always show 6 o'clock.⁵⁸ There was no connection between the clock's failure and the number 6, which in the Bible, symbolizes as human weakness.

On a Sunday in 1989, worshippers saw that the tall clock was missing from the front of the sanctuary. Someone, "like a thief in the night," took it, leaving scratch marks on the foyer floor.⁸⁹

A year after its departure, the Simon Willard clock, aka a grandfather clock, returned, after having been

spotted by a church member on an auction sale. Once again, worshippers had a way of watching the time of a sermon.

Later, the Church fastened the clock to the front wall to ensure against any further tempus fugit.⁸⁹ One of three Simon Willard clocks thought to still exist, it has a cast brass eagle finial. The dial has painted moon phases on a disk in the lunette. Originally, the clock had ogee bracket feet. An owner, after 1823, removed them.

Another departure, about 1985, was the removal of the sanctuary's velvet backdrop. After three decades, it had lost its luster.

In 1990, the meetinghouse was in need of expansion. Hamilton's population was about 7,300, an increase of about 6,500 from when the 1843 church house was built.

There was no rush to make changes.

Some needed space opened in the vestry, when the FCCH bought the Harold J. Ockenga estate, the Wigglesworth/Cutler property.³⁸ This allowed offices to be moved from the annex and vestry, thereby freeing of space for Sunday school classes and other services.

About 1990, the Word could be clearly heard throughout the sanctuary,[~] but not by installing a soundboard behind the pulpit. The Church added a small speakers high on the sidewalls, by the windows and heating and air conditioning vents.

At the front of the balcony, the FCCH installed a console for the sanctuary's sound and lighting system. For those unable to attend Sunday services and those who want to rehear a sermon, the FCCH began providing audio recordings.

The Church, in 1992, gave the matter of identifying building needs for to a Board of Elders: it replaced the former Cabinet leadership.¹⁰¹

The urgency for expansion was very evident. A 1996 Salem News article reported that, in the 12 years Rev. Dr. Bussell was the pastor, Sunday service attendance increased "10 fold from a prior average of 50 to 70."⁵³

One of the Board's first projects Board was repairing the spire's structural members, fastening the spire to the belfry below it and closing gaps in its tin-coated steel shell.⁵⁹



Speakers are on both side-walls, near windows and heating and air conditioning vents.

In 1997, the FCCH reallocated the vestry floor space.⁶⁹ A narrow, enclosed foyer was added, at the front, to provide an area for hanging coats and serve as a barrier to outside weather conditions. Stairs to the sanctuary were at both ends of the foyer. A double door, in the center of the foyer's back wall, opened to a hallway that was two steps lower than the foyer's floor.⁹⁰

Off of the center hallway, on the right, the original office became a small kitchen.⁹⁰

The FCCH divided the former large meeting room into smaller areas and rooms. On the right, there was a large room that was separated, by muslin curtains hanging on wires, into small classrooms; on the left there were another classroom, two small toilets and a small nursery.⁹⁰

At the back of the vestry, a door opened to the annex, which on the ground level had two nurseries, a pastor's office and a furnace control room. The door replaced a previous vestry backdoor to the driveway.⁸⁹ The small pastor's office had been a Sunday school classroom.⁹⁰

A new senior pastor, the 36th, came to the FCCH, in 1997: Rev. Dorington Little. While previously a pastor of a church in Boone, IA, he was familiar with the Hamilton area having received his Doctor of Ministry at Gordon Conwell Seminary, in 1992.

The FCCH, in 1997, switched from oil to gas, for heating the meetinghouse. ~ This was more than four decades after the town first laid a natural gas line, on Bay Rd. The Church removed the oil tank below the parking area, which it covered with macadam.

A couple of years later, 1999, the town came to the rescue of the disabled steeple clock: it was electrically powered. This eliminated weekly mechanical winding of the two heavy weights, the possibility of their falling again and the labor cost for the town. The town also repainted the clock.^{27, 56}

Expansion Goes On

Hamilton's population in 2000 was 8,315, an increase of approximately 14% from that of 1990.

The church house, with its columns and pediment, retained its classical Greek architecture. At the back, there was a 2-story annex. Gone were the chimney pipe and the brick chimney; the roof no longer had wood shingles, however the 138-year-old weathervane remained atop the spire.

The question for the Church elders was, could the meetinghouse, as it existed, meet the needs of the increasing and changing local population?

