

FORM B – BUILDING

NRDIS 2/20/1980
LHD 5/8/1975

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

73/320/4

Lowell

A, B

CLM.213

MASSACHUSETTS
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town/City: Chelmsford

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Chelmsford Center

Photograph



Address: 2 Westford Street

Historic Name: First Parish Church

Uses: Present: church

Original: church

Date of Construction: 1842

Source: *History of Chelmsford*

Style/Form: Greek Revival/Gothic Revival

Architect/Builder: Edwin R. Clark (interior), Kilham, Hopkins, Greeley & Brodie (addition), Arthur Englund (steeple)

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: wood siding/wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Sunday School and Children's Chapel

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Listed under Historical Narrative

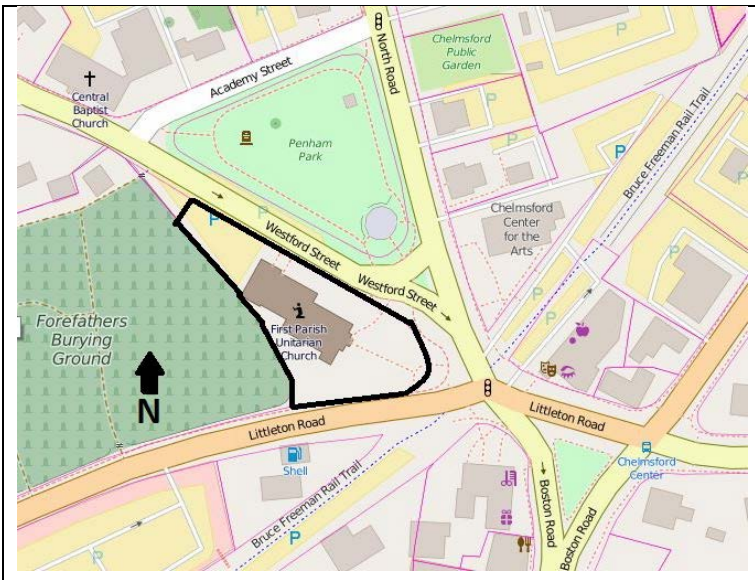
Condition: Good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: .93 A

Setting: The church is located at the intersection of Westford St., Littleton Rd., & Rte. 4, facing into the town center. A grassy lawn with mature trees is in front of the building and an asphalt parking lot in the rear. The Forefathers' Cemetery is located to the west of the property.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Jennifer Burden, Gray & Pape, Inc.

Organization: Chelmsford Historical Society

Date (*month / year*): February 2016

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The 2.5-story church, measuring approximately 65 feet long by 45 feet wide, is a classic example of a Greek Revival style building. The church has a brick foundation, walls clad in wood clapboard with wood trim, and a front gable roof. A steeple is centrally located near the gable end. The steeple, which was last rebuilt in 1955 due to a lightning strike, has four tiers. The square tower is clad in wood clapboard and each face includes a clock with gold Roman numerals and clock hands. Moulding surrounds the top of the base, including semi-circles over the top halves of the clocks. The next tier is an octagonal belfry that is open on four sides. The corners of the belfry include round, Ionic pilasters that mirror the Ionic columns on the primary façade. The octagonal lantern above the belfry is completely enclosed and features square, Corinthian pilasters at the corners. An octagonal, pyramidal spire tops the steeple and includes a weather vane at the top.

The primary (southeast) façade is five bays wide and symmetrical. A closed, moulded pediment tops the façade and features a fanlight opening below the gable peak that currently includes a solid, fluted covering. Both corners of the outer bays feature wide cornerboards that are comprised of eight, vertical, wood boards of various widths. Panels comprised of horizontal, wood boards are located between the cornerboards; the panels and cornerboards are unadorned. A plaque commemorating the founding of the First Congregational Society and the meeting houses located on this site is located on the north bay. A set of six granite steps lead to the inner three bays of the façade, which are inset into the building. Two, two-story, round, fluted, Ionic columns with square, granite bases are located on either side of the center bay. Wood paneled entry doors are located in the second and fourth bays of the first story. The center bay of the first story includes a divided window with a stained glass upper portion and a nine-pane lower portion. The three center bays of the second story include single, six-over-six, double-hung windows.

