

First Parish of Sudbury

A Brief History of The First Parish of Sudbury
Unitarian Universalist
Sudbury, Massachusetts

*Written September 2000 by D. Bruce Langmuir & Lee Ford Swanson
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Re-written and updated June 25, 2004 & September 30, 2008 by D. Bruce Langmuir*

The first Meeting House built in 1723, was torn down and many of its beams re-used in the present structure. The present Meeting House, *built on the Rocky Plain* of West Precinct on *Lancaster Highway*, was erected in 1797, at a cost of \$6,025.93, and was designed by Captain Thomson. In those days the town meeting house and the church building were one and the same. Twenty-two carriage sheds were erected in 1798 by the Town of Sudbury to shelter horses of the worshipers and voters, as the separation of church and state did not occur until 1836 in Sudbury.

Originally the Meeting House was one large room with a high center pulpit. It had galleries around three sides of the room, and a spire in place of the present steeple. The spire was replaced with a steeple and bell in the 1840's. In 1842 the sanctuary was moved to the second floor by flooring up the galleries at a cost of \$1485.93. The current church bell, the second one, was cast by a firm in Medway in 1856 and is far heavier than the first.

The clock in the steeple was bought by public subscription in 1873 and to this day is owned and maintained by the Town of Sudbury. Until a clock electric motor was installed shortly after 1928, the clock was driven and kept in time by a weight consisting of a box of rocks and a large pendulum.

The current Cole & Woodbury tracker action pipe organ installed in 1895, originally had a golden oak case with gold leafed front pipes and red striping around the mouth of these pipes, reflecting an early Victorian period style. In 1928 an electric motor and blower was installed by James Cole of Cole Church Organ Builders (the same Cole as in Cole & Woodbury). Cole wrote, "*When this blower is placed you will find that the Organ will sound considerably better, all the annoyances of a Blow-boy will disappear, and be at a great saving of expense.*" The Blow-boy hand pumped the organ to supply wind to the pipes. The organ was still hand pumped for special services as late as 1950, and again in the 1970s when electricity was temporarily lost during a service. In the early 1960s the organ case and front pipes were painted white as part of a sanctuary renovation from the

early Victorian period style. Andover Organ Company now maintains the organ which has had no tonal changes since first installed. They last worked on it in 1998 along when the Sanctuary was restored (see below for latter). 1998 work included removing all paint from the front pipes down to bare metal, to match color of pewter chandeliers.

The organ specifications are:

Great

8' Open Diapason
8' Stop Diapason
8' Dulciana
4' Octave
2' Fifteenth

Swell

8' Geigen Principal
8' Salicional
8' Vox Angelica
8' Melodia
4' Gemshorn
8' Oboe (Labial)

Pedal

16' Bourdon

<http://www.fpsudbury.org/Public/ColeWoodberryOrgan>

In 1928 electricity was introduced, in 1939 water and indoor plumbing brought in, and in 1951 a furnace installed, as the whole Meetinghouse was previously heated by wood stoves. The wood stoves were located on the first floor in the parish hall and their heat rose up into the sanctuary through several large floor grates, now boarded up and covered with carpet.

A kitchen was built in the north end of the parish hall. A domestic hot water heater was located in the kitchen.

In the north east corner of the Meetinghouse, in what is now the Library, was located the Minister's and church secretary office, later divided into two rooms, one for each. In the east side of the Steeple, off the southeast corner of the parish hall, was the religious education director's office. In the west side of the Steeple, off the southwest corner of the parish hall, were two small bathrooms, women's and men's, that were so cold in winter pipes sometimes froze.

Around 1958 rooms were built in the then open Parish Hall (the first floor of the Meetinghouse) for use as religious education spaces. On the west side of the Parish Hall were two walls forming three roomettes that had curtains across their open east ends in the

center of the Hall. On the east side was a closed room used as a nursery and its door was on its west side. While these walls were up acoustic ceiling tiles were tacked up. Around 1966 (after the religious education wing was built in 1964), all the walls inside the parish hall were removed, making it all open again. Boards covered up the open ceiling slots where the top of the walls were, and a new wide board floor was installed. By this time the parish hall floor consisted of the original wide floor board, on top of this plywood, then on top of this the new wide floor boards, still there in 2004.

In 1964 eleven carriage sheds were removed to make space for the addition of the religious education wing to be added. It was named the Atkinson wing (or building) after its major benefactor. The Atkinson Wing was a single story building with a large multipurpose classroom and “*formal living*” room on the first floor, and a basement with classrooms, two small bathrooms and a utility room. The formal living room was called the Brackett Room, named after Lucy Brackett.