In 2004, many church members thought that the current building no longer met the needs of the 700 people that attended weekly services and participated

in the expanding role of programs beyond Sunday worship.⁸⁵ The first phase included an expansion to:

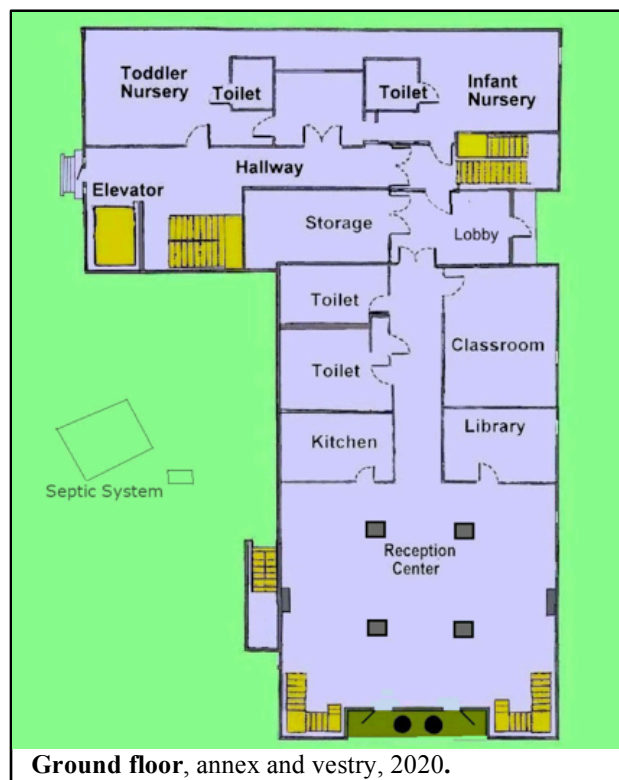
- Refurbish the administration building (*Wigglesworth/Cutler house*) and the barn behind it,
- Build a new Ministry Center and Fellowship Hall,
- Create a large parking area,
- Expand the annex and
- Refurbish and expand the sanctuary.

The expansion project, expected to cost more than \$7 million.⁷³ produced a lot of disharmony between the church, neighbors and town officials, before the parties settled out of court.⁸⁸

During the course of legal discussions, the Church bought back, in November 2005, the property at 12 Cutler Rd., which it sold in 1874.^{32, 43} It became a missionary residence. In 1943, Albert L. and Louise C. Rider bought it and built a ranch-style, brick house, at what was then 12 Farms Rd.⁴²

Another issue facing the Church in the mid 2000s was disharmony among Churches associated with the United Congregational Church (UCC). Forty-five years after joining the UCC, the FCCH, in 2006, became associated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC).¹⁰¹ Based in Minneapolis, the CCCC holds to the accuracy of the Bible and belief in Jesus. The CCCC handbook states individual members have "the full liberty of conscience in interpreting the Gospel."

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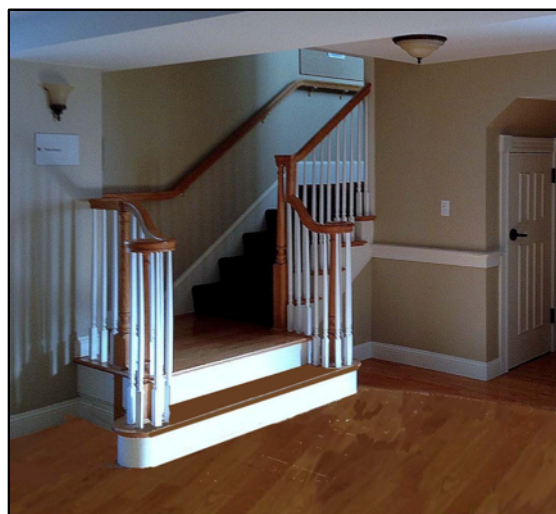




Main entrance, front of vestry, 2020.



Reception center, vestry, 2020.



Stairs, vestry, to sanctuary foyer, 2020.



Kitchen, vestry, 2020.



Library, vestry, 2020.



Hallway, in vestry, to annex, 2020.



Classroom, vestry, 2020.



North annex lobby and hall to vestry's reception center.



Infant nursery, annex ground floor, 2020.



Kindergarten nursery, annex basement, 2020.

The first phase of the expansion program was completed from 2006 to 2008.

The second phase, expansion of the meeting-house, began in 2006, when the Church reconfigured the 1977 annex, in order to install an elevator to the south end of the annex.