The north wall is five bays deep. The basement level includes four, symmetrically placed, wood, 15-over-15, double-hung windows with stone sills. An entrance into the basement is located in the second bay from the west. The wood paneled door has a five-pane transom and a stone surround. A side gable hood, supported by two, slender, round, fluted, Doric columns, shelters this entry. The hood and columns likely date to the 1993 elevator addition. A rusticated, stone course separates the basement and first story levels. Three, paired, two-story windows are located on the north wall. The wood, 15-over-21 windows each feature arched, six-pane tops. The window openings also feature exterior wood shutters that do not appear to be functional. Interior, louvered blinds in each opening are likely used to control the amount of sunlight entering the building. A simple entablature is located between the windows and roof.

The south wall is four bays deep. A one-story, flat roof, brick projection is located in the easternmost bay. Because the brick is painted, it is difficult to date this portion of the building. A replacement, siding window with a stone sill is located in the next bay to the west. The remaining two bays on the basement level feature 15-over-15, double-hung windows with stone sills. The upper stories of this wall mirror that of the north wall.

The rear wall of the church is partially obscured by the 1955, two-story, Sunday School addition. An external, brick chimney is located near the south corner of this wall; the chimney appears to date to the addition. Two sets of paired windows, like those on the north and south walls, are located in the north and south bays of the wall; these were partially removed to accommodate the addition. The rear pediment mirrors the primary façade, except for the chimney on the south end.

The 1955 addition includes the two-story Sunday School and the 1.5-story McFarlin Memorial Chapel, sometimes referred to as the Children's Chapel. The Sunday School has a concrete foundation, walls clad in wood siding with wood trim, and a side gable roof. The building has wood cornerboards and rafter tails, but omits the board frieze of the main church, which gives the building a more Classical Revival style appearance. The primary (north) façade is six bays wide. The first story includes five, wood, eight-over-eight, double-hung windows in the first five bays from the east. The westernmost bay includes the main entrance. Four

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steps lead to the double, paneled doorway that is topped with a seven-pane transom. A one-bay, front gable hood that mirrors the one on the north wall of the church, shelters the entry and is a later addition. The second story features, eight-over-eight, wood, double-hung windows that are shorter, but just as wide, as those on the first story. All window openings feature shutters. The rear wall of the school is also six bays wide. The west bay includes an entrance with a single, wood, paneled door on the first story. Eight-over-eight, wood, double-hung windows are located on the second story of the west bay and on both stories of the next four east bays. The east includes a one-story, brick, flat roof utility room. The room has a wood paneled door and an eight-over-eight, double-hung window on the west wall and an eight-over-eight, double-hung window on the south wall. The second story of the east bay includes a pair of eight-over-eight, double-hung windows.

The Chapel is located to the west of the school. The 1.5-story building has a concrete foundation, brick walls with wood trim, and a front gable, asphalt-shingled roof. The primary (north) façade is three bays wide with four-over-four, double-hung windows in the outer bays and the main entry in the center bay of the first story. A set of four steps leads to the main, double-door entry that is topped with a seven-pane transom. 'McFarlin Memorial Chapel' is painted above the transom. Two lights are located on either side of the doors. The pediment of the half-story is clad in wood siding and includes a 16-pane casement window with shutters. A decorative, arched, wood, fanlight is above the window opening and wood ornaments are located at the bottom corners of the shutters. The vinyl-sided, west wall is six bays deep with four-over-four, double-hung windows in the outer bays and eight-over-eight, double-hung windows in the inner bays. The wall also features wood cornerboards and a simple moulded entablature. The first story of the rear wall is clad in vinyl siding with wood cornerboards and the half-story is a vinyl-sided pediment with a louvered vent at the gable peak.

