

11 Washington Street



First Parish Church in Sherborn

Form No.	148
Town	Sherborn
Address	11 Washington Street
Historic Name	First Parish Church in Sherborn
Uses: Original	Church
Present	Church
Ownership, 1981	First Parish Church, Sherborn
" Original	First Parish Church, Sherborn
Constructed	1830
Source	Sherborn Past and Present 1674-1924
Style/Form	Greek Revival
Architect	Hiram Jones of Dover
Ext. Wall Fabric	Clapboard
Outbuildings	
Alterations	Educational wing added, 1963. Steeple toppled by 1938 hurricane but soon restored.
Moved	No
Acreage	2 acres
Setting:	Surrounded by architecturally significant and historically significant public and private buildings on the east side of the church commons.
Recorded by	Edward W. Gordon, July 1981

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Located on the East side of the Church Common, the First Parish Church is surrounded by the architecturally and historically significant public and private buildings of Sherborn Center. To the immediate south is the Italianate old town hall (1858) To the west, across Washington Street, are several noteworthy private residences including the Flagg house (1740) and Col. Calvin Sanger's store (1805) and house (1819). The latter is Sherborn's finest Federal residence.

Built in 1830 and stylistically Greek Revival, The First Parish Church is composed of a pedimented portico which projects from a rectangular vestibule which in turn projects from the west wall of the long rectangular meeting hall. These sections date to 1830. To the rear is a rectangular Sunday School addition which dates from 1963.

The First Parish Church rests on a Granite block foundation and is crowned by a gable roof. Its walls are covered in clapboards which are painted white. Aside from its dignified temple-like portico, its dominant feature is its tall steeple. The Church's principal entrance is located on the west gable end. This facade displays 4 fluted Doric columns which supports a molded entablature and a wide pediment whose tympanium is faced with flush boards. Set back behind their Doric colonnade is a trio of tall doors whose heavy enframements are repeated in the surrounds of three square windows on the second level. The vestibule's side walls display a single window above which is a rectangular "blind" panel. This structure's edges are accented by wide Doric corner boards and molded fascia boards. The meeting hall's long side elevations exhibit three large multi-paned windows whose verticality counters the horizontal mass of the walls. Old photographs indicate that these windows had shutters.

Set back from the pedimented portico's roof is the rectangular base of the octagonal steeple. This platform supports three segments. The first stage features circular clock faces set into rectangular panels. Above this section is a belfry composed of facades which alternate between Doric pilasters and rectangular elevations containing open and blind panels. Louvered screens cover the open panels. Above the belfry is a full octagonal spire and weathervane.

The First Parish Church is representative of the change which occurred in New England church architecture after 1825. The lighter, more heavily decorated Wrennian churches were replaced by the heavier temple-like forms of the Greek Revival style. Constructed by Hiram Jones of Dover, this church speaks eloquently of Boston area country builders' ability to erect well-crafted public buildings. Of Sherborn's two 19th century churches, the First Parish is the least altered; most of its exterior and interior detail has been retained. It is Sherborn Center's major focal point. Architecturally it contributes a great deal to the 19th century charm of Sherborn center.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1830, the First Parish Church in Sherborn is the third meetinghouse to be located on the hill at the head of Edward's Plain. From the 1650's until the 1670's Sherborn's (then Boggastow) first settlers worshipped across the Charles River in Medfield. During the 1670's services were held in the Morse-Barber House on Forest Street (#46). In 1680 the General Court set apart land 20 rods square for a Church and Common in Sherborn Center. It served as the house of worship for inhabitants of what is now Ashland and Holliston as well as part of Mendon, Framingham, and Natick. The Second Church was built in 1723 and enlarged in 1769. (In that year the second meetinghouse was cut in two and the west end moved forward so that the length might be increased twenty feet.) Prior to the construction of the present meetinghouse, the First Parish Church had been the principal focus of community life. In 1830 this focus became diffused, and with the completion of the Pilgrim Church on South Main street, Sherborn became a two parish town. Nevertheless the First Parish continued to be an important center of Sherborn activities.

The parish records of 1826 show the beginning of a movement for a new meetinghouse, but it was not until 1830 that a decisive vote was secured and \$4000 was appropriated for the purpose. The building committee was composed of Silas Stone, Alphen Clark, Micah Leland, Joseph Sanger, and Elisha Barber. The builder was Hiram Jones of Dover who was also responsible for the Plain school on North Main Street. The contractor was Charles Farrar. On August 18 and 19, 1830, the parishioners "raised" the present meetinghouse. Completed within the year, it was dedicated December 29.

The First Parish's Rev. Abnor Clark (1830-1841), for several years an assistant to Rev. Shearjashub Townsend, espoused the new Unitarian teachings of the day. A group of more conservative parishioners agitated for separation - the Pilgrim Church on South Main street was dedicated in November, 1830, as a house of worship for the more orthodox believers. Its establishment finalized the separation of Church and Town.

A third congregation broke away from the First Parish in 1848. Sherborn's Methodist Society was short-lived - after five years they disbanded and rejoined the Unitarians. Their chapel had been located to the north of the First Parish between the Leland Monument and Washington Street.

In February, 1854, the church organ was first used. Funded by the ladies of the church, it was placed in the gallery and later moved to the floor. The present organ was installed in 1921.

Over the years the First Parish has housed a number of service and social organizations. During the civil war its sanitary commission provided garments for Union Soldiers. The Sunday School association was formed during the pastorate of Rev. Theodore H Dorr (1854-1863). In addition, a small Parish library had been gathered during the 1830's. The wife of Rev. Eugene DeNormandie organized various young peoples groups during the 1870's and 1880's. In recent years the Alliance, the women's group of First Parish, has established a consignment shop "Good as New" for the sale of family clothing at reasonable prices.

In 1893 the church joined with the church at South Natick in engaging the Rev. Leverett R. Daniels, the Sherborn service being held in the afternoon. This arrangement was short-lived but resumed between the 1920's and 1940's when automobile travel made minister sharing feasible.

The hurricane of 1938 toppled the steeple, but it was soon restored thanks to the generosity of Richard Saltonstall. During World War II the First Parish Church and the Pilgrim Church were reunited. This merger was prompted by a shortage of ministers, small memberships and gasoline rationing. The combined congregations were called the Federated Church of Sherborn.

In 1960, a divergence in theology again occurred. Post war population increases made the separation feasible. In 1963 a Sunday School addition was constructed to the rear of the church with funds provided by the Misses Helen and Haidie Bothfeld. The old Sunday School structure, Unity Hall, located at 10 South Main street had been moved to 17 North Main street in 1959.

In the fall of 1973, the First Parish Church in Sherborn became the nucleus for the West Suburban Unitarian-Universalist Church. In a sense the First Parish had come full circle. At the time of the initial formation of the First Parish in 1680 it served worshippers in a wide geographic area. This "area church" served the many families of liberal religious faith from Sherborn, Natick, Holliston, Millis, and Medfield. It continues to serve as an important focus of Sherborn community life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES

- (no list)