

(each photo here)

FORM B - BUILDING SURVEY

213

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

1. Is this building historically significant to:
Town Commonwealth Nation

Building has historical connection with the following themes: (see also reverse side)

- Scholar
- Agriculture
- Art/Sculpture
- Education
- Government
- Literature
- Music
- Commerce/industry
- Science/invention
- Travel/communication
- Military Affairs
- Religion/philosophy
- Indians
- Other _____

Development of town/city

Architectural reason for inventorying:

2. Town Chelmsford

Street address 2 Westford Street

Name 1st Parish Unitarian-Universalist Church

Use: original & present Church - town hall/parsonage

Present owner 1st Congregational Society (Unitarian-Universalist)

Open to public yes - services by appointment

Date 1842 Style Greek Revival

Source of date Waters, History of Chelmsford

Architect _____

OR part of Area # _____

3. CONDITION Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Moved Altered Added see attached sheet

4. DESCRIPTION

FOUNDATION/BASEMENT: High Regular Low Material brick

WALL COVER: Wood post-boards boards-clapboard Brick Stone Other _____

ROOF: Ridge Gambrel Flat Hip Mansard
Tower Cupola Dormer windows left rear Balustrade Grillwork _____

CHIMNEYS: 1 2 3 4 Center End Interior Irregular

STORIES: 1 2 3 4

PORCHES: 1 2 3 4 PORTICO _____ Balcony _____

FACADE: Gable end: Front/side Ornament sign on front right see attached sheet

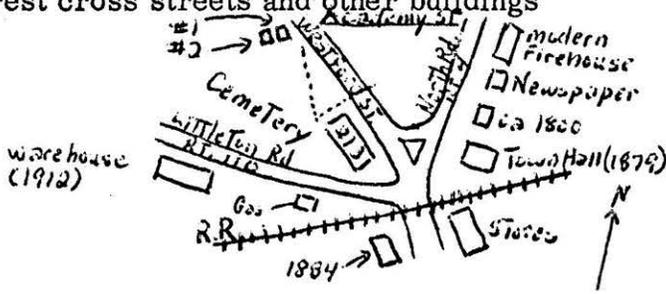
Entrance: Side Front Center/Side Details: see attached sheet

Windows: Spacing: Regular/Irregular Identical/Varied sanctuary sides - 3 pairs arched windows - 21 pairs 15 over

Corners: Plain Pilasters Quoins Cornerboards very wide

5. Indicate location of building in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings

6. Footage of structure from street 35
Property has 525 feet frontage on street



Recorder Jane B Drury

For Chelmsford Historical Commission

Photo # 9-12A Date June 23, 1973

SEE REVERSE SIDE

RELATION OF SURROUNDING TO STRUCTURE

- 1. Outbuildings _____
 - 2. Landscape Features: Agriculture Open Wooded Garden: Formal/Informal
 Predominant features Bushes at front. Graveyard Cemetery at rear
 Landscape architect _____
 - 3. Neighboring Structures
 Style: ~~Colonial~~ Federal Greek Revival Gothic Revival Italian Villa Lombard Rom.
 Venetian Gothic Mansard Richardsonian Modern
- Use: Residential Commercial Religious Conditions: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

GIVE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE OF SITE (Refer and elaborate on theme circled on front of form)

As the first, and for many years the only, church in town, this church has a long history inextricably connected with that of the town. The first minister, Rev. John Fiske, came with neighbors from Wethers + Woburn to Chelmsford in 1655. In those early days every inhabitant was expected to pay his ministerial tax. The present building is the 4th to stand on the site + was built in 1840. The Town at a cost of \$1,426.06 built the brick basement, above ground, which was used as a Town Hall until 1879. It was also used for public meetings + social gatherings. In 1876 the steeple blew down, + about 1910 it was struck by lightning "which followed the weight + chain of the clock" - an accident which occurred June 13, 1955. The clock in the steeple was purchased by subscriptions for \$463.16 in 1877; to the present day the payment for its care comes from Town appropriation. The clock is hand wound once a week.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND/OR REFERENCE

*Waters, "History of Chelmsford" (1917)
 Chelmsford Newsweekly (1955)*

RESTRICTIONS _____

Original Owner: First Congregational Society (Unitarian-Universalist)
 Deed Information: Book Number _____ Page _____, _____ Registry of Deeds

1st Parish Unitarian-Universalist Church
Westford Street

Altered:

Many changes have been made through the years in both the Sanctuary and the vestry (basement). In 1887 the basement was refitted for use as a vestry; the original entrance to the hall was retained, but a new one was made by the addition of a stairway from the narthex. The selectmen's room was enlarged to become the kitchen, and a stage was added at one end of the vestry. In 1888 the church itself was renovated. In 1915 the interior was made over in colonial style. The kitchen was remodeled during the 1960's.

Attachments:

On Dec. 18, 1955 the ground-breaking ceremony was held for the Sunday School building and Children's Chapel (attached to the rear of the Sanctuary). This addition was dedicated Sept. 23, 1956.

Two one-story brick boiler rooms (the old one now is a part of the kitchen) extend from the basement on the Littleton Road side.

Entrance:

6 granite steps lead to an inset doorway with a window (top half stained glass) flanked on each side by an ionic column and a plain door.

Ornament: sign on the right side of the front

"First
Congregational
Society
Unitarian
Organized Nov. 13, 1655
The first Meeting-House was
built about 1660, the second
in 1712, the third in 1792,
The present Meeting House
was built in 1842."

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

CALLS TO CHURCH

Drums
Hist.
P. 48

1659, found among Town Charges
"For the payment for a drum to Henry Farwell - f 3-5-0"

1680
Hist.
p. 687

OLD CHURCH BELL

Voted: "Ther shold bee a bell bought for the Towns use and that ther shold be so much land sould out of The Common as will purchase the Bell, and hange him in the meeting house. That is to say if the townes stock in hand will not doe it, then to sell the land."
The date on the bell was 1682.

The old bell was sold and went to Tynngsboro for a school house.
Sold to Cyrus Baldwin.
See Allens Hist. p. 26)

NEW CHURCH BELL

Town appropriated f100 to purchase an English Bell of 700 weight and "hang the same." (Hist. p. 680)

Town consented to have the new bell rung at twelve o'clock day and nine in the evening at the expense of those who desired it.

When the church was burned, the old bell purchased in 1793 was melted by the fire.

A number of small bells were made from this metal and sold to raise money for the church (see Hist. p. 688)

CLUBS

1671

It was ordered by the Selectmen that "Every male person within our townes above the age of fiveten years shall provid a good clube of fouer or five foot in length with a knobe in the end and to bringe the same to the meeting house ther to leave the same untill ocaton fore use of it."

Signed the name of the Rest By
Sam Adams

Clerke."

(Hist. p. 61)

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY

REV. JOHN FISKE

Married widow of Major Henchman. Elizabeth.
Died in 1676 (Allen's Hist. p. 124)

Had been failing for a year.

For several Sundays was carried to church in a chair and preached sitting.

Rev. Thomas Clarke was hired to help out.

(See Hist. p. 65)

Prepared a catechism which was printed at the expense of the church. One was in the Library of the late George Livermore of Cambridge, which was bought by the Lenox Library of New York for \$106; At the auction sale of the Livermore Collection.

The Title: "The Watering of the Olive Plant in Christs Gardens or a short catechism for the first Entrance of our Chelmsford children."

Hist. p. 23

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY

Church land for the first meeting house in Chelmsford.

Nov. 22. At Town Meeting it was voted that 30 acres of meadow land and 30 acres of plowable land, and a house 38 ft. in length and 20 ft. in width, with 3 fire places, chimneys built of brick or stone, be provided for the minister, Rev. John Fiske. He to be paid fifty pounds for the first year and his maintenance "as the Lord shall enable us for the future".
See Hist. P. 12-19.

1679

The Ministry Land is recorded as follows:

"The 31st of May, 1679, by the Townes Gifts and Order was laid out to the ministry and for that only use for ever in Chelmsford to say Thirty Acres of Upland and Swaes bee it more or les and is bounded East by the highway to the training field, South upon a great rock, North by the land of Mr. Cornelius Walldow, with a strait line to a stake with a heape of stones about it which is a Westerly corner of John Bates his land and so of a strait line to a pine neare stoney brooke path, North West, bounded upon the Towne Common upland to a black oake and from thence in a strait line to a Red Oake neare the land that was given by the Towne to Mr. Fiske and his sonne John Fiske and from thence to a great Rock southerly all waies provided ther bee a profitient carbe way left beetwine the land of the above sayd Fiske and the fore mentioned land, which way is to bee the Foure polles in breadth. In witness here unto wee the Comnity apointed to sette hear in have sett to our hands the day and years above sayd.

William Underwood

John Fiske

Comnity"

The Records of the Church were kept by Rev. John Fiske from 1634 to 1675.

They were found by David Pulsifer of Boston at the home of Rev. Fiske's grandson Samuel (son of Moses) in Salem, Mass. Mr. Pulsifer made a copy for Rev. Dr. Dexter which is in Yale University Library. After Mr. Pulsifer died the book came into possession of Dr. Samuel A. Green of the Mass. Hist. Soc. Dr. Green copied and published parts of the records in 1898 entitled "Extracts from the note book of the Rev. John Fiske - 1637-1675"
Chelmsford Eagle Dec. 15, 1893.
Hist. p. 19

No record of the First Meeting House. see Hist. p. 17.

The old meeting house was repaired "both outside to keep out rain and snow and also withinside such Inbargement as may be needful and in particular a long table from one allee to another."
See hist. p. 47.

It was voted to build a new meeting house and that it should be "fifty tow foots in length and forty tow foots in bredth and twenty four foot between joynts, 25 foot spar and a terit to hang the bell in."
The old house was not to be defaced until the new be fit to meet in.
Hist. p. 676)

1712

July 1 The building was accepted by the Town and a committee appointed "to seat the new meeting house."
Women sat on one side, men on the other.
Hist. p. 678)

See

The meeting house was repaired.

May 13 (From Bridges Diary) "obliged, by reason of ye meeting house, its leaking, to preach in ye pew all day."
(Hist. p. 792

May 15 (Bridges Diary) (Hist. p. 793)
"Pulpit wet. Omitted reading"

Oct. 16 "afraid to stay to preach the pulpit being so wett and damp by reason of rain."