The First Parish Church is a contributing resource to the Chelmsford Center Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The Church is also a contributing resource in the Chelmsford Center Local Historic District, created in 1975. The First Parish Church is an excellent example of the Greek Revival style as applied to a church building.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

Early Parish History

The First Congregational Society, Unitarian was the first organized ecclesiastical group founded in Chelmsford. Organized on November 13, 1655 by Rev. John Fiske (1601-1677, emigration from England in 1637). Rev. Fiske, then the minister of the First Congregational Church in Wenham, MA, was approached by a committee from Chelmsford in 1654 to join with parishioners in Chelmsford. In 1655 Rev. Fiske left with the majority of the congregation to establish the new parish as well as new homes in Chelmsford. The Town provided Rev. Fiske with a home on Littleton Road that was razed in the 1940s that also included 30 acres of meadow and 30 acres of tillable land. The first meeting house was constructed ca. 1660 that was also used for religious services, including the Society. Rev. Fiske became ill in late 1675 and the Town sought an assistant to aid him in his ministerial tasks. Despite his failing health, Rev. Fiske continued preaching to the congregation; his only compromise was to sit rather than stand when delivering the sermon. According to his will, a silver communion cup was left to the church. Rev. Fiske was buried in the adjoining Forefathers' Cemetery; the exact location of his interment, however, is unknown.

After Rev. Fiske's passing, Rev. Thomas Clark (ca. 1652-1704, born in Cambridge, MA), who assisted Rev. Fiske in his later years, assumed the pastorate. In an agreement between the Town and Rev. Clark, he was to be paid £80 in a combination of specie, grain, and meat annually for his services; was to receive £60 for the purchase of land to erect a house that Rev. Clark would pay one-quarter of its building costs; could receive a salary increase if he needed and if the Town could afford it; and if Rev. Clark were to leave Chelmsford, the land and house, excepting what Rev. Clark contributed to its construction costs, would be returned to the Town. In 1679 Rev. Clark suggested he take a smaller salary so that would be paid more in specie than in goods. The Town agreed to this arrangement and paid Clark £70 annually in specie for the next three years. After the three-year period, Clark returned to the original agreement. In February 1688 Clark asked for a salary increase and the Town approved unanimously approved the request. At this date Clark's salary rose to £100 annually; £20 was to be paid in specie and the rest in goods. Clark remained in the pastorate until his death on December 4, 1704. He too was buried in the Forefathers' Cemetery. He was survived by his second wife, Elizabeth Whiting, whom he married on December 2, 1700. Rev. Clark's descendants included his great-grandson, founding father John Hancock.

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On June 26, 1706 Rev. Samson Stoddard (1681-1740, born in Boston) became the pastor of the congregation. He agreed to receive £100 for settlement, and then £70 annually. He salary steadily increased to £90 in 1715, £100 in 1718, and £137 in 1735. Interestingly, Stoddard purchased the estate of Rev. Fiske in 1708 from the children of Fiske's brother Moses. In 1738 Stoddard's health declined and he succumbed to "corporeal and mental disorders" on August 23, 1740. As the Stoddard family had financial difficulties, the Town voted to give Stoddard's widow £132 for his funeral expenses.

Stoddard's successor was his son-in-law Rev. Ebenezer Bridge (1716-1792), who married his daughter Sarah (1718-1783) on October 24, 1741. By all accounts Rev. Bridge was a caring, animated, and gifted preacher with strong opinions, but not the best writer as, "his sentences [were] long and ill-constructed." Rev. Bridge was also known to correct behaviors of irregular members through disciple. Bridge's tenure was fraught with difficulties during the years of the American Revolution when money and supplies for everyone were few and far between. After Sarah's death, Rev. Bridge married Johanna Abbott, the widow of Dr. Nehemiah Abbott, in 1791. About this time, Bridge's health began to fail and he stopped preaching a few weeks before his death on October 1, 1792. During his approximately 50-year pastorate in Chelmsford he baptized 1,932 people and oversaw 965 burials.

At the date of Bridge's death the third meeting house was under consideration, but was not completed until July 1794. While the building was under construction Rev. Hezekiah Packard (1761-1849) was ordained as pastor of the congregation. Packard was born on December 6, 1761 in North Bridgewater, MA. At 13 years old he was appointed as a fifer during the Revolution. In 1783 he enrolled at Harvard. Rev. Packard's pastorate in Chelmsford lasted until July 29, 1802 when he located to Wicasset, ME where he remained until 1830. He was influential even during his brief time in town, having helped established the Chelmsford Social Library in 1794. The library included about 80 members and 350 books that were kept in various librarians' homes. Eventually the library was relocated to Town Hall, and then to the Adams Library.