The elevator provides handicap access to all the levels of the annex. In addition, it is large enough to transport caskets. The elevator's mechanics and control system are in a dormer on the annex roof.

The FCCH built an entrance, with a porch, next to the elevator. It replaced the door that was on this side of previous fellowship hall.

A new north entrance was built on the Cutler Road side of the building. The Church moved it from the north side of the fellowship hall to the recessed neck on the same side.

The enlarged annex,⁸⁵ on its west side, has two rows of windows, six over six. On the north and south ends, there also are two rows of windows.

Many changes were made to the annex's first floor. Gone were the five classrooms and pastor's study. In their place, by the south door are:

✦ **Nurseries** – A toddler (3 to 4 years olds) and an infant (up to 36 months) nursery are on the ground floor. Both have toilets. Entry and exit are supervised by a common control center. Previously, there was a nursery room at the back of the vestry, which replaced temporary areas, in the vestry.⁹⁰

The FCCH added to the basement, which originally was a large recreation area, a storage area, a furnace (northwest corner), a children's Sunday school room (southwest end), and a toilet. Removed was the door in the below ground stairwell; the windows remain.

All the classrooms and pastor's study were removed. In their place, starting from the elevator, are:



Elevator, annex, 2020

✦ **Hallway** – A wide hall is in the center of the annex between the north and south entrances. ✕

✦ **Large music room** – Across from the elevator, on the second floor, there is a 24- x 15-ft. music room. The choir practices here and stores their robes, music and instruments. It replaces the choir room that was in the vestry.

✦ **Prayer room** – Next to the music room, there is an 11- x 15-ft. prayer room, for use by the pastors and those involved in Sunday morning services and for private consultation.

✦ **Chapel** – At the north end of the center hallway, there is a 24 by 20 ft. chapel. Its principal use is for adult Sunday school classes. Other uses include small group meetings, receptions, baptisms, weddings and funerals.⁷²

Adding to the devotional nature of the chapel are the four stained glass windows that the FCCH moved from the sanctuary, in 2002.⁷¹ Backlit box frames highlight their full beauty.

The chapel, which has seating for up to 50 people, has a visual aides system that projects images onto a screen, at the front of the room.

Also in the chapel are an upright piano, three Victorian chairs and a former deacon's bench (*they were in the 1843 meetinghouse*), the large 1724 pulpit and the 1953 baptism font.

The FCCH offers infant baptism, using the chapel font that is moved to the sanctuary. In 2018, there were only 5 infant baptisms. The Church also offers adult baptism, by immersion. These are performed either in a nearby pond or using a large font at the local Baptist church.

✦ **Sanctuary entrance** – intersecting the center hall, near the north end, there is an inclined hall that leads to the sanctuary. Since the annex's first floor is slightly higher than the sanctuary floor, the hall is inclined, to allow wheelchair access.

✦ **Corridor** – Next to the center hallway, there is a separate corridor that runs from the elevator to the back of an alcove, at the front of the sanctuary. The corridor, which has two windows facing the hallway, provides ready access for the choir to the alcove platform, from the music room,. Further, the slightly inclined corridor floor allows easy handicap access to the alcove.

✦ **Storage room** – A storage room, off of the corridor, has a passageway to the sanctuary platform. In it are stored maintenance supplies and it has heating and ventilation equipment.⁶⁴

In 2011, the FCCH began to refurbish the portico and vestry.

✦ **Foyer removed** – The vestry foyer was removed to enlarge the reception area. Beams from the 1843 meetinghouse, some of which came from the 1762 building, were "insect-ridden" and needed to be replaced. However, not all the aged wood was thrown away. The Church members made small crosses from unaffected areas of the beams and sold them as part of a campaign to raise capital for the meeting-house expansion program.⁷⁹

✦ **Larger reception center** – With the foyer removal, people enter directly into a larger, updated reception area that has a reception desk, in the center. The desk can be moved to the sides to provide more space. At both the center's front-right and front-left corners, there are wide carpeted stairs, with railings on both sides, to the sanctuary and gallery.

The enlarged reception center, formerly called a fellowship area, provides for social gatherings following services and during the week.

✦ **Kitchen updated** – The FCCH moved the previous vestry kitchen to the south side of the reception center (11 x 18 ft.). It was updated with a new refrigerator and other food-service devices.⁷³

✦ **Library** – Where the kitchen had been, the Church built its first dedicated library (11 x 18 ft.). Custom-made bookcases and cabinets line the walls and new lighting installed. Church members and previous ministers wrote many of the books.

