

25 South Main Street



Pilgrim Church

Form No.	127
Town	Sherborn
Address	25 South Main Street
Historic Name	Pilgrim Church or "The Brown Church"
Uses: Original	Church
Present	Church
Ownership, 1981	Pilgrim Church - United Church of Christ
" Original	Sherborn Evangelical Society
Constructed	1830, remodeled 1853
Source	"Sherborn Past and Present", 1674-1924
Style/Form	Italianate with colonial revival elements
Architect	
Ext. Wall Fabric	Clapboard
Outbuildings	Horse sheds dismantled in 1930
Alterations	1853 - raised loft for basement and added 20' to rear. 1924 - new steeple; 1920s and 1960s interior alterations. 1944 - rear addition.

Moved Nearer to middle of lot in 1853

Acreage Less than 1 acre

Setting: Faces semi circular drive, to south is Federal style Bowen Adam house, to north is small commercial building, to west is old Town Hall and new library.

Recorded by Edward W. Gordon, June - July 1981

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This church has been greatly altered over the years. The present frame structure is essentially Italianate ecclesiastical incorporating the original 1830 church along with interior and exterior alterations from the 1850's, 1920's and 1960s. For many years it was known as "the Brown Church" - it was apparently painted brown in the 1850s. perhaps to simulate the more costly and fashionable brownstone building material (e.g. Boston's Arlington Street Church built 1859). The sanctuary rests on a high rusticated basement. Its surface treatments display a richness unheard of in the Greek revival or Federal church of several decades earlier - here the old 18th century Georgian vocabulary has been revived and called Italianate - quoins appear at its corners, a central pediment, column and pediment frame a neo-Palladian window Narrow rectangular windows are capped by what appears to be cast iron round arched lintels. Unfortunately its steeple was lost in a lightening storm in 1923 and has been replaced by a Colonial Revival steeple.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Pilgrim Church origins lie in an early 19th century religious controversy which transformed England religious life. Anne Shaughnessy comments in History of Sherborn that "in most cases it was the members of the Parish holding the more conservative Trinitarian position who withdrew and formed 'second' religious society in the community". This is precisely what happened in Sherborn. Twelve religious/conservatives petitioned the Town to create the Sherborn Evangelical Society. (It became officially known as the Pilgrim Church by act of Legislature in 1875.) It was formed February 22, 1830 and its church building dedicated November 4, 1830. Prior to its construction, services had been held in the hall above Joseph Sanger's store, once situated on the Town Office lawn. The cost of the new Church land was \$200 and the building \$3000. In addition horse sheds were erected "said sheds to be built with one roof and uniform" These stood until 1930. The original bell was made in Medway at a cost of \$500. (A new Bell was installed after the old one cracked). The first minister was Samuel Lee.

The Pilgrim Church 1830 structure was extensively altered in 1853. It was moved closer to the end of the lot and raised 10 feet to create a basement. An additional 20 ft. was added to the rear and the building "was finished off a grand and substantial manner". The current steeple is a replacement - the old one was struck by lightning on June 24, 1923. The pastorate which deserves the greatest attention was that of Rev. Edmund Dowse. A native of Sherborn, he served as minister of Pilgrim Church for 67 years (1837-1904). Active in public affairs, he was chairman of the School Committee for 50 years, State senator for 2 years and chaplain of the State Senate for 25 years. In 1924, the two Protestant churches in Sherborn were rejoined to form the Federated Church of Sherborn. The 'meetinghouse on the hill' was used for church service while the Pilgrim Church was used for the Sunday school and rectory. By 1961 the Unitarian contingent of the Federation withdrew and once again the two groups returned to their old facilities. The Pilgrim church is currently among the nationwide congregations which comprise the United Church of Christ. The creation of two churches in 1830 was an event of major importance in a community which had been a "one church town" since the late 17th century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES

- Anne C. Shaughnessy - [A Guide To Sherborn](#) and [The History of Sherborn](#), 1974
- Historical Sketches, Sherborn Tercentenary - 1652-1952 by F. Bardwell