(Hist. p. 680)

The new house was decided to be 64 x 30 ft. To be 12 ft. longer and 23 inches wider. Windows to be semi-circle. There was to be a steeple and a "vain or weather cock on the top of the spear". Underpinning to be of hewed stone, two ft. above the ground. One tier of pews around the gallery and two rows on each side the broad alley. 52 sq. pews on the floor each $6\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in size. To have banisterr, not to be painted. The cushion on the new pulpit was ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ covered with baige which cost ten shillings. The whole trimming for the pulpit cost f 15.

Apr. 7. Finished pulling down the old house.
May Began raising the new house, finished the last of May
(Hist. p. 794)

March 14, The church was burned. (p. 685)

April 19. The new meeting house was dedicated. The basement was built of brick, to be used as a Town Hall. (until 1879)

The Town at this time has no Town Hall. Was built in 1879)

1888

The Church was removated and rededicated.

Was made over in Colonial style.

See Hist. P. 685-6)

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

9. 65 Rev. John Fiske: gave a silver cup, marked on the bottom
774 "J.F.L.C.C."
(John Fiske Legacy to the Church of Chelmsford)
Cup made by John Dixwell, Boston, Goldsmith.

Rev. Samson Stoddard: Gave a Silver Tankard to the Church
(see Allens Hist. p. 118)

Joshua Henshaw Esq. of Boston presented a "very elegant" folio Bible to the Church to be read on the Lord's Day. This was rebound at the expense of the church in 1812. Was Printed. On thick wire wove paper in large fair type. Exceeds any edition of the Bible. (See Allen's Hist. p. 51-52).

LOANED TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- 1842 Holy Bible , illustrated. Presented to the Church in 1842 by Oliver March Esq. of Lowell.

Hymns of the Spirit
Leather binding. Pulpit copy.

Up to 1830 Town supported church
 Gave the land
 Built the Church and Paid the Minister.

In 1831 The Parish voted to choose its own officers and
 transact its business.

List of Ministers	Rev. John Fiske	1653-1676
	(In Wrentham 1642@1655)	
	Rev. Thomas Clark	1677-1704
	Rev. Sampson Stoddard	1708-1740
	Rev. Ebenezer Bridge	1741-1792
	Rev. Hezekiah Packard	1793-1802
	Rev. Wilkes Allen	1803-1832
	Rev. William Andrews	1836-1838
	Rev. John Lewis Russell	1839-1842

Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Vol. 2, pg. 40-41

"The Father (Ebenezer Bridge, Sr.), who above fifty years has sustained the office of the minister, last year deceased. The old house was abandoned when its old possessor left it. Proposals were desired to erect one upon a better plan. Gen. B. with other inhabitants engaged to erect one for 1000L, & the old House worth 30L or to receive 400L & the privilege of selling all the pews and seats. The last offer was accepted. The house is completely finished, tho' not upon any consistent plan. It is underpinned with stones split & faced from a quarry in Westford, some of which a foot in height are between 9 & 10 feet in length. The frame of the whole building is of oak, & the posts of the Tower are above 60 feet high. The house is painted well without, & the Steeple is more modern than such as are commonly found. The Tower is joined to the Steeple by a belfry yet destitute of a Bell, but they have not a pleasing effect together. The interior part of the house is painted upon the front of the Galleries & the pulpit, & there is gilding below the pannels in chinese work. The Canopy is pendant, the window executed in the Italian, but not bold enough for a good effect. The roof is little arched, but the work under the galleries arched boldly. There is a swell in the front gallery which has a good effect, & would have a greater, provided the gallery was but half the depth. The pews are square & inconvenient but as the pulpit has two flights of steps, & the long seats open before the pulpit, the eye forgives the flat pannels in the projection of that principal object in a Meeting House. The front porch, if a porch can belong to a large & elegant building, has double pilasters on each side of the door in front, & the same on each side of the window over it. If pilasters belong to porches, when no columns belong to the House. We forgot the burying ground, while dinner was preparing (at the Railroad House) & we did not see it to be near, till we entered our carriages."

680: The Meeting House of 1792

"In 1784, some began to agitate for a new meeting-house, and plans were drawn. The next year the vote was 73 to 7 in favor of the old site.

In 1790, it was voted to build a new meeting-house 54 feet square. This was changed to 64 by 46 feet, and in 1792 the final decision was to have it 64 by 48 feet. There was to be a projection 12 feet in length and 23 inches wide. The windows in the gallery were to be 'Simecurcle.' There was to be a steeple, and a 'vain or wheather cock on the top of the speir.' The underpinning was to be of hewed stone two feet above the ground.

While this was building, the meetings were held in the hall at the tavern of Oliver Barron (2 Chelmsford St. site). There was to be one tier of pews around the gallery, and two rows on each side of the broad alley, and 52 square pews on the floor, each $6\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in size. They were to have bannisters, and were not to be painted. The cushion on the new pulpit was covered with baize which cost 10 shillings. The whole trimming for the pulpit cost L15. It was voted that the Town raise L400 and the old meeting house and the pews in the new, except the minister's pew, for building the new meeting-house.

1791. The sum of L300 was voted for the new building to be built 'on the hill where the old meeting house now stands.'

1793. The Town voted not to hang the old bell in the new meeting house, and L110 was appropriated to 'purtich' an English bell of seven hundred weight and hang the 'saim.'"

689 Description of Meeting House

"The meeting house which burned in 1842 had three large porches, on the south, east and west. These had staircases to reach the gallery, which round on three sides, and above this gallery were wall pews. The pulpit was on the north side and the singing seats were opposite this. The first row was for the men and women singers. There was a men's door and a women's door, and the men and women probably sat on opposite sides. Next above the singers were the men with fiddles of various sizes, clarionets and other instruments, but the fif was not allowed. The minister in the pulpit was on a level with the galleries, and the sounding board, which was shaped like an inverted umbrella, was over his head. There were eight steps to the pulpit, which was handsomely furnished with crimson satin damask. A window behind it had beautiful curtains. Below the pulpit sat the deacons.

About 1830, these were Joel Adams, Noah Spalding (who always sat in the middle), and Owen Emerson. The stove stood in front of the pulpit, and there were two funnels which went around the room. The minister was perhaps as much too warm as the people were too cold.

(This information is from a letter of Mrs. Luther Faulkner to H.S. Perham.)"

First Parish Unitarian Church
Westford Street

Waters, Page 685-6

"The two denominations (Unitarian & Universalist) could not conscientiously worship together, but after the burning of the meeting house in 1842, the two united in building the new meeting house. The Universalists held their services for a time in the Academy building.

There were at this time included in the First Congregational parish: the First Congregational Church, the Proprietors of the Chelmsford Centre Meeting House, the First Congregational Society and the Union Parish.

On the evening ofn the 14th of March, 1842, the meeting house was discovered to be on fire, and so far had the flames progressed that all attempts to save it were hopeless. The house with all its contents, Sunday School library, folio Bible, psalm books and bass viol were destroyed, and the bell melted by the intensity of the heat. It was beyond question the work of an incendiary. The neighboring buildings were saved with great difficulty.

1842. When the present meeting house was erected, the Town built a basement of brick, above ground, which was used as a Town Hall until the present building was erected in 1879. The basement cost \$1,426.06. This was used also for public meetings of various kinds and social gatherings. It was heated by a large stove. When there was a dance there, the fire was allowed to die down, and, with two sticks of cordwood under the stove, four men would solemnly march out with it, while the orchestra played the Dead March in Saul.

At Town Me eting, the room was often so full that the men had to adjourn to the common in order to poll the house, the ayes standing on one side and the noes on the other.

The new house was dedicated April 19, 1843. The Rev. Henry A. Miles of Lowell preached the sermon.

The Proprietors of the Chelmsford Centre Meeting House (Eli F. Webster, Amos Carlton, John C. Bartlett and their associated) were incorporated in 1843.

March 21, 1876, the steeple blew down, and was restored at considerable expense. A few years ago the steeple was struck by lightning, which followed the chain and weight of the clock on the interior of one of the columns, which it slightly damaged.

In 1878, the Union Parish was dissolved - and all its assets, claims and liabilities were transferred to the First Congregational Society.

Jan. 16, 1881, the 225th Anniversary of the establishment of the First Parish was celebrated. Rev. A.M. Sherman, acting pastor, delivered an historical address.

In 1888, the meeting house was renovated and rededicated.

In 1903, the Rev. C.A. Allen, grandson of Wilkes Allen, preached on the 100th Anniversary of the Ordination of the latter.

In 1915, the interior was made over in colonial style.

Waters, Page 689

"The four meeting houses were all built on nearly the same site.

Three types of meeting house were erected in New England. The first were square log houses, with clay-filled chinks, steep thatched roofs, and the beaten earth for floors. Wooden ~~steps~~ floors and lath and plaster were luxuries. We read later of some which were 'lathed on the inside, and so daubed and whitened over workmanlike.'

The second type was a square wooden building, perhaps unpainted, with a pyramidal roof, sometimes having a belfrey on the top, like that at Hingham.

The third type was that fashioned after the style which bears the name of Sir Christopher Wren, and which was the prevailing type in meeting houses after the early part of the 18th century. The Chelmsford meeting houses of 1792 and 1842 were built in this style."

Village Clock
2 Westford Street

Waters, page 594:

A Company or Association was formed January 27, 1877, with Moses C. Wilson, president, E.K. Parkhurst, vice president, Henry S. Perham, secretary, and Joseph Reed, treasurer.

Report of the Treasurer of the Village Clock Company

Bills Paid	
Howard & Co. for the Clock	\$275.00
Green and Hagerman	145.02
Mrs. Robinson, for Board	4.00
Cole and Nichols, for weight	20.74
Fiske and Spalding's bill	3.13
E.K. Parkhurst, for freight	3.30
N.P. Dadmun's bill	11.97
	<u>\$463.16</u>
Amount of money received from all sources	463.61
Balance in the hands of the Treasurer	.55
Chelmsford, Dec. 24, 1877	Joseph Reed, Treasurer
Received since the above was made	.50

The clock was purchased with money subscribed for that purpose, the amounts ranging from \$1 to \$25.

