

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	LEN.1
Historic Name:	Church on the Hill
Common Name:	Lenox Congregational Church
Address:	169 Main St
City/Town:	Lenox
Village/Neighborhood:	Lenox;
Local No:	
Year Constructed:	1805
Architectural Style(s):	Federal;
Architect(s):	Goodrich, Benjamin D.;
Use(s):	Church;
Significance:	Architecture; Religion;
Area(s):	LEN.A, LEN.B, LEN.J
Designation(s):	Local Historic District (06/27/1975); Nat'l Register Individual Property (09/30/1982); Preservation Restriction (02/25/1987); Nat'l Register District (06/27/2022);
Building Materials:	Roof: Asphalt Shingle; Wall: Wood; Wood Clapboard; Foundation: Stone, Cut;
Demolished	No



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

This file was accessed on: Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at 5:08 PM

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

46-18		A, B	LEN.1
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LHD, 6/27/75 [LEN.A] NRIND 9/30/82 [LEN.B]

Town/City: Lenox

Place: Historic District

Address: 169 Main Street (Formerly 165 Main)

Historic Name: Church on the Hill

Uses: Present: United Church of Christ Church
Original: Church

Date of Construction: 1805

Source: Church history

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: ~~Isaac Damon~~ Benjamin D Goodrich

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Large cut stone

Wall/Trim: Wood clapboard

Roof: Asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Major Alterations:

Clock on bell tower replaced in 1899. Interior renovated 1840, 1866, 1940, 1950

Condition: Good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

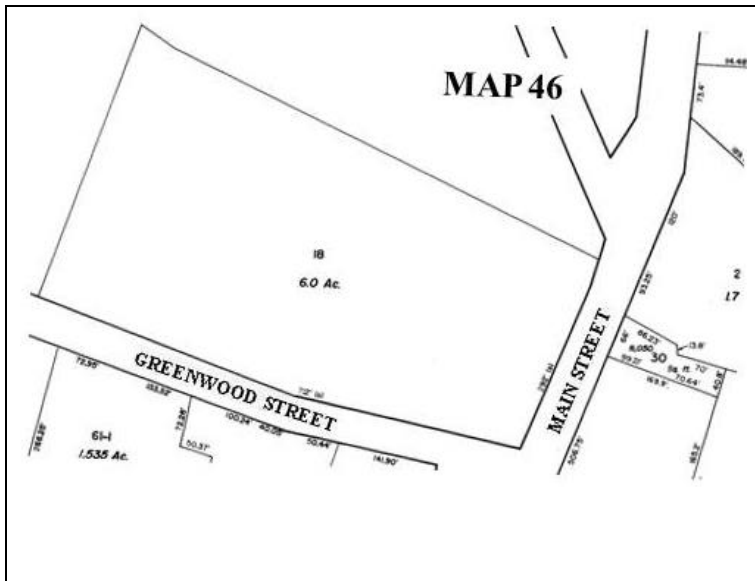
Acreage: 6.0 acres

Setting: Village

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Lucy Kennedy

Organization: Lenox Historical Commission

Date (month / year): May 2012

Revised by: MHC April 2022

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JAN 17 2014

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APR 28 2022

MASS. HIST. COMM.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

LENOX

169 MAIN STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

A, B

LEN.1

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

This Federal style building has two stories, an asphalt shingle roof and is intact. It has a three-bay center entrance; six bays deep; wood frame; front gable roof w/dentiled pediment; bell-tower at front of gable peak with a tall, square, balustraded base with large clocks on front and rear sides (clock replaced in 1899). It has Palladian window on left (West) side, topped by an octagonal belfry with Roman-arched vented openings and smaller balustrade and an octagonal cupola with bell-shaped roof and weather vane atop it. It has wood clapboard siding; corner pilasters; 1-bay wide. The entrance pavilion is one-bay deep with dentiled pediment, corner pilasters; Palladian window with tracery, door surround with pediment (short returns), modillions, entablature, paneled pilasters. It has double front entrance doors, wood paneled w/small window high up on each. The two-story square apse on rear facade has a rose window. There is a brick right side wall chimney and an exposed brick left side wall chimney. There are 12-over-12 windows with molded window headers and authentic window blinds. The foundation is large cut stone.

