

First Parish Meeting House has 'Commonly' familiar face

By Gordon B. Seavey

The stately First Parish Church, which dominates the picture postcard Common scene in the center of Westford, is an irreplaceable landmark. So much so, church members are considering the installation of a sprinkler system as added protection against fire.

This is the third such structure erected by the inhabitants of the town, erected in 1794. The earliest edifice, erected shortly after the church was "gathered" in 1725, soon was outgrown. It was carried over snow-covered fields to South Chelmsford, near Heart Pond, to be used by the Baptists. The second building burned after a couple of years of service. The present edifice's steeple rises 120 feet into the air and may be seen from many distant angles.

To pay for the new building, the inhabitants were asked to purchase their family pews. John Abbot, Gentleman (lawyer), and Moses Thomas, housewright (carpenter), were chosen by the town to "sell at Publick Vendue" the pews.

Among old records is a bill of sale to Josiah Boynton, Jr., dated Nov. 13, 1794, for a wall pew No. 54 for what was then a princely sum of \$100. The wall pews were considered better located in the sanctuary which at that time was a two-story open room, and the steeple faced the west.

The deed was "Signed, Sealed and Delivered in the presence of us" John Raymond and Zaccheus Wright.

The main entrance to the church then, now closed, was beneath the tower and naturally faced the street because the edifice was given a quarter turn in the 1800's. What a task in those days to move a structure of that size, and its purpose was never adequately explained.

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