The Atkinson Wing and Meetinghouse were not physically connected by a building, other than an open breeze-way between the two buildings. An underground tunnel was used to connect the utilities of the two building together. Church offices were still in the Meetinghouse.

Staff now included a full-time minister, part-time music/choir director, and part-time religious education director. For a time there was also a part-time sexton.

In 1993 a connector was constructed between the Meetinghouse and Atkinson RE Wing. The construction also included adding a second floor to the Atkinson Wing for church offices and a workroom. The connector consisted of a new main entrance from the parking lot, a first and second floor foyer, stairway to the second floor and an elevator to all three floors. Large handicapped accessible bathrooms were built in the Atkinson Wing basement. A new handicapped accessible bathroom was built into the Parish Hall, replacing the two very small bathrooms in the southwest corner of the Meetinghouse. The utilities tunnel between the Meetinghouse and Atkinson Wing was rebuilt and the boiler for the Meetinghouse was now in the utilities room in the basement of the Atkinson Wing. The domestic hot water tank was removed from the kitchen and a single one placed in the utility room in the Atkinson Wing. Due to insufficient funds, a large space on the second floor of the Atkinson Wing was not completed and become known as The Unfinished Space, later completed in 2003.

Also in 1993 a professional hard-wired hearing assistive sound system was installed for use in the sanctuary (earphones and speakers), parish hall, foyers, and several rooms in

the religious education wing. This replaced a small limited 1968 hearing assistive system which provided only earphones in the sanctuary and speakers in the parish hall.

For its 200th Anniversary in 1997, the exterior of the Meeting House was historically preserved and the steeple reinforced (the third time) to adequately support the heavy bell so it could be rope tolled again after about five years of silence. All the Meeting House windows were historically restored with antique glass in every sash. The sanctuary and old south foyers were restored and redecorated the following year in a simple Federal style in keeping with the period when originally built. This work included historic analysis of the colors of layers of paint, restoration of all plaster surfaces, the use of paint in keeping with the original colors, the installation of pewter colored chandeliers and sconces, and stripping all paint from the organ pipes to their natural leaded tin color which matches the chandeliers and sconces. Two pew cuts were also made so wheel chair users could sit beside their friends and family. The chandeliers, sconces and flush ceiling mounted lights were all controlled and programmed from an electronic dimmer system.

In 2003 the “*Unfinished Space*” was completed on the second floor of the Atkinson RE Wing. This included a new handicapped accessible bathroom, thus now placing accessible bathrooms on all three floors of the buildings. (The stage in the Sanctuary was the only area left that was not wheel chair accessible.) It also included a new religious education/music workroom, a storage room for our renters Sudbury Extended Day, and a large multipurpose room called The Commons, capable of seating 60 persons. The Commons contained storage closets for folding chairs and tables, a kitchenette and secured audio/video system with surround sound and a motorized ceiling mounted 8 foot wide movie screen.

In 2005 the Parish Hall was refurbished. All dark stained posts were sand blasted down to bare wood, then varnished. The stained dark wood wide board pine floor was sanded down to bare wood and many coats of gymnasium grade urethane applied. All incandescent light chandeliers were replaced with much improved chandeliers using compact fluorescent lamps, half being dimmable. Thus lighting efficiency improved by nearly 12 times. Parish Hall was rewired with new circuit breaker panel and new outlets, to current electrical code. - Kitchen outlets were added and rewired to new circuit breaker panel.

Langmuir document: History-First Parish 03

September 29, 2000, version, organ specs added May 12, 2001.

Saved again on December 16, 2002, under Langmuir document: History-First Parish 01

June 25, 2004, added history of parish hall being divided into classrooms around 1958, mister/secretary office, religious education office and small bathrooms, changing Langmuir document to: History-First Parish 02.

September 30, 2008, added refurbishing of Parish Hall, changing Langmuir document to: History-First Parish 03.

See: <http://fpsudbury.org/BuildingsAndGrounds/Paints2004.doc>

On Oct 2, 2011, at 7:14 PM, db.m.langmuir@comcast.net wrote:

Attached is the history of First Parish of Sudbury document Lee Ford Swanson and I myself wrote in 2000 and I updated in 2004 and 2008.

I am told by Lee Swanson that some of the dates in this document before around 1930 may not be correct as more research has been done since 2000 when the document was first written by Lee and myself. Research done I guess by Lee.