Until 1892, the care of the clock was paid for by subscription. Since then the Town has made an appropriation for that purpose. The last officers elected were J. Adams Bartlett, president, Joseph E. Warren, vice president, Harry L. Parkhurst, secretary and treasurer.

Middlesex North District Registry of Deeds

Copied by Jane Drury

North: Book 169, Page 115

June 19, 1884

Inhabitants of the Town of Chelmsford to First Congregational Society

"We, the inhabitants of the Town of Chelmsford in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in consideration of \$100 paid by the First Congregational Society, a religious body corporate in said Chelmsford, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do hereby remise, release, and forever quitclaim unto the said First Congregational Society all our right, title and interest in and to the basement story of the Church building now occupied by said society, said basement having been occupied by said Inhabitants as and for a Town Hall up to the date hereof. This deed is made in accordance with the vote of said Inhabitants, at their last annual meeting authorizing the Selectmen of said Town to take such action relative to the disposal of the interest of said inhabitany in said Hall as in their judgement would be for the best interest of the Town, which vote at said annual meeting dated March 17th 1884, was as follows, viz: Voted, that the subject matter in said article (16) be referred to the Selectmen, with authority to dispose of the rights or interest of the town in the old Town Hall at the centre of the town....."

June 19, 1884 Signed
Aug. 30, 1884 Witnessed
Sept. 6, 1884 Recorded

Chelmsford Newsweekly (1955): April 1887

"Since the relinquishment by the town in 1885 of its interest in the old town hall, which is the basement of the Unitarian Church, the ladies of the society have been assiduously working to obtain means by fairs and entertainments to remodel the room and fit it up for parish purposes. One familiar with the old hall, with its bare walls, meagre furnishings and generally grimy appearance, would fail to recognize in the neat and attractive rooms the dingy resort not inaptly termed 'the cellar' where for nearly forty years the citizens met in annual town meetings to fight their municipal battles. Want of space will permit but a brief description of the transformation which has been brought about by the labors of the carpenter, painter and paper hanger, supplemented by the tasteful adornments provided by the ladies of the society. While the original entrance to the hall has been retained, a new one has been made by a stairway from the church. Descending this one lands in the kitchen, which is the former selectmen's room, enlarged, and with its commodious pantry, dish closets, numerous drawers and other appointments, is the pride of our thrifty housekeepers. Upon the right of the main entrance to the hall is an ample cloak room. The auditorium, with its papered ceiling and walls, new chandeliers and handsomely framed pictures (two of the latter being a gift of the Misses Richardson) is a very cosy and attractive room and will seat comfortably 200 persons. At the north end is a raised platform with folding doors which is designed primarily for the ladies' parlor, and with its handsome carpet and drapery curtains presents a very homelike appearance.

The formal opening of dedication occurred Wednesday evening and was attended by representatives of the several religious societies in the village. Mr. J.A. Bartlett presided and after a brief review of the history of the ancient parish, happily introduced the speakers, Revs. J.A. Chase, pastor of the society, C.C. Hussey of Billerica, James Danforth of Tyngsborough, J.L. Seward of Lowell and Mr. E.H. Warren of Chelmsford. The remarks of the speakers were quite felicitous and deservedly complimentary to the ladies. A just tribute was also paid by Mr. Seward to the admirable work which in various directions is being done by Rev. Mr. Chase. Excellent instrumental music was furnished by Dr. A. Howard and Miss Mabel P. Emerson, and a vocal selection, 'Curfew Bells' by a quartette consisting of Messrs. Harry L. Parkhurst and Frank A. Emerson, Mrs. Harry L. Parkhurst and Miss Carrie Proctor. Two poems, written for the occasion, were read, one composed by Mrs. Martha L. Emerson of Boxford, a native of Chelmsford, and effectively read by Miss Celia Richardson, the other read by its author, Mrs. Geo. A. Parkhurst. At the conclusion of the programme a collation was served which terminated a most enjoyable evening.

Unitarian Church
2 Westford St.

Page 53: Around the Unitarian Church From notebook of Miss Frances Andrews

Was an uneven, barren, waste of land.....no green lawns....no shrubbery,.....no graded walks,.....no hardened roadbeds.....but diverse ruts, through drifting sands and rolling stones.

(See Chelmsford Eagle, Jan. 1, 1876)

A subscription was started by the villagers and the V.I.A. to grade the hill from the church to the depot; lay out walks and plant shrubbery.

Lowell Weekly Journal

Jan. 4, 1887 - Remodelling the basement of the Unitarian church for a vestry is well underway. A.W. Holt has the contract.

Oct. 15, 1887

Since the relinquishment by the town in 1885 of its interest in the old town hall, which is the basement of the Unitarian church, the ladies of the society have been assiduously working to obtain means by fairs and entertainments to remodel the room and fit it up for parish purposes. One familiar with the old hall, with its bare walls, meagre furnishings and generally grimy appearance, would fail to recognize in the neat and attractive rooms the dingy resort not inaptly termed "the cellar," where for nearly forty years the citizens met in annual town meeting to fight their municipal battles. Want of space will permit but a brief description of the transformation which has been brought about by the labors of the carpenter, painter and paper hanger, supplemented by the tasteful adornments provided by the ladies of the society. While the original entrance to the hall has been retained, a new one has been made by a stairway from the church. Descending this one lands in the kitchen, which is the former selectman's room, enlarged, and with its commodious pantry, dish closets, numerous drawers and other appointments, is the pride of our thrifty housekeepers. Upon the right of the main entrance to the hall is an ample cloak room. The auditorium, with its papered ceiling and walls, new chandeliers and handsomely-framed pictures (two of the latter being the gift of the Misses Richardson), is a very cosy and attractive room, and will comfortably seat 200 people. At the north end is a raised platform with folding doors, which is designed primarily for a ladies' parlor, and with its handsome carpet and drapery curtains presents a very homelike appearance. The formal opening or dedication occurred Wednesday evening and was attended by representatives of the several religious societies of the village.....

July 20, 1888 - The interior of the Unitarian church is to be remodelled the present season, and the work will be pushed forward as rapidly as possible this summer.

Aug. 3, 1888 - A.W. Holt has the contract for the remodelling of the Unitarian church. This will include re-arrangement of the pews, lowering and enlargement of the pulpit platform, a room on each side of the desk, a reduction of the size of the gallery and of the windows. The walls and ceiling are to be papered and there will be an additional aisle. The choir loft will be changed from the present location to the right of the desk. A new carpet will be provided, and these modifications with others of a minor character will make the auditorium one of the most attractive in this vicinity.

Lowell Weekly Journal
Unitarian Church

Nov. 16, 1888 Interior Improvements - An Attractive Auditorium

The improvements upon the interior of the Unitarian church at Chelmsford, which have been in progress since the first of August, are now substantially completed, and a description of the important changes which appear in the modernized auditorium will, it is thought, possess a special interest for many former residents of the town who will be gratified to learn of this evidence of vitality and progress in the venerable society with which they were connected in earlier years. According to tradition and history the meeting house is the fourth which has stood upon or near the present site and is in the direct line of succession from the original structure which was erected in 1654, and probably constructed of logs, as the first saw mill was not in operation until 1656. The other meeting houses bear date as follows: 1712, 1792 and 1842. The third house, as our older citizens well remember, was destroyed by fire which was supposed to be of incendiary origin. Thus much in the historical line.

Beginning our notice of the changes with the vestibule, we find that the old Sunday school library has been removed and the walls neatly papered. There are now three entrances to the auditorium, a wide one in the centre with double swinging door being an addition. These of course correspond in location with the aisles, of which there were formerly but two. A portion of the large gallery over the vestibule has been removed, but there are still seating accommodations for about fifty persons. The establishment of side aisles has placed the wall pews nearer the centre of the house, thus making them in some respects more desirable than before. The pews are placed on a curvilinear line, a position which has obvious advantages. The old seats are retained with such modifications as the new arrangement necessitated. The

cushions have received a new covering of olive damask, the work of the ladies of the society, and with the skilful work of the painter's brush, the pews have the appearance of newness in harmony with their surroundings. Perhaps the most striking change has been made in the pulpit and its vicinity. The pews upon either side, once the most eligible in the church, but latterly shunned on account of their conspicuous location, have been removed, and their place is substituted on the left, a room for the pastor, and upon the right, the choir loft with ample recess left for a pipe organ, which is one of the appointments the future has in store. At this end of the house are three arches in gothic style, the central and larger forming the pulpit recess and bearing the inscription "Deal Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with Thy God;" over the left arch are the words "Serve the Lord with Gladness," and the right bears the injunction, "Oh Sing Praises Unto the Lord." The pulpit platform has been brought down nearer to a level with the pews, and nothing has been retained of its accessories except the desk, a concession to the conservative spirit of some of the older members. Modern pulpit chairs replace the old time long sofa, which gave one the impression that the single occupant must feel lonesome. Another marked transformation is seen in the new windows. While there is no change in the size, it is reduced in appearance by the introduction of a perpendicular centre bar, and an arched top in gothic style. The centre lights are of clear glass with border of small colored panes, giving a very pleasant effect without the obscuration sometimes described as "a dim religious light," which is full often a trial to the eyesight of the worshipper. There is but one memorial window and that is in the old choir gallery. It is given in remembrance of the late Dr. J.C. Bartlett, for more than 30 years chorister of the church, and is a tribute of the esteem from past members of the choir who were associated with him. The lower half of the window in appearance resembles the main windows above described. Upon the upper half are two musical instruments crossed and upon these rests an open book. Below in a scroll appear the words, "In Memoriam, John C. Bartlett."

The facilities for lighting the church are excellent. There is a large central chandelier with 12 burners, and in each corner is suspended a Rochester lamp which gives a very strong light. There is also a lamp over the desk and the choir is similarly lighted. Both walls and ceiling are papered, the tint of the former being an orange terra cotta which imparts a warmth of tone not secured by a white or drab surface. A new carpet harmonizing in color with its surroundings completes our inventory of the appointments of the attractive auditorium. Materials or labor were supplied by the following individuals or firms: Carpenter work, A.W. Holt; painting and papering, W.H. Spalding & Co., Lowell; windows, Amasa Pratt & Co., Lowell; memorial window, W.I. McPherson, Boston; pulpit furniture and carpet, Adams & Co., Lowell. The committee in charge of the work, Mrs. J.M. Fletcher, Mrs. Wm. Fletcher and Mr. J.A. Bartlett, have given most faithful service and may well felicitate themselves upon the results. In recognition of the importance and the completion of this society enterprise there will be public services in the church Wednesday evening, 21st inst.

