

Preservation Week Preview: Newburyport's Architecture of Faith

Presented by R.W. Bacon

Tuesday, May 10, 2016, 7 p.m. • St. Anna's Chapel at St. Paul's Church



NEWBURYPORT PRESERVATION TRUST
Linking the past with the present and future

PRESERVATION WEEK 2016

(1) Introduction to *Newburyport's Architecture of Faith*.

This presentation: What it *is* (an overview of church architecture and its contribution to our "sense of place"), and what it *isn't* (a comprehensive study of religious symbolism or an exhaustive history of religion-fueled power struggles.)

(2) Beginnings: Trees, rocks, temples & "heathen hofs."

Northern European Celtic cultures (500 BCE - 500 CE ... and earlier) built ceremonial rockpiles, stone circles, and worshiped outdoors in groves of sacred trees. The stave church (rows of upright staves), is a derivation of the "heathen hall" of Viking tradition, the region's earliest evidence of indoor worship.

(3) More Sacred Places: Towers columns, arches, & domes.

The architecture of ancient Egypt and Greece informed later civilizations on how to build large and stable buildings ... like temples and churches. Ruins of Roman temples (c. 200 CE) are found in northern England. The sturdy pointed arch of Islamic architecture, mastered by itinerant European masons during the Crusades, became the identifying mark of the later "French" or "Gothic" style.

(4) Influences from England: Steeples & spires ... then rebellion & simplicity.

The earliest Saxon churches from the introduction of Christianity in England (c. 600 CE) were influenced by Roman architecture, i.e. "Romanesque" [Ex.: All Saints Church, Brixworth (850)]. The grandiose cathedrals built in France in medieval times brought the "Gothic" style to the fore in England [Ex. Salisbury Cathedral (1258)]. The Protestant Reformation brought the rise of the "auditory church" and the stripping away of ornament and old symbolism [Ex.: Guyhirn Chapel (1660)]. This unadorned conception of a meeting house is what the Puritans brought to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 17th century.

(5) **The New England Meeting House.** The finest example of an authentically preserved New England meeting house is close-at-hand. [Ex.: Rocky Hill Meeting House, Amesbury, Mass. (1785)]. "Church" & "Meeting House" defined.

(6) **White On White.** This photographic study of churches in rural New England by Steve Rosenthal is a touring museum exhibition (www.HistoricNewEngland.org).

(7) **Asher Benjamin** (1773-1845) and his pattern books influenced generations of craftsmen, and by extension, the look of the built landscape throughout New England. His plans for churches, with columns and spires, were based on the Neoclassical forms already popular for decades in England thanks to architects Christopher Wren, James Gibbs, and Benjamin Latrobe.

(8) **First Parish Church**, 20 High Road, Newbury. Congregation established 1635; present church built in 1869 is the successor to four previous meeting houses (1647-1661, 1661-1700, 1700-1806, 1806-1869) located across the street.

(9) **St. Paul's Church**, 166 High Street. Congregation established 1711; first church built at "the plains" (Storey Ave.). Present church built in 1923, designed by William Graves Perry (of 1960s preservation fame) is the successor to two prior churches on the site (1741-1800, 1800-1920).

(10) **First Religious Society**, 26 Pleasant Street. Congregation established 1722; Market Square meeting house built in 1725. Current Federal-style structure was built in 1801, replacing the dismantled Market Square church.

(11) **Old South Church**, 29 Federal Street. Congregation established 1742; present structure built in 1756. Notable for its association with the charismatic preacher Jonathan Whitefield (1714-1770) ... and his crypt.

(12) **Central ("North") Congregational Church**, 14 Titcomb Street. Congregation established 1768; present structure built in 1861, the third church on the site (1768-1827, 1827-1861). The 1861 church combines Gothic features of the earlier 1827 church with Italianate Victorian elements in fashion in 1861. The steeple is a 1971 replica.

(13) **Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church**, 7 Harris Street. Congregation established 1918; present church built in 1985, after a fire destroyed its previous home on the site. The original church on the site was a 1796 Federal-style structure designed by Leonard Smith for the 2nd Presbyterian Society. The First Baptist Church, Colored, established in 1921, used the chapel for Sunday evening services. The church building was sold to the Greek Orthodox Congregation in 1924.

(14) **Belleville Church**, 300 High Street. Congregation formed 1807; present Romanesque Revival structure – that retains some Gothic features – was built in 1867. The present church is the third on the site (1808-1816, 1816-1867).

(15) **People's Methodist Church**, 64 Purchase Street. Congregation established 1819; church built 1825. Steeple added in 1888.

(16) **Congregation Ahavas Achim** ("Washington St. Meeting House"), 53½ Washington Street. The congregation, established 1896, purchased its new home in 1933. The structure was built in 1865, when a Methodist Episcopal congregation, established in 1827 at a brick church on Liberty Street, built its new Italianate Victorian meeting house.

