

Some Events in the History of the Church
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July 3, 1637 - The Reverend Peter Prudden arrived in Boston with fifteen families he led from Hertford, Buckingham, and adjoining counties in England.

April 24, 1638 - The followers of Reverend Davenport and Reverend Prudden sailed up West Creek and landed to found Quinnipiak (present day New Haven).

April 25, 1638 - First religious service held under an oak tree near the present northeast corner of College and George Streets in New Haven. The Reverend John Davenport preached in the morning. During the afternoon the Reverend Peter Prudden preached on the text: "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

August 22, 1639 - The Davenport and Prudden groups formally established their respective Churches in Robert Newman's barn on the present site of Silliman College, Yale University near Grove Street in New Haven. Seven of the best men in the Prudden congregation became the leaders or "seven pillars" of the future Milford church and a covenant was drawn up. Within two months the settlers were firmly established in the present day Milford.

November 24, 1640 - At the second meeting of the town it was agreed: "...to set out a meeting house thirty feet square after such manner as shall be judged by them most convenient for the public good."

July, 1656 - The Milford brethren were saddened by the death of their beloved pastor and pioneer leader, Reverend Peter Prudden.

August 22, 1660 - Reverend Roger Newton installed as second pastor. He married Mary, daughter of Rev. Thomas Hooker, the founding leader of Connecticut. Young men were received into his home to study theology. One of these was Abraham Pierson, who married a Milford girl, Abigail Clark, and became the first Rector or President of Yale.

1666 - Robert Treat became the dominant spirit in the founding of Newark, N.J.

November 18, 1683 - Reverend Samuel Andrew ordained as third pastor. He was the son-in-law of Governor Robert Treat and the father-in-law of Governor Jonathan Law.

1701 - Establishment of the Collegiate College of Connecticut (the nucleus of present day Yale University) at Saybrook by ten Congregational ministers including the Reverend Samuel Andrew of Milford. He was later acting president or rector of the institution for twelve years and was one of those responsible for its removal to New Haven in 1716.

1708 - Church in Durham, Connecticut organized. A number of members of the Milford congregation were among its founders.

1715 - Liberty was granted the inhabitants of Newtown, Connecticut to embody in church estate. This new congregation was made up mostly of Stratford and Milford people.

1716 - The First Church in New Milford, Connecticut was organized. New Milford's settlement was largely a venture of "Old Milford."

1728 - The second or three decker meeting-house was erected. This massive three-story frame structure was largest of its day in Connecticut.

December 9, 1737 - Reverend Samuel Whittelsey, Jr. ordained as pastor when Reverend Samuel Andrew retired. A small but strong minority disliked his liberal theology and eventually formed the Second Church.

1738 - The Parish of Amity (now the Congregational Church in Woodbridge) was formed by members of the Milford and New Haven Churches.

1740 - Reverend George Whitefield, disciple of John Wesley, came to Milford. After being denied use of the Meeting-house by Rev. Whittelsey he preached from the front stoop of the Allen home on West Town Street (the original brass door knocker from this dwelling is preserved on the tower door of the memorial bridge.) This sermon further inspired the band of First Church dissenters.

November 30, 1741 - The minority group seceded from the First Church, professed Presbyterians, and formally organized the Second Society (called the Plymouth Church after 1859).

1742 - The first "Town Clock" was installed in the First Church steeple by Ebenezer Parmelee of Guilford. This brass timepiece appears to have had only an hour hand on each of its three dials.

1743 First meeting house of the Second Church erected. This small two story frame structure with galleries on three sides stood on what is now the East side of Plymouth Place until about 1900. Land procured from Bartholomew Sears.

May 1747 The Rev. Job Prudden, great grandson of Rev. Peter Prudden ordained in New Jersey by the Presbytery of New Brunswick and installed as first pastor of the Second Church in Milford.

1750 General Assembly released members of Second Society from paying taxes to support First Church.

1760 - Formation of First and Second Ecclesiastical Societies to manage the financial and business affairs of the respective churches.

1786 - Three decker meeting house of First Church was extensively remodeled. Much of the window glass in the windows of our present meeting-house appears to have been salvaged in 1823 from the 1786 sashes. Two of the eighteenth century sashes are preserved by the church and contain their original handmade imported English glass.

November 11, 1789 - George Washington, while eating breakfast at Clark's Tavern, borrowed a silver spoon from the wife of Rev. William Lockwood, pastor of the First Church, who lived next door.

October 26, 1796 - Rev. Bezaleel Pinneo ordained pastor of First Church. Along with Rev. Samuel Andrew, he ranks among the greatest of Milford pastors during his fifty three years of local service. The townspeople affectionately called him "Father Pinneo."