The form as submitted in 2014 attributed the church's design to Isaac Damon, based on incorrect research in Withey & Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (1970), p. 160. Damon did not arrive in Northampton until 1811, six years after the completion of the Church on the Hill. Additional information on Damon from secondary sources has been redacted. See Continuation sheet. [MHC edit 4/2022]

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

LENOX

169 MAIN STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

A, B

LEN.1

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In 1803, a special town meeting was called in Lenox, and it was voted to begin construction of a new church to replace the meeting house which had been built about 1770. The new church was to be built on or near the same site. The church was completed in 1805, and on the first day of 1806 it was dedicated in a service led by Rev. Samuel Shepard. As the official town and state church it held an important place in the political and social, as well as religious life, of Lenox. Although other churches were incorporated in the early nineteenth century, and their members exempted from paying taxes to support the Congregational Church, this church was not disestablished until 1834, and even then it retained its important position in the town.

"The Church on the Hill," as it came to be known, was prized by visitors to Lenox for its picturesque beauty and its embodiment of New England tradition. Guide books never failed to mention it, and its white steeple became a landmark visible for miles around. Even the wealthy summer residents who belonged to the Episcopalian Church took a special interest in the Church on the Hill, and contributed to its restoration.

The Church on the Hill was listed on the National Register of Historic Places Sept. 30, 1982.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES:

Church records

"The Church on the Lenox Hilltop...", New England Magazine. October 1900Lenox – Massachusetts Shire Town. David H. Wood 1969

Lenox Assessor's database 2012

169 Main Street (1805)



Looking North from Main Street



Looking South-west from Main Street



Cemetery to West of Church



View from North Side Parking Lot



Stone Wall Behind Cemetery

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

LENOX

169 MAIN STREET

RECEIVED

Area(s) Form No.

APR 28 2022

A, B

LEN.1

MASS. HIST. COMM.

Supplementary information provided by MHC April 2022, correcting information on the builder/architect.

Isaac Damon did not arrive in Northampton until 1811, six years after the completion of the Church on the Hill. As documented by the 1982 National Register nomination form for the Church, and by church records, the builder was **Benjamin D. Goodrich** (1769-1913), "joiner" of Richmond.

From the "Articles of Agreement" drawn up on the 19th of October, 1803, between Benjamin D. Goodrich, Joiner, of Richmond, Massachusetts, and a Contracting Committee of the Town, consisting of William Walker, Caleb Hyde, Oliver Belding, Jr., Joseph Goodwin, Joseph Newell, Nathaniel Miller and Ebenezer Williams, we learned that the former will "erect, building and finish a Meeting House. The body of the House to be sixty-four feet long and fifty feet wide and a projection of eight feet by twenty-six feet at the south end for a tower or steeple, the Posts of the House to be twenty-seven feet high; to be forty-six pews on the lower floor comfortable to the plan adopted by the Town; to be thirteen pews in the Gallery, besides two pews to be made and raised over the stairs; the upper Pillars to be of the Ionic order with Capitals of the same order; the arch over the body of the House to be elliptical arched; the flooring over and under the gallery to be horizontal; the front gallery to be made in a circular manner with four posts in the side gallery. The Pulpit to be built upon a post with a Corinthian Capital with two flights of stairs, the railing and banister of which to be of good Cherry or Mahogany; the pews below to be built of' stuff nine-eighths of an inch thick when worked; the windows to be twenty-four squares each, the glass nine by eleven, except the Venetian and other ornamental windows which are to be portioned sizes, all well fixed with patent springs; to be a double door in the front of the tower, and a single door in each end of the same; the roof and sides to be boarded with good, sound hemlock boards; all the inside work below and the front of the galleries to be done with good clean stuff; to be well painted inside and out with three coats, and to be plastered with three coats; the shingles to be laid out not more than five and one-fourth inches out; the clapboard to be laid out not more than six inches and to lap at least two inches; the bell to be hung and suitable apparatus provided for it; a lightning rod to be put up, made of refined iron of suitable bigness with an elegant iron vane and brass ball properly gilt and ornamental; the steeple and workmanship of it to be made comparable to the plan of a steeple laid down in Plate No. 33 in Benjamin's Country Builders Assistant." ...