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Sacred trees
500 BCE

"Heathen hof"
stave churches
400-1000 CE

Saxon
Romanesque
church c. 850

English Puritan
chapel
c. 1650

New England
meeting house
c. 1715

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(17) Immaculate Conception Church, 40 Green Street. Congregation established in 1840s; early Gothic Revival style church built in 1853. The steeple and bell deck were added in 1874.

(18) Hope Community Church, 11 Hale Street. Congregation established 1846; the current church on Hale Street was built in 2000, successor to the First Baptist Church on Green Street. The Gothic-influenced Green Street Baptist Church was completed in 1848. The building was raised up and rebuilt in 1873. Sold in 2000, it is now a restaurant.

(19) How BIG is Hope Community Church?

(20) Churches on the move:

Pentecostal Assembly of God, 13 Hale Street. Congregation established 1942; current church built in 2000, the successor to its former home at Plummer & Merrimac Sts., built in 1942. The former church structure is now occupied by a social service agency.

First Church of Christ, Scientist, 22 Inn Street. The congregation established in 1890 is currently located on Inn Street after selling its High Street church building in 2010. The former church, built in 1941, is now a single-family home.

(21) Changing times:

St. Aloysius de Gonzaga Church ("French Church") 25 Federal St. Congregation established 1902; church built in 1904. The church closed and the building was sold in 1999. The building is now two residential condominiums.

Quaker Meeting House, 36 Ferry Road (formerly on High St.). Congregation established 1714; Georgian-style meeting house built in 1743 on High Street. The building was sold in 1825, and a new meeting house built on Turkey Hill Road in West Newbury. The 1743 meeting house was moved to Ferry Road in 1857, where it remains a private home.

(22) Defunct, demolished, long-gone, etc.:

2nd Parish Meeting House (1689), near Sawyer Hill Burying Ground, Curzon's Mill Road. Dismantled and carted off in the middle of the night by rowdies (1710).

First Presbyterian Church (1742), High & Federal Sts. Congregation built Old South 1756. Site now private homes.

4th Religious Society (1793), Temple & Prospect Sts. The site is now a parking lot for the Sullivan Building.

First Baptist Church (1812), Congress Street. Congregation dissolved & property sold in 1877. Later a box factory. Razed before 1909. Now the site of 1940s house.

First Universalist Church (1840), Middle & Fair Sts. Congregation dissolved & property sold in 1887. Later a shoe shop and leather processing factory. Burned down in 1899. The site is now residential.



The Plains
Church
at Storey Ave.
(1711-1741)

Market Square
Meeting House
(1725-1801)



First Christian Society (1844), Court St. Congregation dissolved & property sold in 1873 to the nearby Immaculate Conception Church. Site is now parking lot for IC School.

Whitefield Congregational Church (1852), State & Prospect Sts. Demolished 1939. Site was later a supermarket, then a furniture store, and is now the IFS Lending Office.

Advent Christian Church (1856), Charter St. The basement was a shoe factory. The site is now within the footprint of the Sullivan Building.

(23) More churches on the move:

First Congregational Church, Main Street, Middletown, Conn. Congregation established 1668. The town's third meeting house built in 1799 by Lavius Fillmore was based on an Asher Benjamin design. After a new church was built in 1873, the 1799 church was hauled up Main Street and placed on a new foundation – backwards. It is the oldest surviving building on Main Street.

First Baptist Church, Georgetown, Mass. Congregation established 1829; church moved to the present site in 1837. Threatened with demolition in the 1970s, the building was purchased and rehabilitated by a private owner. Since then it has been used in multiple ways, including as a residence.

(24) In the news: Preservation ... or not.

St. Bridget's Church (1859), St. Louis, Missouri. *Demolished* March 2016 to make way for school construction.

First Spiritualist Church (1887), Springfield, Mass. *Moved* April 2016 to make way for casino construction.

(25) So ... the buildings are great. But what about people? The buildings don't preserve themselves. Preservation depends on the values and proactive care of motivated *people!* That's the key to preserving artifacts ... and culture itself. (*Cue the stampede for Newburyport Preservation Trust membership.*)

(26) Learn even more at Preservation Week events.

Consult the schedule for opportunities to tour the *interior* of many churches in this presentation. You'll absorb history, see artifacts, and learn about preservation challenges. Thanks for your kind attention, and have a great week! – R.W. Bacon

About the presenter. R.W. Bacon is a museum/history professional with specialties in 17th-century New England architecture and life – and early 20th-century American music, vaudeville, and circus. A graduate of Syracuse University and the Harvard Museum Studies program, he is the author of eight books on multifarious non-fiction topics. For more than you ever wanted to know, visit www.VarietyArtsEnterprises.com.