First Parish Unitarian Church
Westford Street

Chelmsford "Newsweekly" (1955): First Parish Congregational (Unitarian) Society

"As the first and for many years the only church in town, the First Congregational (Unitarian) Church has a long history inextricably connected with that of the town. After this year, only the members of the Society contributed toward the support of the ministry. Previously, every inhabitant was expected to pay his 'ministerial tax.'

The present building is the fourth to stand on this site and was constructed in 1842. The town built the brick basement of the building and until the Town Hall was built in 1879, this basement was used for town meetings and various public gatherings. It is interesting to find that in 1876 the steeple blew down and in about 1910 it was struck by lightning 'which followed the chain and weight of the clock' -- an accident which recurred on June 13, 1955. Plans are now completed for restoring the steeple and for building a parish at the rear of the church building. Work is expected to begin in October. Several years ago the former home of Mr. & Mrs. Walter J.E. Martel at Putnam Avenue and First Street was purchased as a parsonage but sold when Miss Susan S. McFarlin bequeathed her home in 1950 for that purpose. This too was later sold, and the present parsonage at 43 Acton Road purchased. Many changes have been made through the years in both the church auditorium and the vestry. Among recent gifts to the Society is the Wurlitzer organ, given by Gerald M. Kennedy, in memory of his wife, the late Dorothy Kennedy Emerson, in 1950.

Active organizations of the Society are the Evening Alliance, the Women's Alliance, the Liberal Religious Youth group, the Men's Club and the Unitarian Players, a dramatic group.

Pastors of the ancient church have been: Rev. John Fisk, 1655-1676; Rev. Thomas Clark, 1677-1704; Rev. Sampson Stoddard, 1708-1740; Rev. Ebenezer Bridge, 1741-1792½; Rev. Hezekiah Packard, 1793-1802; Rev. Wilkes Allen, 1803-1832; Rev. William Andrews, 1836-1838; Rev. John Lewis Russell, ;840-1842.

Rev. Darius Forbes, 1844-1845; Rev. Frederick F. Thayer, 1845-1847; Rev. Charles W. Mellen, 1849-1853; Rev. William Morse, 1854-1856; Rev. Russell A. Ballou, 1856- 1858; Rev. Horace W. Morse, 1860-1867; Rev. Fiske Barrett, 1867-1869; Rev. Frederick W. Webber, 1870-1872; Rev. Duane V. Bowen, 1872-1874; Rev. Ezekiel Fitzgerald, 1874-1876; Rev. James J. Twiss, 1876-1879; Rev. Andrew M. Sherman, 1879-1881; Rev. Daniel F. Goddard, ;882-1883; Rev. Joseph A. Chase, 1883-1891; Rev. Granville Pierce, 1892-1901; Rev. Alfred D.K. Shurtleff, 1901-1907; Rev. Lorenzo L. Greene, 1907-1927; Rev. Lyman M. Greenman, 1928; Rev. Floyd J. Taylor, Rev. Edward Cahill, Rev. Karl Bach, Rev. Percy Brayton, Rev. Joseph Giunta, Rev. Philip Larson."

Chelmsford "Neweekly" (1955): Women's Alliance, First Parish Unitarian

"Before the War of the Rebellion there was a society known as the Ladies Charitable Society, composed of ladies of all denominations; the original object was to work for any worthy causes presented by any of the ladies.

When it passed out of existence is not really certain - but there had been a Ladies Society for many years. There was one connected with the Unitarian Church that met once a year to elect officers to enable it to hold trust funds. These funds were drawn out and the Society disbanded in 1876.

During the war of the Rebellion (1860), there was a Soldiers Aid Society composed of members of the different religious societies. Later there was a 'Freedman's Aid, and still later a 'Western Aid' of the great 'Chicago Fire' in 1871. These societies, having some definite object after the time of need, usually passed out of existence.

The present society, which was probably organized sometime between 1866-1868, has no existing records but presumably came to life in the latter part of the fall of 1868.

The Freedman's Aid Society was about to disband. A social and supper was held at Parkhurst's Hall (then standing where the flagman's house now is).

The ladies had been in the habit of meeting regularly and felt the need of some social organization. Mrs. Joseph Reed suggested that the ladies of the Unitarian Society should have a society of their own. The matter was talked over, and being favorably received, a meeting was called to be held at the house of Dr. Bartlett. The result of this meeting was the formation of the present Ladies' Circle, with Mrs. Maria Bartlett as president, Mrs. Emma L. Buzzell, vice president, and Mrs. Clorinda H. Parkhurst, secretary and treasurer, which had a large membership. The original object of the society was to work for any deserving charity which might be presented and also to hold socials. The money went toward fitting up the town hall for a vestry, whenever the Parish Committee could purchase it from the town.

Meetings of the society were held on Wednesday afternoons once every two weeks, at the home of some member. Attendance was always large.

During the winter months suppers were held. The gentlemen invited and accepted and with a general social in the evening, a very good time was enjoyed until nine or ten o'clock. These socials are looked back to with a great deal of pleasure by the older members of the parish.

In the latter part of the year 1875 it was voted to take the funds of the charitable society and purchase crockery. This was done in February, 1876, at a cost of somewhere over \$100.00. The charitable society, having met once a year to elect officers, was then disbanded. This crockery, with additions since made, is still in use.

After purchasing the crockery socials were held in the town hall until 1880, when the present town hall was built. From 1880 to 1886 the ladies met during the winter in the lower town hall or more appropriately named, the supper room.

During the year of 1886 the old town hall was purchased from the town by the standing committee of the Unitarian Society. Mr. Perley Perham and Mr. Adams Bartlett acted for the Parish.

At the Annual Meeting of the Ladies' Society on November 3, 1886 at the home of the president, Mrs. Joseph Fletcher, it was voted to engage a carpenter to look over the hall to see what the cost of fitting

it up as a vestry would be, within their means. Mr. Almon Holt was engaged to do the work, and on April 13, 1887 the Ladies' Parlor and Vestry was dedicated; the entire cost being about \$519.62. The money was raised by fairs, entertainment and by private donations.

Mrs. Joseph Fletcher had a large part of the work and other troubles incident to such responsibility. To her, due credit should be given for our now very enjoyable vestry.

Previous to this, two furnaces had been placed in the basement at a cost of \$406.00.

One important feature not directly connected with the Ladies' Circle was remodeling of the church in 1888. The committee included Mrs. Eliza A. Fletcher, Mrs. Harriet Bartlett, Mrs. Emma Buzzell and Mrs. Louise C. Howard, in connection with the Parish Committee.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Buzzell and Mrs. Fletcher the larger part of the money was raised by subscriptions; the impetus sermon by their pastor, Reverend Joseph A. Chase was followed by the earnest and indefatigable efforts of Mrs. Bartlett. The church was rededicated November 21, 1888.

The prosperity of the Parish commenced at that time and continued to the present date.

The hard work of the society commenced with their first fair, which was held October 31, 1883, netting the society \$119.42. In addition to fairs there were rummage sales, socials, dinners, etc.

I will mention a few of the most important donations of the circle: To the Sunday School Library, \$50.00; Piano for Vestry, \$285.00; To Church Organ Fund in 1906, \$100.00; Toilet room and other repairs, \$196.62; and lastly, in 1913 repairing church, \$750.00.

Many years the ladies furnished flowers for the church, commencing in 1892.

In 1895 through the efforts of Miss Emma J. Stevens, then president, the Ladies Sewing Circle joined the National Alliance.

In 1909 a very substantial donation was received from the will of Miss Mary Reed; the interest to be used for church purposes. The larger part of the work of the Society has been the making of articles for fairs held annually.

Outside of Parish work, they made garments for the 'Ministry at Large' in Lowell and also for the needy. At one time, bags of clothing went to Morgan Memorial in Boston and Barrels of clothing to the colored schools in the South; the expenses being too great to be continued.

For a number of years a sum of money has been sent to the American Unitarian Association.

At one time, each lady attending the meetings paid five cents, with twenty-five cents annual dues; later, it was twenty five cents dues, and five cents for every absentee. Neither rule being very popular, both were soon discarded....."

Lowell Daily Courier

Nov. 16, 1903 - At the Unitarian Church Sunday morning, the services were of a specially commemorative character. The date was the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Wilkes Allen as pastor of the church, his first settlement and which embraced 29 years of active devoted service. The last year of his residence here was 1834.

Speaking of the physical characteristics of his ancestor, his grandson Rev. Charles A. Allen of Waverly, said he was short, thick set with a large head, and his manners were grave as became a person of that period.

Dec. 4, 1903 - The work of equipping the Unitarian Church for lighting by gas is practically completed. Next will come the introduction of water into the basement.

Lowell Courier-Citizen

Aug. 5, 1908 - At a parish meeting of the Unitarian Society held in the church vestry at 7:30 this evening it was voted to make the proposed change in the location of the Bartlett memorial window subject to the action of a future meeting of the Ladies Circle and Alliance, which is to have the matter in charge. Plans for the alteration were submitted by Architect E.R. Clarke and met with the hearty approval of the executive committee.

Dec. 6, 1912 - Within a few days, a definite, public location of the key to the Unitarian church, to be used in gaining entrance to sound an alarm of fire, will have been established. Responding to a request made by Ralph P. Adams, chief of the local fire department, the standing committee of the Unitarian society have granted permission for the placing of the needed box near the door at the left, on the front of the church. Another box, also to have a key, is to be placed on the fire house. These boxes, which are to have a front of glass and are to be broken when the key is needed, are now being made by E.R. Marshall.

June 29, 1913 - Concluding with the service today, the Unitarian church will remain closed until September. During this time, plans for remodeling and redecorating the interior of the edifice, that have been prepared by Architect Edwin R. Clark, will be carried out.

