

This morning our historic journey comes to our final location in our church history. We started the journey at Sugar Ball, to the log cabin, and finally to "Old North" spanning 116 years and today we come to the spot where we honor our third, fourth, and fifth meeting houses, spanning 178 years.

Many had a strong attachment to the Old North spot and to the old sanctuary. Some, proposed the remodeling of the latter, while others suggested the erection of a new house upon the site. The majority opinion favored both a new location and a new house. After many meetings and deliberations, the new house on a new location was adopted. The cornerstone was laid and the frame raised July 4, 1842. On November 23, 1842, the Third meeting house was dedicated. Rev Bouton continued as pastor at the "New North" until 1867. Rev Ayer became our fifth pastor and was installed in 1867 in the Third Meeting House.

Our Third Meeting House was very different from "Old North." It lacked the grandeur that the Old North possessed, but it had its own beauty. It was of one story with a bell tower and steeple forming part of the façade. The church was eighty feet in length and fifty feet in width. It had a porch in front, where the roof rested on four plain pillars, columns twenty-five feet height. The sanctuary consisted of eighty-eight pews and a sitting capacity four hundred and fifty. In 1848 the house was enlarged adding twenty more pews. In 1855 fifteen hundred dollars was raised by the members of the society to provide a tower clock and enclosed the church lot by a stone and iron fence. The year 1858 a chapel was added to the west side of the building and ten years later the chapel was enlarged by adding a kitchen. In 1869 a new organ was installed and many more renovations were made in the sanctuary.

Rev Ayer had been pastor at the Third Meeting house for six years, when on Sunday morning, June 29, 1873, the engineer of the 1:15 AM express running into Concord over the East Concord Bridge saw a glow in the sky at the north end of city. The rapid blows of the train's whistle awakened Mrs. Griffin on Pearl street who saw from her bedroom window her husband's carriage factory afire. Mr. Griffin ran to the meetinghouse and began ringing the bell. Soon, all the bells in the city were ringing the alarm, but the fire had already spread to the church and several other buildings. The sanctuary was a total loss, but

the chapel was saved. That Sunday Rev Ayer was away, and when he returned on Monday, he found a church without a home.

That same Sunday morning of the fire, the pulpit and some furniture survived the fire, was taken to city hall and worship was held. For three years the congregation worshipped at City Hall during the construction of the new brick sanctuary. It was until March 1876 when the fourth meeting house was ready for occupancy. On the evening of the day following the fire, Monday, June 30, 1873, an informal meeting of the society was held in their make-shift home to consider the existing situation, and to take such action as might be deemed advisable. The meeting was a sad one. After prayer, the retired Rev Bouton stood up and said. "Let us rise up and build," and the people responded, "Amen!"

The fourth meeting house was built of brick with granite trimmings; it was of modified Gothic architecture, with the principal façade upon Main Street, having a bell-tower and spire on the southeast corner. In the tower was a fine toned Troy bell weighing approximately three thousand pounds (it is the bell currently in our tower now) and also a Howard clock. The sanctuary was finished to the apex of the roof, displaying the beams and rafters. The woodwork was of ash, and the pulpit and pews of black walnut. It was lighted by windows of stained glass. The sanctuary was exactly laid out the same as South Church.

An offer was presented by the Pastor at annual meeting to the society on April 10, 1883 to erect a new chapel; the offer was accepted. A beautiful and spacious chapel was constructed, completely furnished consisting of an audience room, parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and anterooms. And the church's sanctuary was completely renovated in 1898.

On Sunday, November 3, 1935, the fourth meeting house was destroyed by fire, as its predecessor on the same site had been destroyed on another Sunday. Rev Ayer, Rev Reed, and Rev Beyer served as Pastors in the fourth meeting house. In the afternoon the day of the fire, the congregation conducted worship service at South Church.

Eighty-five years ago, on November 22th, 1935, a meeting of the First Congregational Society was held in Walker School Auditorium to determine whether or not to rebuild the North Church or to merge with South Church. After many intense debates and opinions, it was decided to rebuild on this site. Late July, 1936 construction began on our fifth meeting-house. From November 1935 to June 6, 1937 the

congregation worship at numerous locations and churches while construction was in progress.

On September 27,1936, the cornerstone for the new building was laid and on June 6, 1937 the church was formally dedicated. A beautiful sanctuary it is. It was designed by Arland Dirlam an architect from Massachusetts, who incidentally designed the current West church building after their fire.

The sanctuary is lighted by twenty beautiful stained-glass windows, a beautiful lancet window at the front of the church, and gothic lanterns suspended from the rafters. The pulpit is carved with designs introducing a cross and grapes. Similar designs are carried out in the carving of the altar table, the lectern and pew ends.

During the pastorate of Rev Dorr, the steady increase in Sunday school attendance in the 1960's brought about the purchase of the Garner House and Mamos Apartment block to the west of the church on Washington street. The new education wing was dedicated on September 24,1967. During the planning and building of the new wing, the church members voted to join with the United Church of Christ. We were no longer known as the First Congregational Society.

For eighty-three years, our present church has had eight pastors. Our life in the fifth meeting-house will soon be coming to an end. Our five meeting-houses indicate very clearly the social and civil conditions of the people by whom they were erected, during a period of almost three-hundred years. They differed widely, one from another, and met satisfactorily the various requirements of their successive eras.

Everett Sims
Church Historian