A hallway between the kitchen and library goes to the back of the vestry, where it connects, via double doors, with the ground floor of the annex.

✦ **Toilets** – Off of the hallway, on the south side, there are two toilets.

✦ **Adult classroom** – At the back of the hallway, on the north side, there is a large (27 x 18 ft.) Sunday school classroom.

The final phase of the expansion program, changes to the sanctuary and annex, began on Apr. 7, 2013. Sunday morning services moved to Heritage Hall in the Ministry Center, at the property's southwest corner, while the sanctuary, vestry and annex were being rebuilt.⁷⁵ The FCCH removed the annex's electrical heat system, in 2013, switching to gas.

The final phase of the expansion program, which included changes to the sanctuary and annex, began on Apr. 7, 2013. While the sanctuary, vestry and annex were being rebuilt, Sunday morning services moved to Heritage Hall, in the Ministry Center, at the property's southwest corner.⁷⁵

Entering from the sanctuary foyer, worshippers saw a very changed interior.

✦ **Alcove/chancel** – At the pulpit end, there is a raised alcove, 18-ft wide and 10-ft. high. The alcove extends into the annex.

The alcove has a movable, 3-level platform, with space for as many as 24 chairs. A door in the alcove's south wall allows the choir and others to enter and exit the platform and for installing and removing the collapsible platform.

There also is a doorway and stairs on the alcove's north side, near the chapel. Stairs are at the front corners of the 3-ft. high platform.⁶⁴

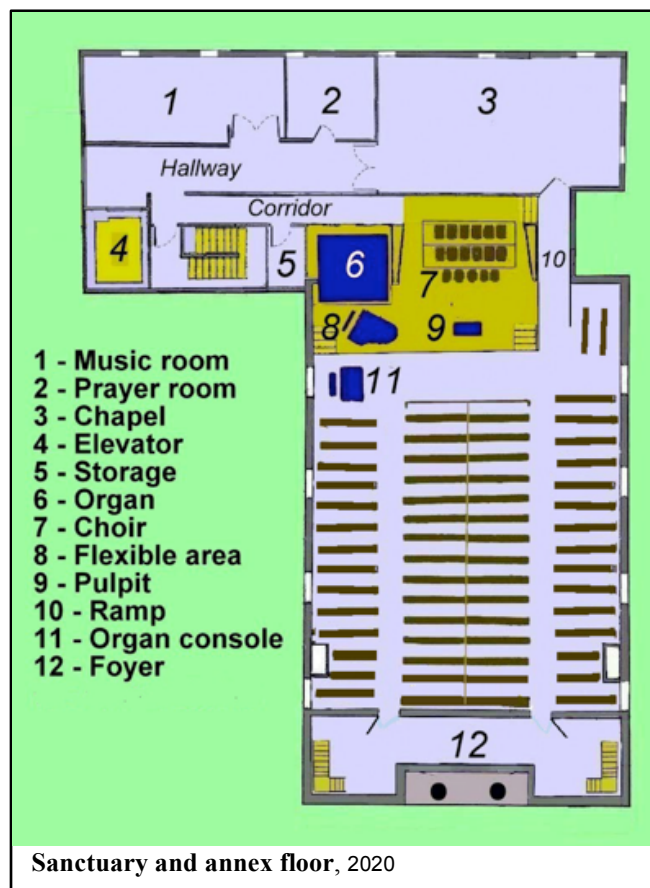
✦ **New cross** – The Church placed a large wood cross on the alcove's back wall. A church member made the cross from beams taken from the back wall of the vestry foyer that was built in 1843 and that may have been part of the 1762 building.⁷⁸

✦ **Larger platform** – The platform was extended 12 ft. into the annex and its length increased to 30 ft. and its front width to 10 ft.⁷⁶ The platform has space, on its south end, for musical instruments, including a grand piano, and other equipment needed for special services and events.

✦ **Organ moved** – The 1898 pipe organ, expanded in 1964, is at the front left and partially extends into the annex. A movable Rostron Kershaw electrified organ console, with caster wheels, is in front of the platform.

✦ **Platform strengthened** – New beams, added below the floor, significantly increase the platform's weight-bearing capacity. This was done for a planned immersion baptism font to be later placed on the platform. The Church later cancelled the font.