Dec. 3, 1913 - The alterations being made in the auditorium of the Unitarian church are nearly completion. Five men began this morning on laying the floor, the final stage of the work.

Dec. 4, 1913 - Little more carpentry remains to be done in the alterations at the Unitarian church. The floor of the auditorium was completed last week and it is probable that services in the church will be resumed on Sunday, Dec. 21.

Jan. 4, 1914 - A large congregation attended the service at the Unitarian church this morning, used for the first time since an entire renovation of the auditorium was started in July. The result achieved is altogether pleasing to the people and of much credit to the committee appointed. In all its parts, the changed wrought are along the Colonial lines, in keeping with the architecture of the building. Windows of the above pattern have replaced those in the ~~pulpit~~, ~~-adding-~~ ~~new~~ sides and a new triple window has been placed in the wall at the rear of the pulpit, adding much to the lighting conditions. The gallery has been extended to a position occupied previous to changes made about 25 years ago, and the pipe organ, formerly at the right of the pulpit, is now placed there. A wall to match that on the opposite side of the pulpit, conceals the space where the organ used to stand. The memorial window to Dr. J.C. Bartlett, for many years organist of the society, has been placed in the center window at the entrance to the church. The treatment of the ceiling and walls is especially harmonious and pleasing, the ceiling being in soft shades of brown and the walls paneled in a similar color. The woodwork throughout is painted white, a cornice softening the lines between walls and ceiling. Electricity has been installed, the indirect system with four large alba globes suspended by chains serving amply for lighting the body of the church, wall lights in the gallery and a shaded light above the pulpit. In changing the location of the organ, need was found of altering its appearance to conform with the increased space allotted to it. It was remodelled and enlarged to meet the requirements under the direction of W.D. Goodwin of Lowell. The case has been finished in mahogany and the pipes, formerly silvered, are now gilded. The pulpit and furnishings are also finished in mahogany. The old pews, with the unsanitary cushions banished and fitted and most comfortable seats of wood in their stead, have been retained. A floor of beechwood has been laid throughout, covered between the aisles and upon the stairs and floor of the pulpit with carpet in subdued tones of green. Plans for the alterations were made by architect Edwin R. Clark and the committee in charge were composed of Arthur M. Warren, Mrs. Walter Perham, Mrs. Leroy J. Parkhurst, Miss Abbie Ford, and Harry L. Parkhurst.

May 23, 1916 - The roadway between Littleton and Westford streets, passing between the Unitarian church building and horsesheds has been closed to travel in accordance with a vote taken at the last annual meeting.

Lowell Courier-Citizen

Dec. 3, 1913 - The alterations being made in the auditorium of the Unitarian church are nearing completion. Five men began this morning on laying the floor, the final stage of the work.

Dec. 4, 1913 - Little more carpentry remains to be done in the alterations at the Unitarian church. The floor of the auditorium was completed last week and it is probable that services in the church will be resumed on Sunday, Dec. 21.

Jan. 2, 1914 - The morning services of the Unitarian society next Sunday will be held in the church for the first time since it was closed for alterations last July.

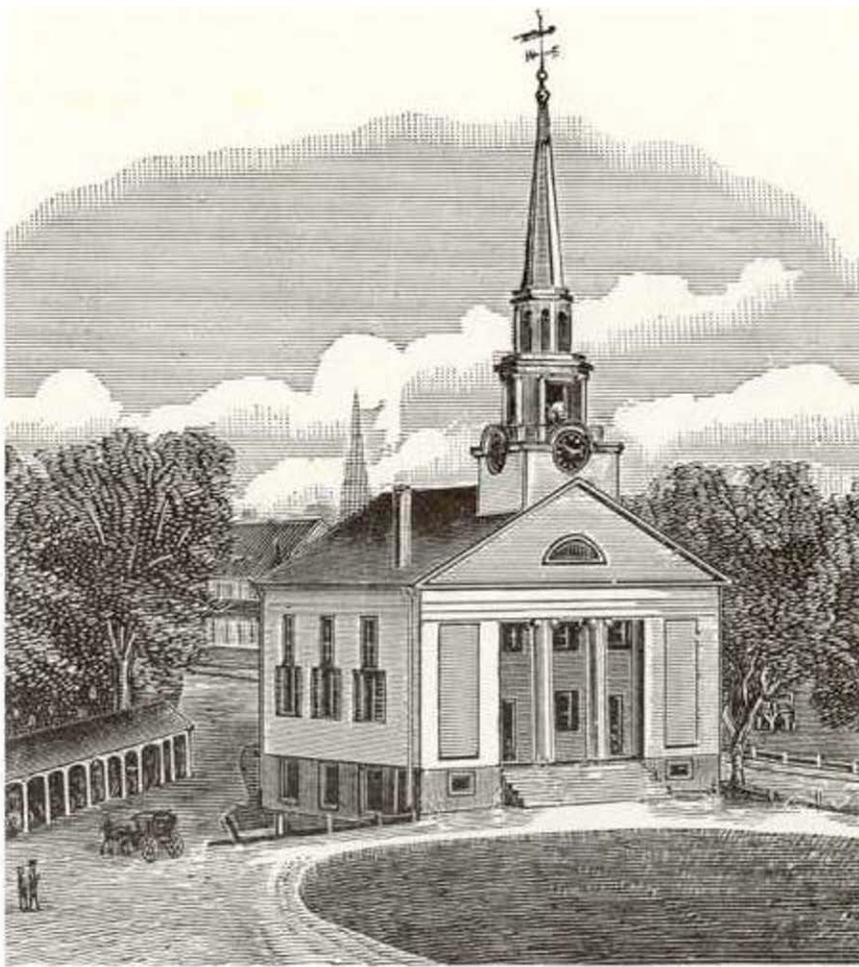
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Newspaper Clipping - Alliance Scrapbook
September 6, 1928

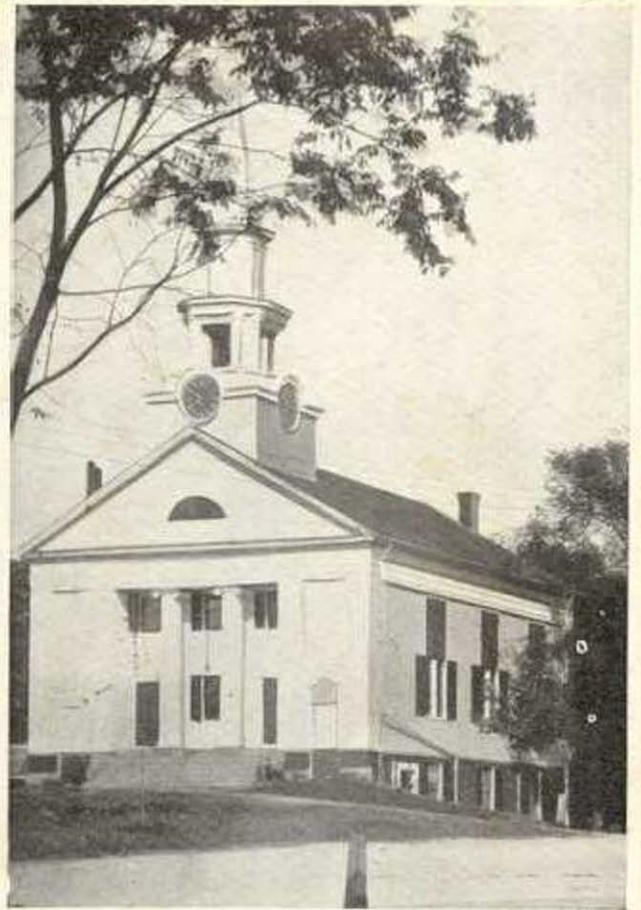
A number of changes being made in the lower part of the Unitarian church will add greatly to the convenience of the members. The kitchen has been enlarged and newly finished throughout and a large soapstone sink with ample drying space has been placed in the centre of the room.

New closets and several windows have been added to the vestry and will give added light and also may be used for serving. A stair-way has been built from the upper vestibule into the lower, a much needed addition, as the old one brought guests through the kitchen from the auditorium to the supper room, a method that was not convenient for the workers at a supper.

The old boiler room has been partly added to the kitchen space and the small coat room partition has been taken away, making a better entrance hall. On Wednesday the members of the Women's Alliance spent the day putting things to rights and getting the vestry ready for painting. Today the men of the parish turned out and gave the vestry a needed coat of paint. The room will be ready for the church services which open Sunday.