At a special Town Meeting on April 18, 1803, it was voted to begin "building on the meetinghouse lot or near the place of the present Meetinghouse." (Wood: 43: 1964) Benjamin Goodrich was responsible for all materials and work, except the stone foundation and bell. He was paid \$4833.33 in three payments, the last October 1, 1805. Comparison of the present building with Asher Benjamin's Plate No. 33, in the Country Builders Assistant, does show a striking similarity of both the steeple and the entire Meetinghouse. From the design, obvious similarities also exist to the Charles Bulfinch influenced churches of Dalton, Lee, Pittsfield, and Richmond. All four of these churches have been lost to us by fire, neglect and changing times.¹

No other work is currently known of Benjamin Goodrich.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES:

Adams, Virginia H., James N. Parrish, Nancy Marasco, National Register Nomination for Lenox Congregational Church, United Church of Christ / The "Church on the Hill." (1982) MHC # LEN.B
(<https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=LEN.B>)

Wood, David H., *Lenox Massachusetts Shire Town*. Published by the Town, 1969.

¹ Adams, Parrish et al, National Register Nomination for the "Church on the Hill," (August 1982), listed 9/30/1982.



NRDMS - 9/30/82

LEN. 1

PR - 2/25/87

LHD - 6/27/75

AREA

FORM NO.

HD	1
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Town Lenox

Address Main Street

Historic Name Church on the Hill

(Congregational Church)

Use: Present church

Original church

DESCRIPTION

Date 1805

Source Church history

Style Federal

Architect Benjamin Goodrich (from design by Asher Benjamin)

Exterior Wall Fabric clapboard

Outbuildings none

Major Alterations (with dates) Interior

renovated 1840, 1866, 1940, 1950

Condition good (currently undergoing restoration)

Moved no Date _____

Acreage _____

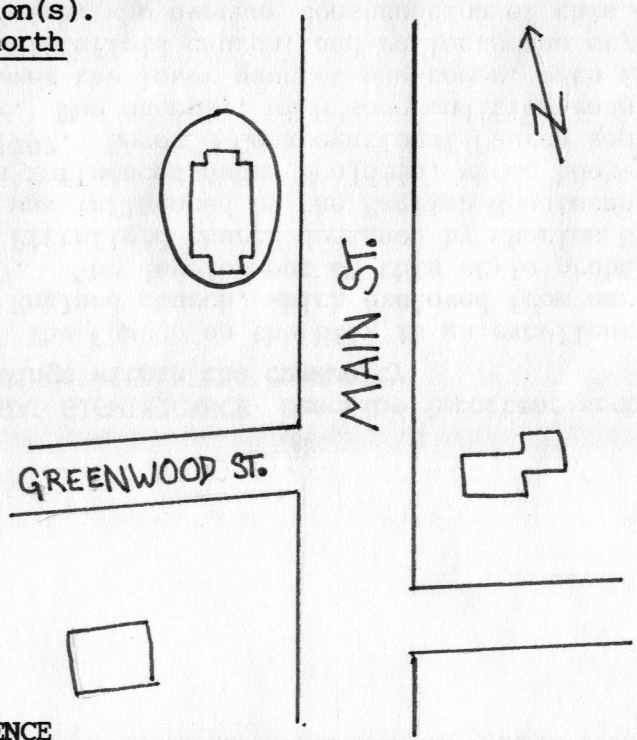
Setting Situated in a prominent position on the hill at the northern edge of Lenox village. The white steeple of the church is visible from miles around.