✦ **Lord's Table** – In front of the platform, on a table at the foot of the pulpit, there are two brass candlesticks and a brass cross, in between. The candlesticks, given to the Church in 1953, have the inscribed letters "IHS," the first three letters (*iota-eta-sigma*) of Jesus' name in Greek (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). The cross is a 1944 gift. Continued pg. 32





Music room, annex, 2020.



Prayer room, annex, 2020.



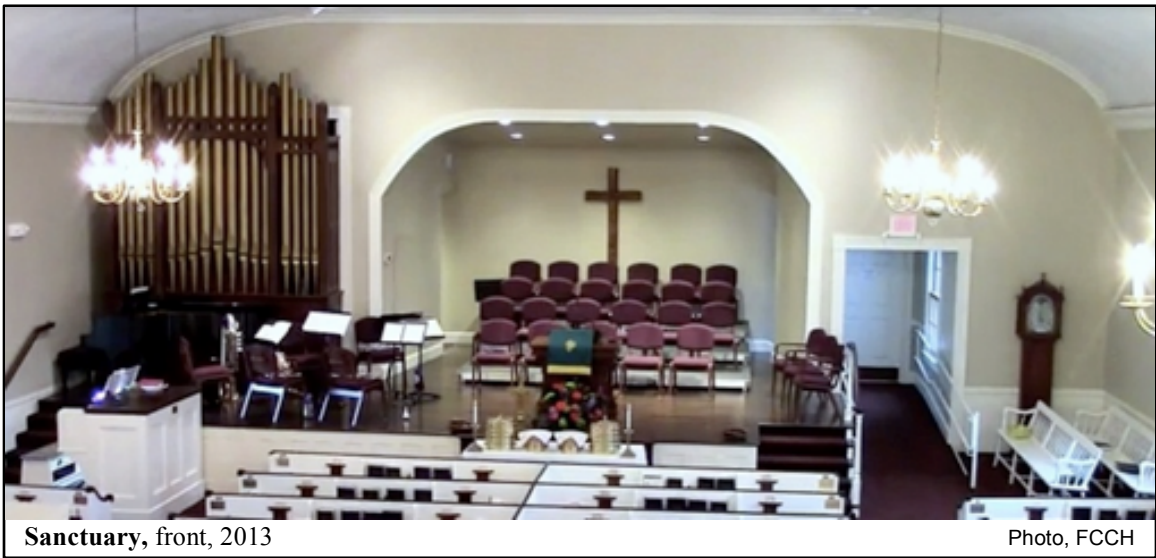
Chapel, annex, 2020.



1724 mahogany pulpit was in sanctuary until 1880, returned in 1937, and again replaced in 2013 by the 1843 pulpit.



Alcove corridor, annex, 2020.



Sanctuary, front, 2013

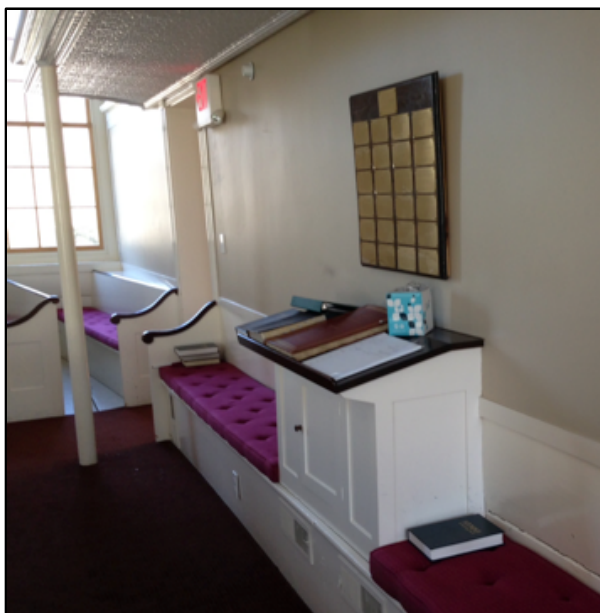
Photo, FCCH



Organ console, sanctuary, 2020.



Foyer, sanctuary at right. 2020.



Pew owner plaque, and remembrance desk. 2020.



1843 pulpit, sanctuary, 2020.



Balcony has extended center section. 2020.



About 1950, FCCCH placed a clock on balcony façade. Once again, in the words of Rev. Cutler in 1814, the pastor had a “monitor, placed hourly before him.”



Balcony, has raised pews to allow viewing over the facade. 2020.



Ladder, not Jacob’s to Heaven, rather access from balcony’s north stairway to attic. 2020.



