

As the township increased in population there was an imperative demand for a larger house of worship. In 1751 a new meeting house was erected on the site where we now gather and was then and still is known as the "Old North". For three days in mid-June the men in town and others from neighboring towns, with much sweat and strain, raised a frame of great white-oak timbers. The women of the town also gathered and provided much relief with refreshments and meals. Soon there stood a bulky, plain, rugged house, sixty feet long, forty feet wide, two stories high, without gallery, porch, steeple and chimney. It was of great simplicity, entirely without ornament. It faced the south, on which side was the entrance and opened to an aisle extending through the middle of the house straight to the pulpit. The seats were crude benches placed on each side of the aisle; the west side being assigned to the women, and the east to the men. The minister had a pew near the pulpit and the deacons sat together directly in front of the pulpit facing the congregation. It stayed unfinished for over thirty years – without heat, until just after the American Revolution when renovations started.

Rev Walker continue his ministry and preached for thirty-one years at the "Old North". There was never a dull moment during his fifty-two years as minister in the plantation of Penny Cook, the township of Rumford, and the township of Concord. History tells us that he preached with a musket next to the pulpit in the log house. He endured many years of conflict with the township of Bow over boundaries. The French and Indian Wars broke out during his pastorship. He made three trips to England to get approval from the Royal government to grant township for Rumford. April 19, 1775 the alarm from Lexington was sounded and Concord became involved in the Revolution.

In the years 1783 and 1784, the barn-like meeting house bloomed into some degree of beauty. Unfortunately, Rev. Walker died Sunday morning on Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> 1782, just before the improvements started. The church proprietors continued with the improvements without a pastor for the next seven years. Finally, in 1789 Israel Evans came to the pulpit and resigned eight years later.

Two-story entrance porches at the east and west ends of the building afforded additional access to the house. A gallery was installed on all sides except the north. Surmounting the east porch was a steeple, and perched atop, one hundred and three-feet high above the ground, a four-foot gilded copper weather-cock looking down with glaring glass eyes on affairs below. It always looked ready for a fight, ecclesiastical or civil. From compass points painted in the belfry ceiling, those standing on the ground could determine the direction of the wind.

Inside, the benches gave way to square pews with paneled sides. The seats were without cushions and furnished with hinges, that they might be turned up when the congregation stood, as it did, during a long prayer. At the close of a prayer all went down with one emphatic bang, in response to the minister's "Amen". The wall pews in the gallery were square, with slips in front. Later a crimson-curtained enclosure was reserved in the middle of the south gallery, opposite the pulpit, the musicians, were grouped around a table with books and instruments. Over on the east gallery door was the slave pew and seats for the poor.

The pulpit was a huge piece of paneling, twelve feet high. As the minister stood at the pulpit, his figure was silhouetted against a beautiful Georgian window. The pulpit stairs were brightly carpeted and ornamented by balusters carved in three distinct styles. A red silk damask cushion on the desk bore the red and gold Bible. Overhead hung the sounding-board. Under the pulpit, facing the congregation, sat the old men; in front of them the deacons. At the right, near the foot of the pulpit stair, was a mahogany pillar for the baptismal font of silver. As time went on the pulpit was described as follows: "The pulpit was a huge square structure and had a semi-circular projection in front; was constructed of paneling and loomed up like Mount Sinai, in awful majesty, high above the congregation. Above it and projecting forward was a ponderous sounding board, curious in design and of elaborate workmanship".

An attempt was made to get a bell in the 1785, money was raised but nothing happened. Rev. Asa McFarland our third pastor came to the pulpit in 1798 and served until 1825. In 1802 the meeting house was enlarged by the addition of a large semicircle projecting thirty feet in front, divided into seven angles. In 1809 more pews were added and sold at public auction. Finally, with the money raised from selling the pews was used to purchase a bell for the tower. The next year the town ordered it rung three times every day, at seven in the morning, at noon, and at nine o'clock at night. The times of ringing on Sundays were regulated by the selectmen. Four years later it was ordered to be tolled at funerals when desired. The first bell ringer was Sherburn Wiggin. He was paid a salary of twenty-five dollars a year.

In mild weather the noon hour was spent in or around the church, but in inclement or winter season there was a speedy exodus to some neighboring house, for it was not until 1821 that any means of warming the church was considered. The first three pastors preached in the winter season to a congregation which had no other means of keeping warm than the foot stoves provided for the more delicate members. For nearly one hundred years the people of Concord met in the winter in an unwarmed church for two services a day. Then it was suggested that in winter there be only one service, which led to the purchase of a moderate sized box-stove, and being place half way up the center aisle. This, strange as it may seem, was a departure from old customs which encountered some opposition.

On March 23, 1825, the Rev. Nathaniel Bouton was ordained and installed as our fourth pastor. In the meantime, our church witnessed the establishment of several other denominations in town: The Friends , the Episcopalians, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Unitarian, or Second Congregational. In addition to other denominations coming into Concord, our congregation separated into three churches in Concord – West, South, and East. On March 17,1841, it was decided and voted on to build a new and smaller house. In November 1842 Old North was abandoned. In 1847, Old North was occupied by The Methodist General Biblical Institute until 1867. The Institute moved to Boston and the house reverted back to the First Congregational Society. It was then sold to private parties and the proceeds of its sale were used to purchase the society's parsonage. With sad hearts its many friends afterward saw the church degraded to a tenement house of a low order. In Joseph Walker's book on the History of the Four Meeting Houses he writes – "On the night of November 28, 1870, the purifying angel wrapped a mantle of flame about it and transported it heavenward upon a chariot of fire."

For ninety-one years this framed meeting house was a place of worship by the First Congregational Society and many historic events of national, state and local levels were held. For twenty-five years all the town meetings were held in the house, on July 20, 1817, President James Monroe attended a church service, a political debate between Franklin Pierce and John P. Hale was held in the house, on March 13,1782 the state legislature met in the house for the first time, and on June 21,1788, the US Constitution was ratified at the church, by which New Hampshire became the ninth state of our Union to make it operative and binding upon the United States. This is just a few of many historic events held at Old North.

Former church historian John Thorne writes "such was our second meeting-house, one of the best in New Hampshire. It was so designed from the praiseworthy desire of the town to have a suitable place for worship, and also to accommodate the legislature, which was disposed to make Concord the capital of the state."

Everett Sims  
Church Historian