Recorded by Marcia Beals Brown

Organization Lenox Historical Commission

Date March 15, 1979 (updated January 1987)

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north



UTM REFERENCE _____

USGS QUADRANGLE _____

SCALE _____

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Church on the Hill is an excellent example of the classical-inspired New England church, which evolved from earlier barn-like meetinghouses after 1800. The development of this style probably began in Berkshire County, with the Pittsfield church designed by Charles Bulfinch between 1789 and 1793. Bulfinch, who was influenced by the English Renaissance architect Sir Christopher Wren, in turn influenced Asher Benjamin, whose book Country Building Assistant was published in 1797. Lenox's Congregational Church was based in large part on plate #33 of that book. The steeple, with some modifications, is taken from Benjamin's design. However the lower part of the tower, with its central door and pilasters, is like the Pittsfield church, and reflects the style of Charles Bulfinch. Benjamin Goodrich, who oversaw construction of this church, was not only a competent builder but a resourceful country artisan, who skillfully and tastefully blended the different design elements.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

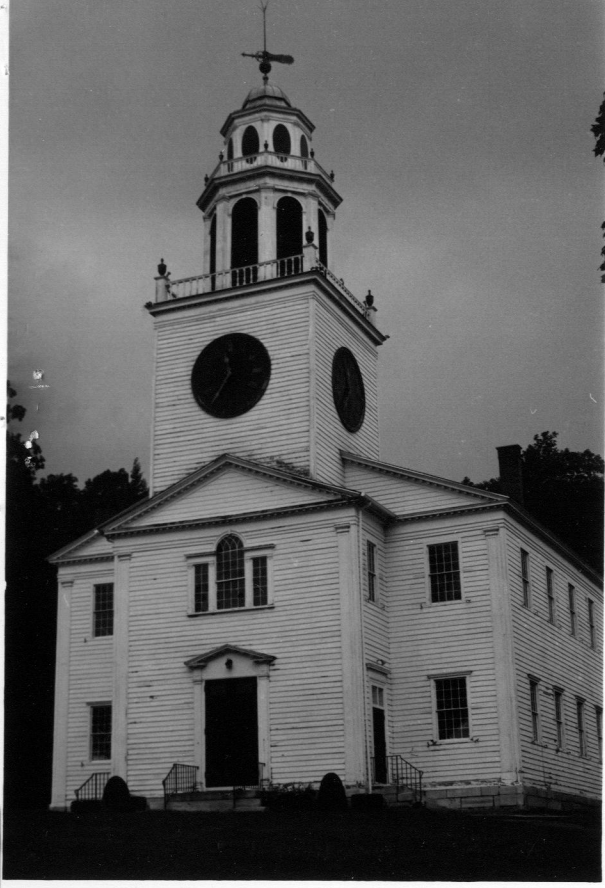
In 1803, a special town meeting was called in Lenox, and it was voted to begin construction of a new church, to replace the meetinghouse which had been built about 1770. The new church was to be built on or near the same site. The church was completed in 1805, and on the first day of 1806 it was dedicated in a service led by Rev. Samuel Shepard. As the official town and state church, it held an important place in the political and social, as well as religious life of Lenox. Although other churches were incorporated in the early nineteenth century, and their members exempted from paying taxes to support the Congregational Church, this church was not disestablished until 1834, and even then retained its important position in the town.

"The Church on the Hill", as it came to be known, was prized by visitors to Lenox for its picturesque beauty and its embodiment of New England tradition. Guide books never failed to mention it, and its white steeple became a landmark, visible for miles around. Even the wealthy summer residents who belonged to the Episcopalian Church took a special interest in the Church on the Hill, and contributed to its restoration. Today the Church on the Hill still stands as a symbol of Lenox's history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Church records
"The Church on the Lenox Hilltop...", New England Magazine. October 1900.
Lenox - Massachusetts Shire Town. David H. Wood, 1969

In Area no. <u>A</u>	Form no. <u>61</u>
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SSION
oston

1. Town LENOX

Address Main Street

Name Church on the Hill

Present use church

Present owner United Church of Christ

3. Description:

Date 1805

Source History of Church

Style Federal - Colonial
 built from plate #33 in
 Architect Asher Benjamin's "Country
 Builder's Assistant"