Balcony control center, 2020.



North entrance, 2020.



South entrance, 2020.



Former below ground entrance to annex basement no longer has stairs, but windows remain. 2020



Cellar entrance, south side, 2020.



Stained glass windows, 1990.

Photo, Ham. Hist. Soc.



3.5 ac. First Congregational Church in Hamilton

1) Church house, 2) Annex, 3) Administration, 4) Cutler barn, 5) Ministry Center, 6) Fellowship Hall, 7) Parking lot, Building at back right is 12 Cutler Rd.

Photo, Google Maps

✦ **Air conditioning** – Bringing air conditioning to the large sanctuary required installing, on the sidewalls, heat and large sound insulated metal ducts.⁶⁴ A few sanctuary seats were removed.

✦ **Windows** – In 2012, sash windows (12 panes over 12) replaced the four 100-yr. old stained-glass windows in the sanctuary. All the sanctuary windows and those at the back of the balcony are a special clear double-pane glass that provides thermal insulation and uv protection for fabrics and carpets in the sanctuary.

✦ **Walls and trim repainted** – The walls are painted beige and the trim a light cream.⁸⁹

✦ **Carpeting** – New aisle carpet was laid.⁷⁴ Also carpeted were rooms and halls in the annex. The same shade of red, auburn, is throughout. All metal chair cushions are the same hue.

✦ **Pews refurbished** – Repainted and re-stained pews have new red, auburn cushions. Pews have brass plates, on the back, with the name of the original pew owner.

✦ **Pew history** – The names of 24 original pew owners, from 1843, are also on a pew history plaque below the balcony, on the back wall, behind the center row of pews. In front of the plaque is a memorial book desk. Visitors are encouraged to sign the book. Often, relatives of the original pew owners register their visit to the meetinghouse.

✦ **Sprinkler system** – Late in 2013, the Church added a sprinkler system to the sanctuary; the annex already had sprinklers. Recessed sprinkler heads are in the metal ceiling.⁷⁴ Massachusetts law, MGL

Chap. 148, Sec. 26G, requires the expanded annex to have a sprinkler system.

✦ **Handicap changes** – The Church made many handicap accessible changes to the sanctuary, vestry and annex.⁷⁶ Portions of the pews, at the front and back of the sanctuary, were removed to allow ample space for wheelchairs. The ramp, at the door connecting the sanctuary and the annex was widened.⁷⁶ Both ramps meet the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines for width and angle of rise/fall.

Two of the former vestry meeting room benches are in an area next to the sanctuary ramp. Others of these benches are in the annex hallway and the sanctuary foyer.

For ease of rapid emergency exit, doors in the annex, vestry and sanctuary have a bar opening mechanism that allows users to easily open a door by pushing a bar, rather than turning a knob or pushing on a lever. The doors also have windows to allow users to see if someone is on other side of a door they are about to push open.

While the outside appearance of the meetinghouse has changed little since it was built 1843, inside there are many changes.

The Church, in 2006, added an outside entrance to the vestry cellar. On the southeast corner of the main building, the below ground door is a replacement to the previous trap door, in the vestry foyer.

A new roof was built, in 2013.⁷⁴

Sunday services returned to the sanctuary on Oct. 18, 2013. This was not an end to changes. More refurbishing and expansion were still to come to the meetinghouse.

In 2015, the town gave the tower clock, which it bought and installed in 1888 and updated to electricity in 1999, to the FCCH. The town did not want to continue paying for clock maintenance or move it to the town hall.²⁸

Quo Vadis?

Alice Morse Earle wrote in her 1891 history of the *Sabbath in Puritan New England*, "The religion, which they had endured such bitter hardships to establish, did not, in their minds, need any shielding and cod-dling to keep it alive, but thrived far better on Spartan severity and simplicity."⁵²

Sunday worshippers in the 21st century Hamilton congregational church endure no Spartan hardships. God's house has central heating, air conditioning, electric lights, large glass windows, a large pipe organ, a sound system with wall-mounted speakers, cushioned pews, carpeted aisles and it is handicap accessible.

The Church, in 2020, had 463 members, of whom 324 were active members.⁵⁰ The 177-year old church house is not only a place for its members and visitors to meet on Sundays. Two 2-story addition at the back, built in 1977 and expanded in 2006, combined with other buildings on the property, provide space for various activities during the week, day and night.