1799 The Second Society meeting house was embellished with a tower, candle snuffer type spire, and a bell.

Circa 1801 1804 - Aaron Burr, then Vice President of United States, was traveling one Sunday morning through Milford. Samuel Higby, a deacon and tithing man of the Second Church, saw the dust of the vice presidential carriage from a gallery window. Since a local blue law forbade Sunday travel, the good deacon stopped Mr. Burr and despite his protest caused him to retire at the nearby tavern (inn).

1804 - The top gallery of the three story meeting house of the First Church was closed up by the construction of an arched ceiling to improve the acoustics. Peter Banner, later the designer of the Park Street Church in Boston, then resided in New Haven and was hired to plan the operation.

October 1804 - The inhabitants of North Milford (Orange) were granted permission to organize their own church.

1810-1811 - The present meeting-house was designed and built for the North Milford Church by David Hoadley of New Haven. Rev. Bezaleel Pinneo of the First Church read the dedicatory sermon April 27, 1811. Orange became an independent community in 1822.

1822-1825 - The First Congregational Church in Tallmadge, Ohio built a new meeting house. Although this congregation was not originally founded by Milford people, enough of them had settled in this community by 1820 so that their church organization as well as their new meeting-house show influences of "Old Milford." Built by Colonel Lemuel Porter, an old friend of David Hoadley, this structure originally displayed a simplified version of the basic plan used for the construction of the third meeting house in "Old Milford" in 1823-24. At least three friends and relatives of Captain Michael Peck, builder of Milford's First Church, were on the building committee for the Tallmadge meeting house.

May 21, 1823 - The corner stone of the third meeting house of the First Church (our present church structure) was laid

1823-24 - Capt. Michael Peck erected a new meeting house for the First Society. According to long established tradition and architectural evidence, David Hoadley of New Haven was the designer. The congregation was so delighted with the structure that the builder and his family were given a free pew for many years. Elnathan Peck, son of Capt. Michael Peck, was one of the builders of New Britain meeting-house in 1822. This latter structure, except for omission of an entrance portico, displayed an almost identical probable Hoadley design as Milford's meeting house. The scarmozzi ionic portico of the Milford structure was probably inspired by one added to the rear of St. Paul's Chapel in New York City during the 1790's. The New York portico is thought to have been designed by Pierre L'Enfant, the famed French architect and engineer, who created the plan for the city of Washington, D. C.

1824 - A Sunday School was started by the First Church in basement conference room.

1825 - The Town engaged Barzillai Davidson of New Haven to install a new "Town Clock" in the First Church steeple. Climatic changes effected the wooden works of this timepiece so frequently that it was seldom reliable.

July 16, 1828 - The Reverend Asa M. Train was ordained as pastor of the Second Church. He was Representative to the State Legislature several terms and State Senator one term.

1833-1834 - Sidney Mason Stone, a Milford native and famed builder architect of New Haven, designed and probably built a new meeting house for the Second Society on the site now occupied by the Plymouth Building for Religious Education. The present Center Church in Meriden, a structure reputedly designed by Sidney Stone, was the basic inspiration for the plan of the Second Society meeting house and stone for the foundation was procured from the Milford green marble quarry then located on the present site of Ryder's Trailer Park. A mahogany empire styled communion table purchased at this time is still used in our vestibule.

1845 - The Reverend Jonathan Brace was named colleague pastor to Rev. Pinneo of the First Church. Upon the death of the aged pastor in 1849 he assumed full duties as minister. During the Civil War he offered to pay a bounty to all Milford boys who would enlist.

1849 - The Town purchased a new "Town Clock" for the First Church steeple from John Douglas of New Haven. This timepiece is still in use today.

1851 - A one story chapel was added to the rear of the First Church. This addition forms the core of the present top floor of the parish house. Inside shutter blinds were also added to the meeting house windows and are still in place.

1852 - The present church bell was purchased from Meneelyse Foundry, West Troy, N. Y.

February 8, 1859 The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn, N.Y., the famous abolitionist preacher, gave an evening lecture. This was the last time the original high pulpit was used.

February 9 - April 30, 1859 The interior of the First Church was extensively remodeled. New pews, which are still in use, replaced the higher original pews on the main floor, a massive walnut victorian pulpit replaced the graceful original high pulpit, and the original carved and moulded decorations were removed from the center and perimeter of the dome ceiling and replaced by a gaudy painted decoration that was erroneously known as fresco. A new communion table was also purchased and is still used in the Parish House.

1859 - The name of the Second Church was changed to Plymouth Church by an act of the State Legislature.

1868 - The audience room of the First Church was enlarged under the direction of Sidney M. Stone of New Haven and the first pipe organ was installed in the north gallery.

1869 - George L. Tibbals enlarged and remodeled the Plymouth Church. These changes included the lengthening of the audience room, installation of new pews (two of these pews are now used near our church piano), construction of a recess and platform at the rear of the building, and the installation of a new pipe organ behind the pulpit.