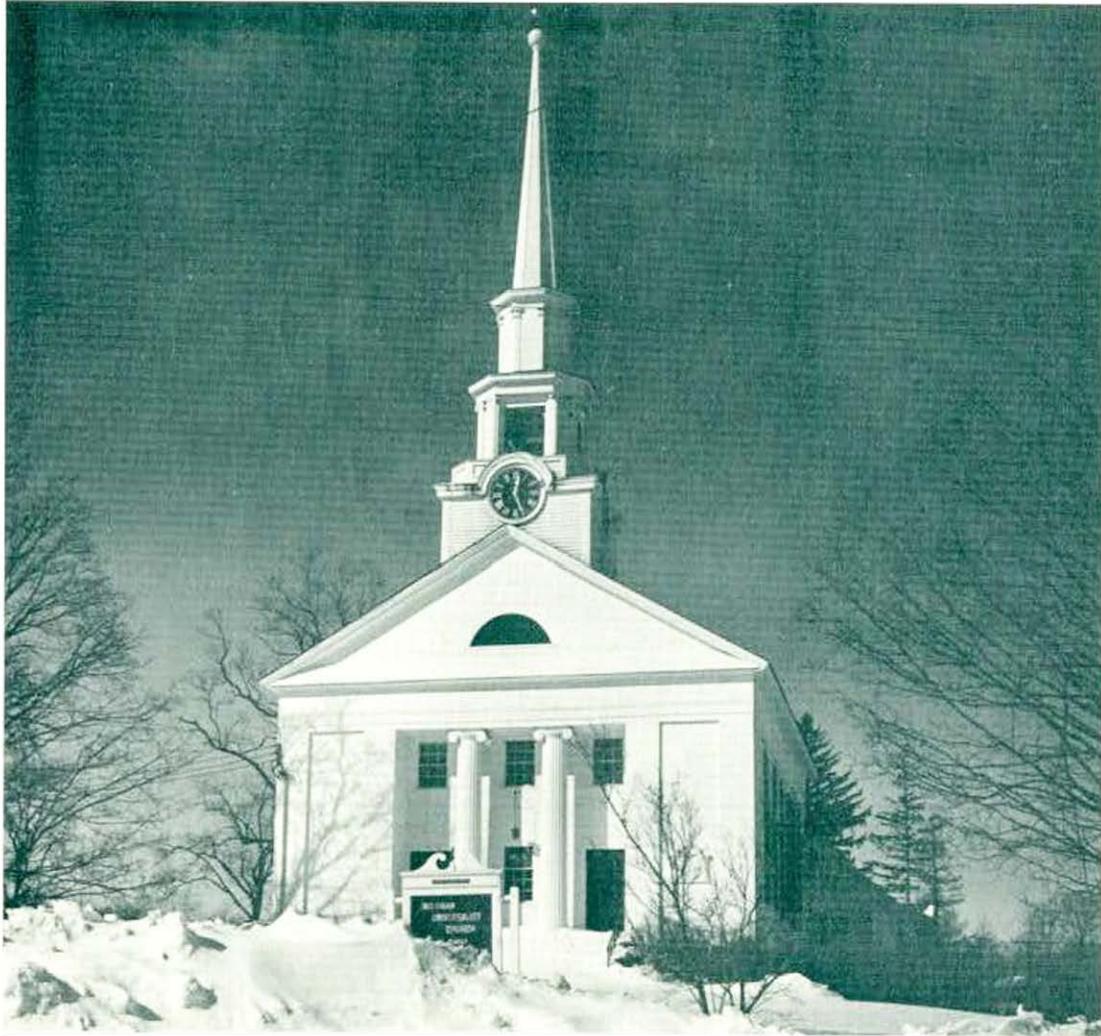


Old Unitarian church horse sheds
moved to rear of 39 Chelmsford



First Congregational Church, Center Chelmsford, Mass.
Organized Dec. 13, 1653. First Meeting House was built about 1660,
the Second in 1712, the Third in 1792. The Present Meeting
House was built in 1842.
Published by Falls & Burkinshaw.





First Parish Unitarian-Universalist Church in Snow, Chelmsford

Paul Turnbull 1972



Forefather's Burying Ground

Paul Turnbull 1972

HISTORY

This religious society was first gathered in Wenham in 1644. In 1655, the Church with its minister, John Fiske, removed to Chelmsford.

The first meeting house was built upon this present site.

In 1710 a new meeting house was erected and later a belfry was added in which to place a bell purchased in 1680.

It was not until 1830 that the separation of town and parish took place and the following year the parish elected its own officers distinct from town officials and became self supporting. The basement of the church building however was still used as the Town Hall until 1879.

The present meeting house was erected in 1842 after a fire had destroyed the old Meeting House.

On Sunday morning, December 18, 1955 a ground breaking ceremony was held and construction of our present addition began. A year later this addition was completed and dedicated to the glory of God and to the service of man on Sunday, September 23, 1956.

The unity of our members, their sacrificial devotion and dedication have brought us to this day.

Minister: Roland Ellsworth Morin, Diploma, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; B.S. Ed., Tufts University; B.D. Crane Theological School, Tufts University.

The manse is located at 143 High Street, Tel. 256-6255.

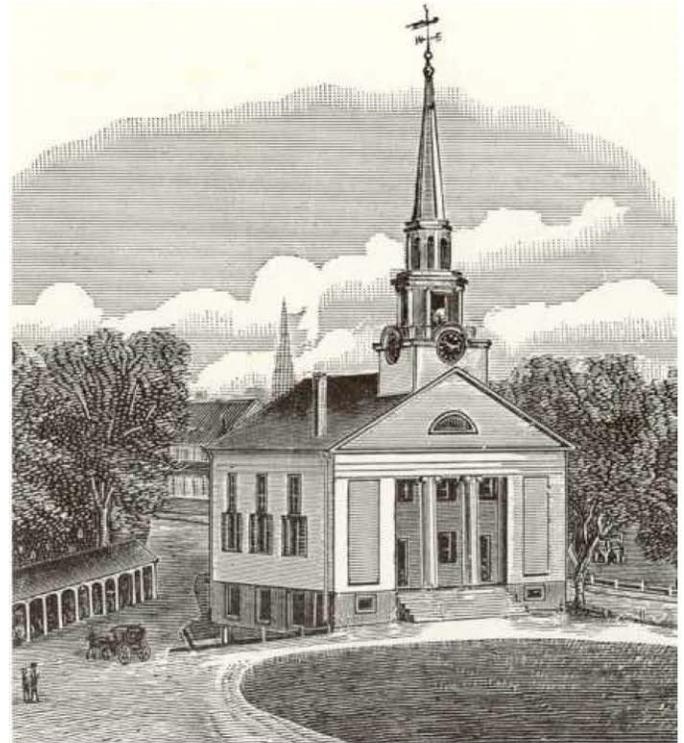
Office hours in the Minister's Study, Monday, Thursday and Friday 9:30 A.M. to 12 Noon and at other times by appointment.

Secretary: Mrs. Wilfred Leach. Hours in Secretary's office, Thursday and Friday from 9:30-12. Church telephone: 256-5133.

The corporate name of this society is, The First Congregational Society (Unitarian) of Chelmsford, Massachusetts and it is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Association which is, "dedicated to the principle of a free faith . . . in seeking:

- (1) To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
- (2) To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;
- (3) To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
- (4) To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
- (5) To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
- (6) To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land."

Sunday Worship 10:45 A.M.
Children's Chapel Worship Service 10:30 A.M.



FOURTH MEETING HOUSE

DEDICATED APRIL 13, 1843

OF THE
First Congregational Society
(Unitarian)
of
Chelmsford, Massachusetts

Chelmsford clock reported in trouble

CHELMSFORD—The town clock is in trouble, according to the Chelmsford Historic Commission.

The structure that supports the old clock has worn down "to the point where it is dangerous," Chairman Audrey Carragher has reported to the selectmen. The commission has requested that the condition be corrected before "serious deterioration occurs."

An article requesting funds to repair the structure is expected to be added to the list of town meeting articles.

For Richard Lahue, time is a factor...

By GARY DORION
Sun Staff

CHELMSFORD — "Ever since I was a kid, I always watched the clock whenever I passed through the square and I always wanted to go up and take a close look at it," says Richard Lahue, Jr., currently the town clockwinder.

"It only takes about 20 minutes to crank it up, he said. "And there's not a heck of a lot to it, although it takes a little bit of backwork and armwork in the cranking."

Lahue, 38, is married, has three kids, and he's been climbing the stairs to the attic of the Unitarian Church each Sunday for the past four years to wind the old clock.

WHEN HE ASSUMED the job in 1976, he replaced Robert C. Spaulding who had held it since 1952 when he had succeeded Arthur Wells.

According to Lahue, "there's only been about eight different people, as far as I can figure, who have run that clock in the last hundred years. And it's very satisfying to know that it's still keeping good time."

Although the job pays just \$100 annually, Lahue says he enjoys the work — primarily because he is carrying on the century-old tradition.

"It's peaceful being there early Sunday morning, before all the people begin coming into church," he said. "And it's a way of taking an interest in the town."

Besides clockwinding, Lahue is a rural postal carrier in Westford full time, and he delivers newspapers in Acton each day as well as dabbling in a local antique business.

"I started work when I was eleven at old Henry Eriksen's General Store and I've been with him ever since," he said referring to the antique collector.

The four-sided town clock in Central Square has stopped only once during the time Lahue has been clockwinder and that occurred during the "Blizzard of 1978." He said that snow got packed on its northern face which blocked the movement of the hands.

But except for that instance, it has kept accurate time, he said.

"IT'S JUST LIKE a big wrist watch, that's all it is. And for being over 100 years old, it's in damn good shape," he said.

The clock was originally installed at the base of the steeple in 1876. According to historical accounts, the townspeople gathered in front of the church to dedicate their new village



RICHARD LAHUE, JR.

the Lowell Weekly Journal, "Last week the village clock located in the loft of the Unitarian Church refused to strike, and for a very weighty reason.

"Wednesday evening," continued the report, "the steel wire rope holding the striking weight, whose avoirdupois is 1100 pounds gave way, and the solid mass of iron came down with a crash about 30 feet."

However, the report continued that "no particular damage was done."

In subsequent years, lightning struck the steeple at least twice, the latter time the day after the final event of Chelmsford's Tercentennial celebration where the bolt shattered the steeple but luckily spared the clock.

Around 1892, at the request of the Village Clock Association, the town meeting appropriated \$30 for its maintenance and has made successive appropriations ever since.

At the 1955 annual town meeting, the townspeople granted the land to the church "excepting and reserving, nevertheless, unto the grantor and its assigns, full and free right and liberty at all reasonable times to enter the church, located on the granted premises to wind, repair and maintain the clock located in the belfry of said church."

ACCORDING TO LAHUE, the clock will run non-stop for about seven-and-one-half days and, with the proper care, he says it will probably run forever.

It chimes every hour on the hour

clock in May of the same year.