Many exterior vestiges of the past remain:

- 1785 bell is in the belfry;
- 1843 Greek portico is unchanged;
- 1843 Window arrangement remains;
- 1843 Steeple/belfry/ tower is unchanged;
- 1888 turret clock, which the Church now owns, is in the tower, and has electrical power; and
- <1843 weathervane is still atop the steeple.

Remaining from the past, inside the sanctuary are:

- Fifty-three recently refurbished pews from 1843.
- The FCCH, in 2013, placed at the front of the sanctuary platform a remnant from the large 1724 pulpit. The platform's center section is the base from the mahogany pulpit.⁸⁹
- The 1880 pulpit returned to the sanctuary and the 1724 pulpit, minus the bottom section, moved to the annex chapel.⁸⁹
- The 1879 tin ceiling remains, though it has holes for spotlights and sprinkler heads that mar its once unblemished fresco-like

surface.

- The balcony still has two rows of raised bench pews (*to allow viewing over the facade*) and a row of individual cushioned metal chairs at the front. The balcony is the full width of the sanctuary. Doors are in the stairwells, at both sides.
- A trap door, in the north end of the balcony ceiling, opens to the attic. A ladder provides access. As they were in 1843, columns, based in the vestry, pass through the balcony to support the steeple.
- The stately 1898 Rostron Kershaw pipe organ still stands at the left front of the sanctuary.
- The FCCH, in 2013, placed at the front of the sanctuary platform a remnant from the large 1724 pulpit. The platform's center section is the base from the mahogany pulpit.⁸⁹
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Use of the meetinghouse, at the start of the 21st century, is very different from that of the 18th and 19th centuries, as was described by Rev. Cutler. In 2018, the Church held: 1 wedding, 1 funeral, 1 adult baptism and 5 infant dedications/baptisms and welcomed 28 new members.⁵⁰



Filled sanctuary, shoulder to shoulder, for guest speaker, 2019.

Photo, FCCH

Special events requiring a large number of seats are now held in the sanctuary. In 2019, a presentation on the major role played by Rev. Manasseh Cutler in the founding of the Northwest Territory, in 1787, filled the sanctuary. Many people wanting to attend were turned away.

In 2020, a new factor arose to affect meetinghouse needs: the COVID 19 virus pandemic. A social distancing policy, enforced to reduce the virus from spreading, prevented services and meetings at the church house. This was the first time church services were ever cancelled indefinitely. Electronic video coverage of simulated Sunday services, from the sanctuary, so-called “live-streaming,” began via the YouTube service.

The FCCH installed video, lighting and sound equipment, in the center of the sanctuary’s pews. The broadcast included the pastor’s sermon and prayers from the pulpit, and pre-recorded organ music and choir songs. Viewers were encouraged to make financial contributions using electronic services.

In addition, weather permitting, adults in small groups (*up to 12*) gathered on the lawn on the south side of the meetinghouse and also at an area near the Ministry Center. In effect, the church was back to what Rev. Manasseh Cutler suggested in 1814, “That they (*the church*) be not led away from the simplicity in the faith of Christ.”⁶⁶

Following the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1919, the Hamilton church resumed its previous main focus on Sunday worship. A hundred years later, the church facilities, prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, were used throughout the week, morning, afternoon and evening. To what uses will they return? How changed?

The church house is one of 6 buildings on the 3.5 ac. property. The others are: Wigglesworth-Cutler House (*built 1715/14*), the Ministry Center (*built 2007*), the Cutler barn (*built 1876*), Fellowship Hall (*built 2007*) and the brick house at 12 Cutler Rd.⁵⁰

The First Congregational Church in Hamilton, Hamilton’s First Congregational Church, a nonprofit corporation of the State of Massachusetts, has a pastoral staff that includes a Lead Pastor, a Pastor of Congregational Life and a Youth Pastor. 2020 began with the FCCH in search of a new lead pastor (42nd), the precious having left in 2018.

Their prayers were answered in March 2020, when Rev. Jeremy A. McKeen accepted their call and was approved as the lead pastor. He had been the pastor of the Truth Point Church in West Palm Beach, FL., which is part of the Presbyterian Church in America. In 2009, Rev. McKeen graduated from Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, FL, which also is part of the Presbyterian Church in America.⁸²

The FCCH clergy staff included, in 2020: an Early Childhood Director, an Elementary Children’s Director, a Women’s Ministry Director and a Worship Ministries Director⁵⁰

The administrative staff included: a Business Administrator, an Administrative Assistant, a Choir Director, a Treasurer, a Financial Secretary and a sexton,⁵⁰ responsible for care of the buildings, furniture, equipment and grounds.