Exterior wall fabric clapboard

Outbuildings (describe) none

Other features palladian windows in bay,
 and bell tower; rose window at
 rear of church (above alter inside);
 wrought iron & marble fence with
 wrought iron gates surround property

Altered Yes Date 1840, 1866
1940, 1950

Moved No Date _____

5. Lot size:

One acre or less Over one acre
 not including cemetery _____

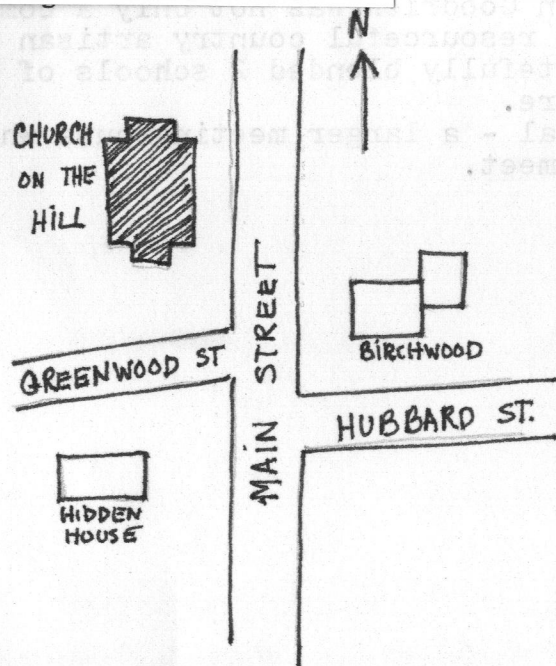
Approximate frontage 150 feet

Approximate distance of building from street
40 feet

6. Recorded by Marcia Beals Brown

Organization Lenox Historical Commission

Date March 15, 1979



DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE
 USGS Quadrant _____
 MHC Photo no. _____

(over)

JUN - 6 1979

MASS. HIST. COMM.

7. Original owner (if known) Town of Lenox owned property with first meeting house.

Original use church and meetinghouse

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates _____

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	<u>XX</u>
Architectural	<u>XX</u>	Exploration/ settlement	_____	Science/ invention	_____
The Arts	_____	Industry	_____	Social/ humanitarian	_____
Commerce	_____	Military	_____	Transportation	_____
Communication	_____	Political	<u>XX</u>		
Community development	<u>XX</u>				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

Architectural - the steeple, as well as some aspects of the lower floors reflect Asher Benjamin's influence. However, the lower half of the tower with its large single center door and tower quite accurately reflect the style of Charles Bulfinch. Benjamin Goodrich was not only a competent builder but also a resourceful country artisan who skillfully and tastefully blended 2 schools of New England architecture.

Community development & Political - a larger meetinghouse where townspeople could meet.

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

The Church on the Hill by Mrs. John J. Pitha, Rev. Harris B. Hinchcliff, Helen & Mary MacDonald, and Mrs. Walter H. Ramsey, Jr.

BUILDINGS

"The Church on the Hill"

by

REV. HARRIS B. HINCHCLIFF

Details of the first meetinghouse in Lenox are lost to the dim memories of the past. It stood a little southwest of the present church, next to the graveyard, and although begun in 1770, the 46 x 36 foot structure was not completed until 1775. Even after the new (present) meetinghouse was built, the town continued to hold its business meetings in the old structure until it was sold at public auction in May, 1806, for \$205.51. Many of the timbers of that old building rendered even further service in farms and dwelling places of the town. The church archives contain several small pieces of wood, prepared and annotated by Eldad Post in 1882, from the first meetinghouse.

The present building was authorized March 14, 1803, at the Annual Town Meeting. A contract was signed October 19, 1803, between Benjamin D. Goodrich, Jr., of Richmond, Mass., and a committee appointed by the town for the construction of the new building. The contract called for completion of the building by October 1, 1805, for which Mr. Goodrich was to be paid \$4,833.33. The "bill of materials," also in the archives, totaled \$2,153.66.