Rev. Wilkes Allen was the next pastor. Allen was born on July 10, 1775 in Shrewsbury, MA and was the eleventh of 12 children. First trained as a carpenter, Allen entered Harvard in 1797. After graduation in 1801 he was ordained in Chelmsford on November 16, 1803. Allen earned \$500 per year and supplemented his income by teaching private school in his home to prepare boys for college. In 1820 Allen published a history of Chelmsford and the Town printed 400 copies of the book at its own expense. In 1833 he relocated his family to North Andover. Although Allen died in North Andover in 1845, he was buried in Chelmsford.

Town Meeting House Building History

Shortly after Rev. Clark's passing in 1710, the Town decided to replace the first meeting house where he and Rev. Fiske held services. At that date it was decided that the new building should be "fifty towfoots in Length and forty tow foots in Brodth and twenty four foot Between Joynts, 25 foot spar, and a terit to hang the Bell in." The Town set aside £330 to build the new house and it was accepted on July 1, 1712. Decisions began in 1784 to replace the second meeting house with a new building. In 1794 the final decision was made to erect a building that was 64 by 48 feet with a 12-foot projection that was to be 23 inches wide, and a steeple to house a new bell. The Town voted to raise £400 for the project. On March 14, 1842, the new meeting house, which had then been in use for several decades, caught fire. The fire was not discovered in time to salvage any part of the building and efforts were made to save the adjacent buildings instead. The fire burned so hotly that the bell melted and some smaller hand bells were created from what was salvaged from the site. The fire, therefore, necessitated the construction of a fourth meeting house for Chelmsford, and this building is what is extant today. Currently the First Parish Church is the oldest extant church building in Chelmsford.

Before fire destroyed the meeting house in 1842, the First Congregationalist Church and the Union Parish met in the building for services. The two entities were opposed to the others' viewpoints regarding salvation, and while the denominations did not want to worship in the same facility, the destruction of the meeting house led them to join together to erect a new building. The collaboration lasted until 1878 when the Union Parish dissolved and its assets, claims, and liabilities were transferred to the First Congregationalists. In 1890 many viewed the parish as embracing beliefs, including Unitarian, Universalist, Materialistic, Spiritualist, and Agonist.

The building was constructed so that the Town Hall business would take place in the brick aboveground basement and church services (the term church was first used in the 1853 record; before this date meeting house was used) would occur in the upper level; therefore, civic and religious functions would be literally separate. The Town spent \$1,426.06 to construct the basement. Sales of pews in the new building raised \$3,858 towards the church's construction. The Building Committee purchased the current bell for the new church building in 1844 from H.N. Hooper & Company of Boston for \$294.28. Funds in the amount of

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\$10.38 were also paid to church member Joseph Manning for the transportation of the bell, bell rope, etc. The new church was first designed to include a cupola, but later it was decided to build a steeple similar to the one at the First Church Unitarian of Littleton constructed in that town in 1841 (LIT.56). The churches in Chelmsford and Littleton have very similar designs, including temple fronts with paired Ionic columns in antis, a broad entablature, large half-round windows in the pediment, as well as three tall windows bays on the side walls. Further research is recommended to determine the relationship between the two church buildings, since they exhibit so many similarities and were constructed within a couple of years of each other.

The basement held Town Hall meetings, other public meetings, and social events until 1879, at which date Town meeting functions relocated to a building on North Road. The Town officially ceded its rights to the basement space to the church in 1884 for \$100. Once the transaction was completed the parish converted the basement into space for a vestry, kitchen, ladies' room, library, and cloak room.

After the steeple was destroyed by wind in 1876, a subscription raised \$463.16 to include a clock in the new steeple and in January 1877 the Village Clock Association assumed responsibility for its maintenance. In 1892 the Town took over this responsibility even though the building was by then solely used for religious purposes.