In 2020, the FCCH is one of four churches in Hamilton, the others are: Catholic, Union St.; Methodist, Bay Rd.; and Episcopalian, Asbury St.

Jack E. Hauck, Nov. 1, 2020



Empty sanctuary, 2020. Video camera, in center of pews, distributed Sunday service to parishioners via cable tv.

Meetinghouse Timeline

The chronology of the Ham-
let/Hamilton meetinghouse is leng-
thy ... and revealing of the chang-
es in the church body with time.
Asher Benjamin, in his 1833 book
Practice of Architecture, wrote, "A
house erected for the worship of
the Supreme Being should corre-
spond in character with the rever-
ential feelings of those who wor-
ship therein." ⁸⁷

To this might be added what
Carl Sandburg wrote, "I have often
wondered what it is an old building
can do to you, when you happen
to know a little about things that
went on long ago in that building."



Front. 1880.

Item	
1713	3 rd Church of Christ in Ipswich
2013	Air conditioning, sanctuary
2013	Alcove, built in sanctuary
1977	Annex
2006	Annex expanded
c1955	Backdrop, front wall removed
1953	Backdrop, hung on front wall
1762	Balcony (<i>gallery</i>), first
1843	Balcony, second
1953	Baptism font
1977	Basement, built under annex
1997	Basement, outside entrance
1727	Bell, first, hung on tree

1731	Bell, second, hung on tree
1785	Bell, third, in tower
1762	Box pews
1843	Box pews replaced
1941	Carpets, sanctuary
1856	Cellar, first, under vestry
2006	Cellar, outside entrance
1843	Chandeliers, first
2012	Chapel, annex
1977	Chimney, brick removed
1997	Chimney, roof pipe removed
1888	Clock, steeple
c1950	Clock2, balcony façade
1953	Clock, tall, front of sanctuary
1903	Communion service cups
1944	Cross, sanctuary, on pulpit table
2013	Cross, on alcove back wall
1926	Driveway, behind annex
1907	Electricity, sanctuary
2013	Elevator, annex
1977	Entrances, front of sanctuary
1869	Fellowship room, vestry
1843	Foyer, sanctuary
1997	Foyer, vestry
2013	Foyer, vestry, removed
1977	Furnace, electric annex basement
1977	Furnace, cellar removed
1856	Furnace, vestry cellar
1843	Great Alley removed
2013	Handicap accessible building
1843	Heat, sanctuary
1977	Kitchen, vestry, first
1864	Library bookcase, vestry
2017	Library, vestry
1714	Meetinghouse, first
1762	Meetinghouse, second
1843	Meetinghouse, third
1879	Metal ceiling, sanctuary
1849	Mural & scripture, front wall
1903	Mural, front wall, removed
2013	Music/choir room, annex
1977	North entrance, annex
c1977	Nursery vestry
2013	Nurseries, annex
1843	Offices, two, vestry
1864	Organ, box
1898	Organ, pipe
1862	Pane windows
2013	Pew markers plaque
1776	Pew room (<i>space</i>) sold
1843	Platform, sanctuary
1845	Platform, vestry
1926	Platform, vestry removed

1843	Portico
1898	Portico doors replaced
1957	Portico, light
2013	Prayer room, annex
1724	Pulpit, first
1880	Pulpit, second
2013	Reception center, vestry
1953	Remembrance table & book
c1950	Roof, asphalt
1850	Sanctuary, first painted
1977	Scripture, front wall, removed
1903	Seat cushions
1939	Septic system
1844	Stalls built behind meetinghouse
1944	Sheds removed
1843	Siding, first painted
c1990	Sound system, sanctuary
2013	South entrance, annex
2013	Sprinklers, sanctuary
1903	Stained glass window, sanctuary
2013	Stained glass windows, annex
1762	Steeple
1845	Sunday school room, vestry
c1960	Telephone, annex
1977	Toilets, annex
1939	Toilets, vestry
1714	Tower
1897	Town office vestry, removed
1938	Town water connected
1843	Vestry
1880	Weathervane, current
1862	Weathervane, first
2013	Wheelchair space, sanctuary



Front, 2020.

Special Thanks

The First Congregational Church in Hamilton was very helpful in researching the meetinghouse history by allowing me access to its historic record books. Nearly 100 of my references are from these exclusive volumes.

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