The contract specifies that "the body of the House (is) to be 64 feet long and 30 feet wide and a projection of 8 feet by 26 at the south end for a tower or steeple, the posts of the house to be 27 feet high." The upper pillars inside the building were directed "to be of the Ionic order with Capitals of the same order, the arch over the body of the House to be an elliptical arch; the front gallery to be made in a circular manner." The original pulpit was "built upon a Post with a Corinthian Capital, with two flights of stairs the railing and banister of which to be of good cherry or mahogany wood." Windows of 24 squares each, "of glass 9 x 11", also were specified, as was "a double door in the front of the Tower, and a single door on each end of the same." The roof and sides of the building are "boarded with good hemlock boards," while the interior was "done with good clear stuff."

A "lightning rod of refined iron" costing \$25.00 also was required, as was an "elegant iron vane and brass ball properly gilt and ornamented" (\$30.00) and a lock and key for the outside door (\$4.50)." In the light of present building costs, it is of interest to know that the hemlock boards for roof and siding cost the people all of \$40.00, while the "pine Clapboards 5/6 thick and 8 inches wide, free of knots and shakes" were billed at \$130.00.

The architecture of the meetinghouse is somewhat of a mystery as to its origin and designer. The contract clearly specifies that "The steeple and the workman-

ship of it (was) to be made conformable to the plan of a steeple laid down in plot No. 33 in "Benjamin's Country Builders Assistant." Clearly the steeple, as well as some aspects of the lower floors do reflect Asher Benjamin's influence. However, the lower half of the tower with its large single center door and smaller side entrances, and the Palladian windows in the bay and tower (two of which were replaced by the clock) quite accurately reflect the style of Charles Bulfinch. Perhaps all that can be concluded is that Benjamin Goodrich was not only a competent builder but also a resourceful country artisan who skillfully and tastefully blended two schools of New England architecture popular in that period.

Employing "any of the mechanics of said town of Lenox, who are or may be Proprietors in said house, who are able and willing to perform any part of the work as well and upon as reasonable terms as he can procure it done by others," Goodrich completed his work according to specifications and the dedication was held on Wednesday, January 1, 1806.

It takes a slight bit of imagination to picture the bare and prosaic interior of the meetinghouse back then. On each side of the center aisle, or "alley" as it was called, were rows of seven box pews with numbers painted on the door according to their order of choice. Next to the outside walls, and separated from the main pews by two side aisles, were five long narrow pews. On each side of the pulpit were four pews extending into the body of the church, and beneath and in front of the pulpit was the Deacons' seat. The circular pulpit itself was not large, but it was high in order that the minister might see all his congregation seated either within their individual pews, or behind the high gallery front.

Contrary to the current emphasis to retain or copy the "colonial style," the church of the past strived to be contemporary. Theologically, such efforts may be laudable, but for lovers of antiquity, modernization is anathema. However one feels, the meetinghouse has undergone several interior transformations.

In 1840, the first alterations in the floor plan were made. The box pews were changed to "slips," the center alley was abolished and replaced by larger side aisles, the pulpit and gallery front were lowered, and stoves were installed in the back of the main room.

With the advent of a regular choir in 1850, the rear gallery was appropriated for its use and a musical instrument called a "Seraphim" was installed for the support of the singers. In 1868, the present Johnson tracker-action pipe organ was installed.

In 1866, the floor plan of the meetinghouse as it presently exists was set up, and in 1880 a society of young women of the church financed a projection of the front wall of the building and installed the present platform and pulpit.

Other histories of the church detail the many gifts received, such as the Eggleston Baptismal Font, the Jessup Steeple Clock and the Robbins Fence surrounding the church lot.

In the late 1940's and throughout the 1950's the meetinghouse received rather continuous efforts of modernization. Electricity was finally brought in, oil heating was installed, so that for the first time in many years services might be conducted on The Hill throughout the winter, and the entire interior was scrubbed and painted white.

LEN. 1