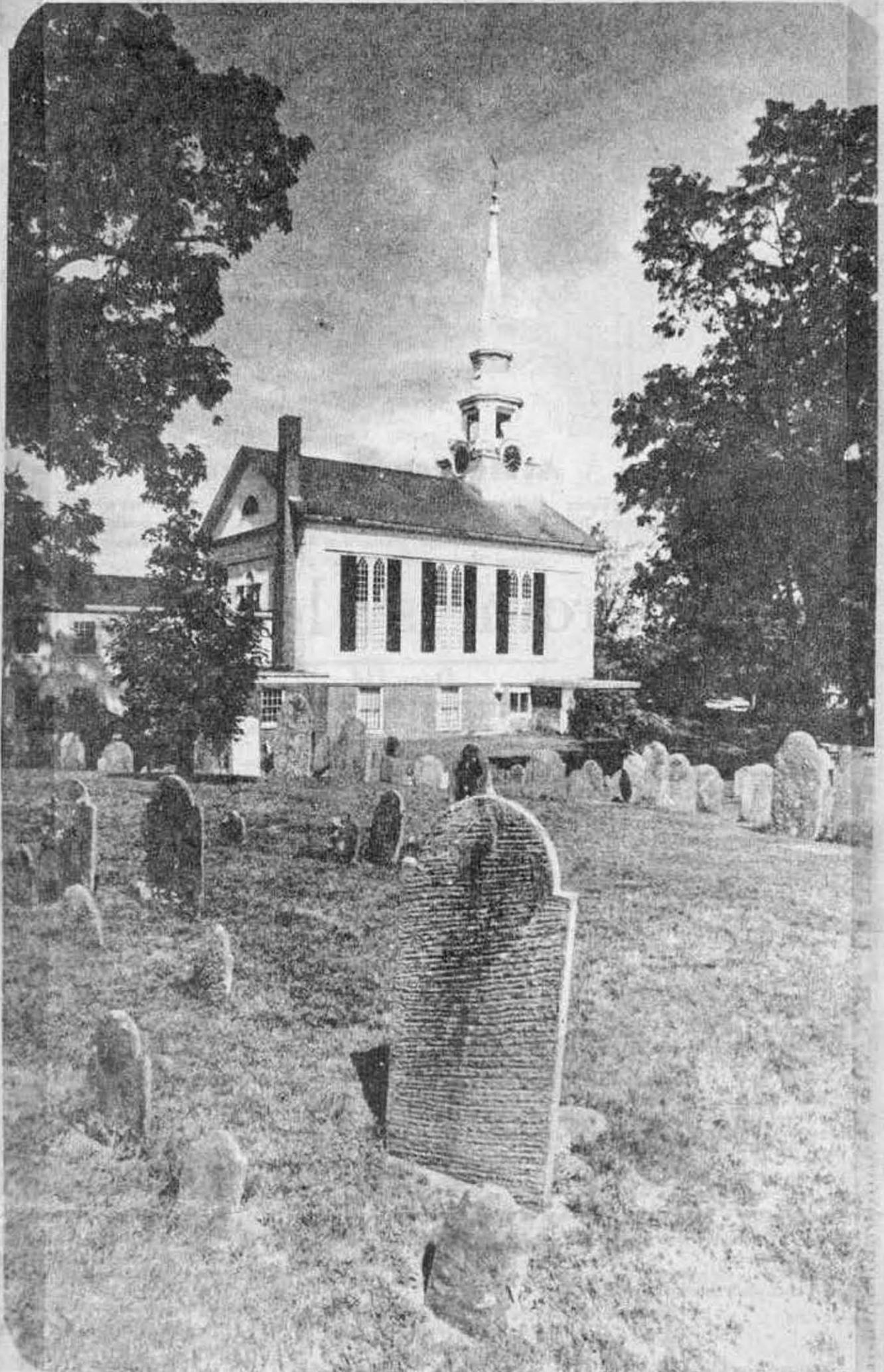
The following year, a private organization was formed that went by the name of the Village Clock Association and it assumed responsibility for upkeep of the clock.

The clock has managed to withstand three accidents over the years, according to accounts. In 1887, as reported by the Chelmsford News of

and, generally, the only maintenance it needs is a coat of paint periodically and an oiling twice a year.

"You know," Lahue said. "people look up at that old clock every day when they pass by although they might do it unconsciously. They look at it but a good many of them probably don't realize that somebody has to wind it up every now and then."

The
Lowell
Sun May
22, 1980



HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHELMSFORD

BY SUE CARMAN

Chelmsford was an entirely different community in 1876. Life was slower paced and less commercialized. Activities were centered around the Common. Chelmsford Street was lined with tree-shaded elegant homes. Town meetings were held in the vestry of the Unitarian Church as they had been since the incorporation of the Town. Town Hall was only a vision to be realized in 1880.

In March of that year a great wind toppled the steeple of the Unitarian Church. This catastrophe spurred a group of public spi-

rited citizens to urge the installation of a town clock in the newly constructed steeple. Clocks were fashionable in towns throughout New England and served the basic function of marking time for the community. Before the era of noise pollution, states Jared Davis, present Clerk of the Unitarian Church, "one could hear the bell as far as Old Westford Road."

The committee raised funds by public subscription to finance the \$464 purchase of the clock faces, mechanism and weights.

On May 17th of the same year the new clock was dedicated by the local citizens. The following year, the committee turned over the responsibility for maintenance of the clock to a private corporation named The Village Clock Association. Those who had contributed to the purchase and maintenance of the clock were shareholders in the company. By 1892 the clock had become an integral part of the community and the residents voted the first town appropriation for the care of the clock, a sum of thirty dollars. Since that time clock maintenance has been part of the town budget. This year's Town meeting voted a line item of \$525 for clock expenses.

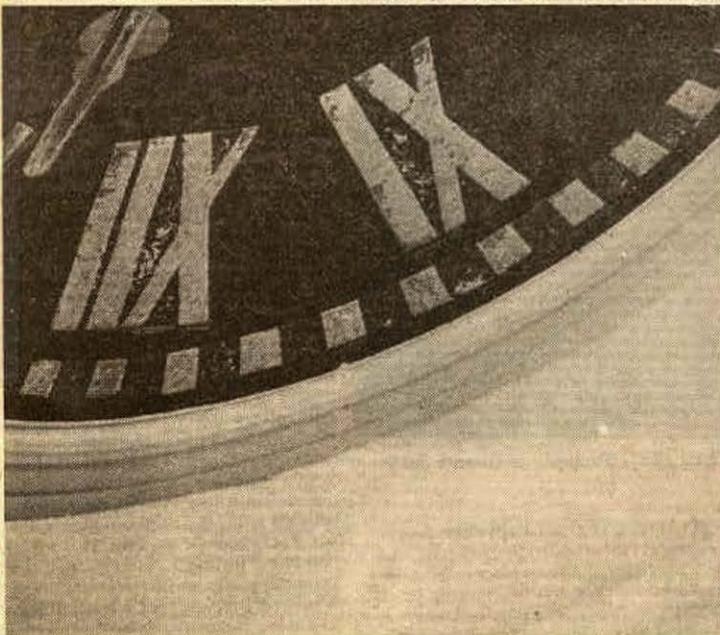
The clock and its mechanism are virtually unchanged since their installation. The hands on all four clock faces are driven by long steel rods radiating from the central mechanism. Power is supplied by heavy weights hung on chains or steel cable descending into hollow columns on the porch of the Church. Two separate weights, both boxes filled with stones, regulate the clock mechanism and the clapper of the bell. The clock is still wound on a weekly basis using the muscles of Richard Lahue Jr. Several years ago the clock had to be wound twice a week because the timbers used to shore up the listing and decaying steeple obstructed the descent of the weights. A simple turning of the timbers allowed clearance for the weights.

The bell attached to the clock is the property of the church. In addition to striking the hours, the bell has served a variety of functions. It has been used to toll at funerals and to announce the beginning of church services. It was rung to commemorate significant events, like the passage of the Volstead Act (prohibition) in 1919. The bell served as the town fire bell until the 1920's when the Fire Department installed a whistle on Town Hall. A fire box was located on the porch of the church containing a key to the front

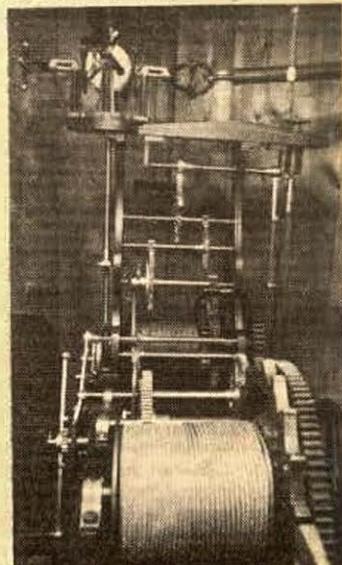
door. Anyone who knew of a fire could break the glass, enter the church, and ring the bell.

Today the clock is in excellent working order. It was last cleaned and repainted for the bicentennial in 1975. In 1980 the church, clock and burying ground, as well as being a part of the Chelmsford Historic District Commission, were officially entered as landmarks in the American Historic Register.

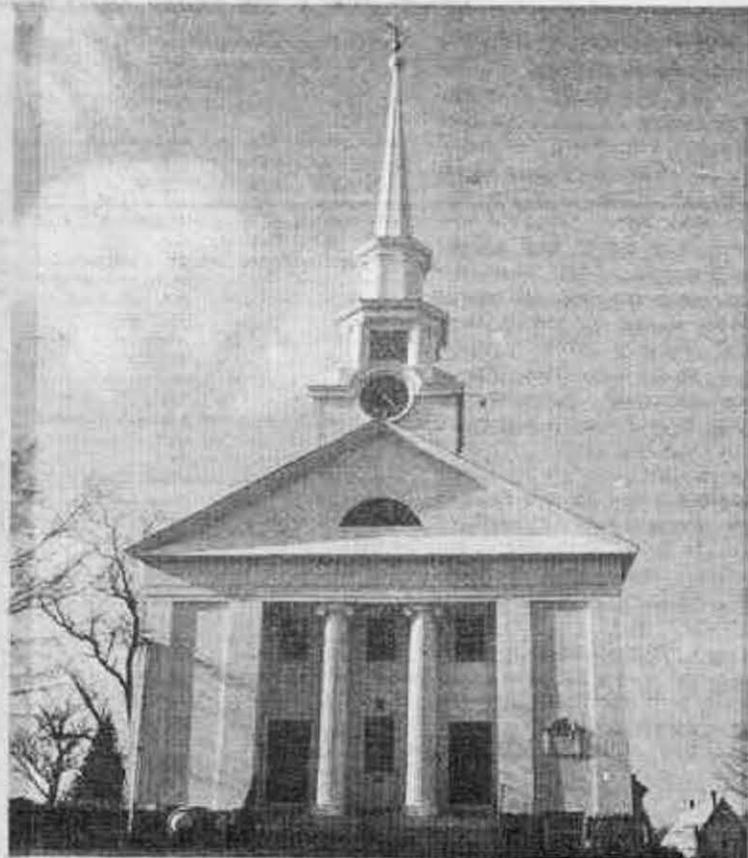
Appreciation goes to Jared Davis and George Parkhurst for their research and personal recollections.