1889 The massive victorian walnut pulpit of 1859 in the First Church was replaced by a smaller Romanesque styled example used until 1949.

August 25, 1889 The two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the First Church was celebrated. Tablets in honor of former pastors were dedicated.

1893 Through the efforts of the ladies, the First Church organ was moved from the north gallery to the platform at the south end of the audience room behind the pulpit.

1902 Spire of First Church rebuilt and a window was added beneath the dial of the "Town Clock".

1906 Slate roof still in use on First Church building was added.

1914 The two hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary of the First Church was celebrated.

1917-1918 The interior of the First Church was remodeled under the direction of Joseph Northrop of Bridgeport. These changes included the moving of the pulpit from the South to the North end of the building, reversing the pews on the main floor, leveling the church floor by filling in the arrangement of sunken aisles, moving the old north gallery in one piece to the south end of the audience room, and installation of the familiar Wilcox Pipe Organ at the north end of the room by the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, Vermont.

1923 - A gymnasium and parish house were built at the rear of the First Church as a gift by Mrs. Clark Wilcox in memory of her husband. The old one story chapel of 1851 and church kitchen of 1887 were raised to the second story level and converted into the top floor of the new addition.

1926 The First Church of Christ, Congregational and the Plymouth Congregational Church united to form the present Church of Christ, Congregational.

1931 The Reverend Roy M. Houghton, D.D. became pastor. He attended many international ecumenical conferences.

August 20, 1939 - The church commemorated its tercentenary with a service of worship after the manner of the early Puritans.

1943 - The Reverend Irvin G. Thursby was named assistant pastor. Upon the retirement of Dr. Houghton in 1945, he was elevated to the position of pastor.

1948 - Plan of Union for a United Church of Christ adopted by this congregation.

1949 - War memorial, consisting of new pulpit, communion table, and platform chairs dedicated.

1951-1952 - The old Plymouth Meeting house was demolished and the Plymouth Building for Religious Education was erected on same site. The project was largely financed by a church building fund drive.

1954 - The needs of a rapidly growing congregation led to the permanent hiring of an assistant pastor. In addition to his other duties, the assistant pastor was also the Director of Religious Education. Soon afterward a full time Director of Religious Education was also hired.

1959-1964 - A vast building improvement program was accomplished. These changes were in three stages. Stage one concerned the excavation and strengthening of the foundation as well as the reinforcement of the church floor. The second stage consisted of the laying of a new church floor, installation of a new Holtkamp pipe organ in the renovated south gallery, construction of a new chancel, and the complete redecoration of the meeting-house interior. The third and final phase of the program consisted of the renovation of the top floor of the parish house and the erection of a mezzanine floor and Fellowship Hall in the space formerly occupied by the Wilcox Memorial Gymnasium of 1923. The new floor level contains a modern choir room, expanded church office, pastor's study, church board room, and an office for the Director of Religious Education.

January 25, 1961 - The Church membership ratified the constitution and accepted membership in the newly formed denomination, the United Church of Christ.

May 31, 1964 - Anniversary service in conjuncture with the city wide observance of the three hundred and twenty fifth anniversary of the church and community.

The Ancient Silver Communion Service

This church is the fortunate owner of one of the largest and oldest silver and pewter communion services in the state. In reality the collection is the result of closely guarded and treasured accumulations formed by the old First Church as well as the Second or Plymouth Church. In the collection are some thirty-one pieces including cups of various types, beakers, two tankards, two flagons, two large bread plates, and two eighteenth century baptismal basins.

Among the most valuable silver items of the collection to be shown on Sunday, May 31st, are the baptismal bowls. The earliest of these was preserved by the First Church and was in steady use until recently. This bowl was made in New Haven by Cornelius Kierstede (1675-1757) and was the gift of Alice (Newton) Buckingham in 1731. It has been judged the finest baptismal basin owned by a Connecticut Church and the earliest one in point of time to have been made in the state. The later bowl was made for the Second Church in 1766 by Ephraim Brasher of New York. Other important silver items include a two handled cup by Cornelius Kierstede (1675-1757) given by Mrs. Abigail Beech in 1729, a two handled cup by John Dixwell (1680-1725) of Boston given by Alice (Newton) Buckingham, another similar to the previous given by Samuel Stone in 1714, two caudel cups by Edward Winslow (1669-1753) of Boston and inscribed: "Milford Church 1707" on one and "M.C." on the other, a tankard thought to have been made by Robert Fairchild (1703-1794) of Durham, Conn. and given by Deacon George Clark of the Second Church, and six silver beakers by Ephraim Brasher of New York (one given by Martha Welch to the Second Church in 1794 and give given by "the Sisters to the Second Church of Milford 1794").