In 1912 the parish installed a box near the front door of the church that included the key to the building. The key was to be used to gain entry to the steeple to ring the bell to alert the Town of fire. Although the steeple was damaged in 1910 and again in 1955, the clock has remained a part of the building. The following year the interior of the church underwent renovation, including new windows along the side walls. The renovations were made under the direction of local architect, Edwin Ruthren Clark. Clark (1868-1943, born in Andover) was working as an architect in his own studio in Chelmsford in the early twentieth century. According to the 1910 and U.S. Population Census records, he resided on Bartlett Street with wife Luella (1859-1939, née Simonds) and her sister Carrie Richardson (born ca. 1862), who was listed as decorator of china. When the couple married in 1892 they lived in Lowell, but relocated to Chelmsford in 1910. Clark also designed the first high school in Chelmsford Center, which opened in 1918. Clark's other works include the 1917 Tobey Memorial Library in Wareham (WAR.19), the 1908 Highland Public School in Carlisle (CAR.3), and several private residences.

The 1955 rear addition, including the McFarlin Chapel, was designed by the architectural firm of Kilham, Hopkins, Greeley & Brodie. The firm was the descendent of the famous Boston firm of Kilham & Hopkins founded in 1899 or 1900 by Walter Harrington Kilham (1868-1948) and James Cleveland Hopkins (1873-1938). William Roger Greeley (1881-1966) joined the firm in 1916 and Walter S. (Steve) Brodie (1911-1985) joined in 1945. The firm in its many forms designed numerous buildings throughout Massachusetts, of which over 120 buildings are documented on Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Forms. The chapel was named for Miss Susie McFarlin (ca. 1860-1949), church member and strong supporter of the Society. Miss McFarlin was also a well-liked teacher in Chelmsford schools until her retirement in 1929. The 1930 census lists her on River Neck Road living with a lodger, Herbert Scholfield and housekeeper Etta A. Amsden.

The Building Inspection drawings for the 1955 addition includes a sheet for the steeple restoration. On June 13, 1955, the steeple was again struck by lightning, necessitating the restoration. The work was completed by Arthur Englund (1903-1994), who was a registered architect then working out of Lowell at 97 Central Street. Although his office was in Lowell, Englund lived in Chelmsford on Old Westford Road.

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Alterations to the Building

Changes to the church interior and site include the following:

- March 21, 1876 – strong winds blew over the steeple; the repaired steeple that featured the installation of a clock was dedicated on May 17, 1876
- 1885: two furnaces were added to the basement
- 1888: interior of the church was renovated including, an added aisle, pew rearrangement, enlarged and lowered pulpit platform, relocation of the choir loft, application of wallpaper to the walls and ceiling
- 1890: landscaping improvements organized by the Village Improvement Association the created a lawn, central walk, and other improvements
- 1903/1904: gas lighting installed
- 1910: steeple struck by lightning
- 1913: second interior renovation designed by Edwin Clark, architect; changes included, new windows on the side walls, triple window behind the pulpit, organ relocated, reduction of pulpit platform to original size prior to 1888, electricity installed, pew replacements, walls paneled, and ceiling painted
- 1917: removal of horse stables from south side of church building
- 1928: kitchen remodeled
- June 13, 1955: steeple again struck by lightning; replaced with a similarly designed, but stronger steeple
- 1955: addition of Sunday School and Chapel at the rear of the church building; dedicated September 23, 1956
- 1967: installation of four new chandeliers
- 1968: installation of new pipe organ, designed by Dr. Edward Gammons*, who also designed the organ for the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. in 1938
- 1993: installation of elevator
- 2014: Chalice Labyrinth added next to south wall of church building

*Dr. Edward "Ned" Gammons (born ca. 1926) was a well-known church organist and choirmaster, and well highly regarded for he knowledge of organ construction. Dr. Gammons earned degrees in music and fine arts from Harvard University. Dr. Gammons was the organist and choirmaster at St. Stephen's Church in Cohasset, MA before relocating to the Christ Church Cathedral in Houston, TX in 1938 where he designed a new organ for the church. In 1940 Dr. Gammons returned to New England for an organist position at the Groton School in Groton, MA, which he retained until 1974. It was during his tenure at Groton that he designed the organ for the First Parish Church.

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Dedication Ceremony for the new clock and restored steeple, May 17, 1876. (Chelmsford Historical Society.)



Ca. 1900 photograph after landscaping improvements were implemented. (Chelmsford Historical Society.)

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Detail of primary façade of First Parish Church, facing northwest. January 2016.

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Detail of north of church, facing south. January 2016.



Detail of south wall of church, facing north. January 2016.

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Sunday School, facing south. January 2016.



McFarlin Chapel, facing south. January 2016.