No - the clock isn't upside down - but taking a photo of the clock in the tower at the Unitarian Church in Chelmsford Center involved a bit of gymnastics on the part of the photographer. (Photo by Vicki L. Pierce)



An inside view of the workings of the clock in the tower of the Unitarian Church in Chelmsford Center - one of few remaining in the country. (Photo by Vicki L. Pierce)



First Parish Church Observes 325th Anniversary

CMFD-The public is invited to join in celebrating the 325th anniversary of Chelmsford's First Parish Church on Friday, November 14, and on Sunday, November 16. Situated on the town common in Chelmsford center, the present church building is in the same location chosen by the first settlers. Remarkably, in this era of rapid change and growth, this church still has in its congregation several active members who are direct 15th generation descendents of its founders.

Few American institutions have survived, let alone prospered, this long. The United States is itself only 205 years old, rare businesses are older than a hundred years and only a few structures date back to the 17th century. But congregations such as that of the First Parish provide a living link to the events and people that shaped our town and country.

Chelmsford's First Parish Church starts its 325th celebration at 8 p.m. on Friday night, November 14th, with a program featuring past ministers Douglas Brayton, Philip Larson and Roland Morin as well as Dr. David Pohl from the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston. Following the program, the public is invited

to attend a reception and view an exhibition of historic items from the church's extensive collections.

On Sunday, November 16th, a special service drawing from three centuries of rich religious heritage will be celebrated. Members of the congregation in period costume will reenact scenes that would have been common in the church in 1655, 1755, and 1855. The public is cordially invited to attend this unique service.

The church traces its beginnings from 1652 when a tenacious group of pioneers moved from their comfortable surroundings in Woburn and Concord to the northwestern wilderness country on the Merrimack beyond the Concord River. To legitimize their settlement they convinced Rev. John Fiske from Wenham to settle in their new community on the frontier. On November 12, 1655, the First Congregational Society of Chelmsford was chartered and the first meeting house was built in 1659.

325 years, four meeting houses and thirty-four ministers later, the continued presence of the church is a tribute to its adaptability. Originally, it was very much in the Massachusetts puritan tradition. It weathered the Unitarian/-Trinitarian controversy of the 1800's, the protests of the 1960's and evolved to the theologically liberal Unitarian Universalist congregation of 1980.

First Parish celebrates 325th year

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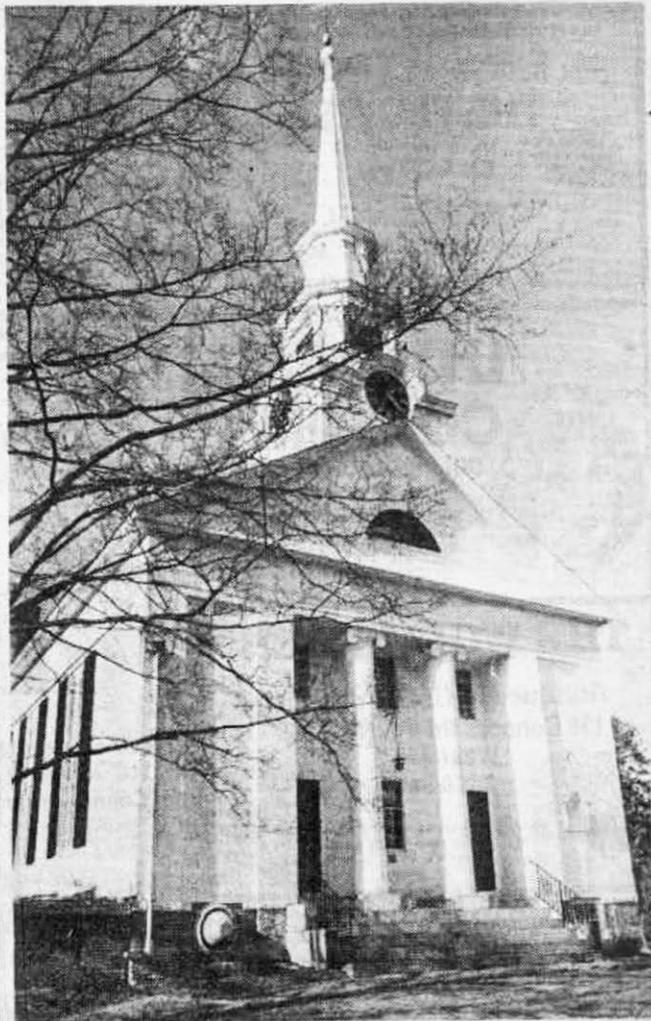
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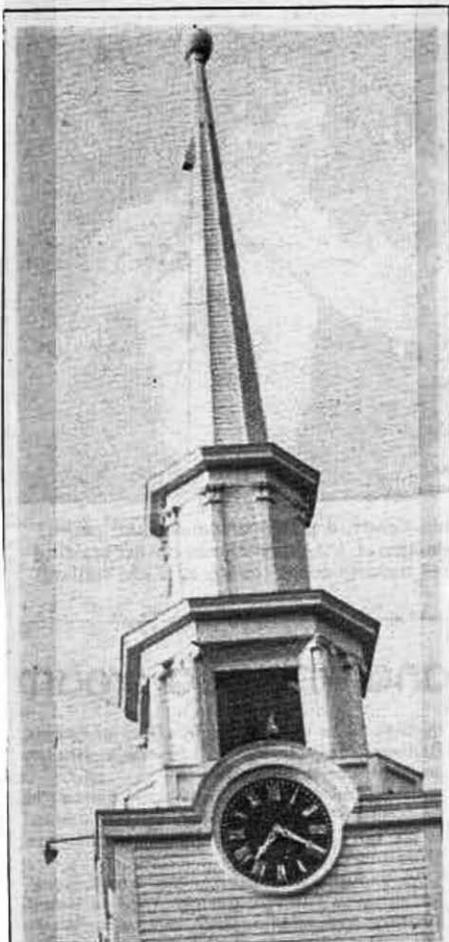
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BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION Chelmsford's familiar landmark, the First Parish Unitarian Church, will be celebrating its 325th birthday this Friday. (Photo by Pierce)



TIME STANDS STILL Starting this week the familiar town clock will be still while the steeple's condition is checked. (Photo by Micki Hilliard)

Time will stand still while steeple checked

By SUE CARMAN

Time will slow to a standstill on all four faces of the town clock atop the First Parish Unitarian Church this Sunday sometime between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., estimates Richard Lahue Jr., the official clock winder appointed by the town.

Lahue climbs up the steps of the church steeple each Sunday morning to wind the clock, both which were funded by public subscription in 1876. But this week—and perhaps for many weeks to come—his job is on hold at the request of the Building Inspector.

The sequence of events leading to the stilling of the town clock was triggered by the May 9th accident which seriously injured local contractor Ralph House. According to the police report, he was inspecting the steeple with Selectmen Brad Emerson and Charlotte DeWolfe, who are members of the church, when he apparently slipped and fell through the overhang flooring above the front doors to the granite steps about 25 feet below.

House was rushed to Lowell General Hospital where it was ascertained he had sustained massive internal injuries requiring immediate surgery. He has remained in the Intensive Care Unit throughout the week where his condition has gradually improved to a Thursday hospital report of "stable".

According to Arthur Hover, Unitarian Church minister, the contractor had been requested to look over the building to assess the need to reinforce the steeple base for the town clock. This week, at the church's request, the American Steeple Company has begun an analysis of the structure and the massive hand hewn supporting timbers. The two facing Town Hall appear to be weakened by dry rot, he stated.

The overhang area which allegedly gave way under House's weight is located several feet below the steps leading upward to the town clock.

The church has been planning to repair the deck above the clock this year, Hover stated, to eliminate water leaks which are trickling into the church itself.

As a part of a long-term renovation project, the steeple was repainted last year.

"I'm not going to condemn the building, there's no reason for it" asserted Building Inspector Ron Wetmore after a midweek inspection of the steeple. "There is not an immediate danger," he continued, "we don't expect the tower to come crashing down."

Contending that House's fall was "an accident", Wetmore emphasized that he had requested, rather than demanded, that church officials lock the entrance to the steeple.

"We know we have a problem," Wetmore stated, explaining that he was most concerned about the effect of vibrations from the bell and the church organ on the weakened timbers. In addition to closing the steeple area, he has requested that the church also not use the choir loft and the organ for the time being.

Selectman Brad Emerson stated Thursday that he intends to make a motion at the Selectmen's meeting on May 18th that the winding of the clock be suspended until repairs are made. "The conditions for the clock winder are primitively crude," he asserted, "it is not a safe environment to send a town employee."

Emerson stated that the church is in the process of determining how much the repairs will cost. After that is completed, he added, they will initiate a townwide fundraising campaign to repair the historic steeple.

"It's more than a church problem," Emerson asserted, "it's a town project, a town responsibility."

Ralph House, age 65, is a well known Chelmsford resident who has been a building contractor for over thirty years. According to Ron Wetmore who worked with him for many years, the Chelmsford Construction Company owned by House built many of the custom homes located in South Chelmsford.

House is a member of the Chelmsford Rotary Club and was on the Park Commission for fifteen years. At one time he was the chief of the South Chelmsford volunteer fire department.



Fore-fathers' Cemetery, Unitarian Church and Common, Chelmsford Center, Mass.

7185-PUBLISHED BY R. W. EMERSON

Postcard courtesy of Paul Pettazoni



Central House, First Parish Church, Parkhurst's Store



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church



UNITARIAN CHURCH, CHELMSFORD, MASS.

The First Meeting House in Chelmsford was built on or near this site about 1660.

Published by R. W. Emerson, Chelmsford, Mass.

The Unitarian Church, Chelmsford, Mass.



Postcard courtesy of Paul Pettazoni



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church



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7/3/2003 F. Merriam



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church

7/3/2003 F. Merriam



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church

9/6/2004 F. Merriam

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
SOCIETY
UNITARIAN
ORGANIZED NOV. 13, 1655

The first Meeting House was
built about 1660. The second
about 1712, the third in 1792

The present Meeting House
was built in 1842



2 Westford Street - First Parish Church

12/27/2004 F. Merriam

