

# First Parish Church Timeline

*A summary of key events and facts from 1702 – 2012*

Paul Lindemann — May 10, 2012  
for First Parish Church, Derry, NH

## 1701

The Deed of Nutfield, by John, an Indian, was signed over to the Newbury or Salem parties, for the price of five pounds.

## 1717

Address sent to New England governor Shute signed by 217 men in Northern Ireland, led by four ministers, seeking (and receiving) encouragement to settle there. He directed them to explore Nutfield.

## 1718

August 4 – Fleet of five sailing vessels arrive in Boston. Some settlers went to other Massachusetts towns. Sixteen families sailed to Maine. The brigantine Robert, captained by James Ferguson, carried eventual Nutfield settlers.

Rev. MacGregor gave these reasons for migrating in his last sermon in Ireland: 1) to avoid oppression and cruel bondage, 2) to shun persecution and designed ruin, 3) to withdraw from the communion of idolators, and 4) to have an opportunity of worshipping God according to the dictates of conscience and the rule of His inspired Word.

## 1719

April 2 – Sixteen families make their way to Haverhill. They decide to consider Nutfield, fifteen miles north, called such for its abundance of oak, chestnut, butternut, and walnut trees. The men left, found a suitable place, built temporary shelters, and returned for their families and provisions.

April 11 – The first Scotch-Irish settlers arrived in Nutfield, after wintering in the area of Casco Bay, Maine, and then returning to Haverhill, MA. Rev. MacGregor joined them, after spending the winter teaching school in Dracut, MA. They met on the hill near the upper meadow, since known as "Horse Hill" because they tied their horses there.

April 12 – The Rev. James MacGregor preached the first sermon near the shore of Beaver Lake.

June 17 – The town ordered a sawmill to be erected on Beaver River and authorized James Gregg to have a gristmill on the same stream.

September 8 – The first person born at Nutfield was Jonathan Morrison.

October 20 – The settlers purchased the Nutfield territory from John Wheelwright by a deed that was drawn up in Boston. John Goffe was the first Town Clerk.

Famous Londonderry Linen produced by settlers who brought art of weaving to Nutfield.

The Irish potato was planted for the first time in New England by First Parish members.

## 1720

David Cargill one of the first elders of the First Church built a fulling mill for woolen clothmaking and a corn mill.

Church services continue to be held under an oak tree at Beaver Lake, in the open, or in their log dwellings.

## 1721

James Gregg was one of the original settlers and received a land grant to build the first corn mill in town, by Thornton St. and East Derry Rd.

January 11 – Voted that "a meeting-house shall be built in this town as speedily as may be and that the above said house shall be "fifty feet in length, forty-five feet broad and so high as may be convenient for one set of galleries."

January 13 – The first death in the settlement was that of John Clark.

May 18 – The first marriage in the community was that of John Wallis and Annis Barnhard.

## 1722

The first framed house was built, for Rev. James MacGregor. It had two stories in the front and one in the rear.

June – the first meetinghouse was built, near the site of the present-day church.

First meetinghouse is a framed structure "convenient and well finished" (homes were mostly still logs) closer to the road (North) than the present building.

June 21 – A town charter was granted to Nutfield, and the name was changed to Londonderry.

## 1723

A schoolhouse of logs was built on the common in back of the First Church. It was twelve by sixteen ft. in size.

## 1726

The first grammar school was built near the meetinghouse.

July 15 – It was voted that the town would keep a grammar school. The first school in Nutfield was a log house, 12 feet by 16 feet, with 7-foot walls. It was located in the vicinity of the first meetinghouse.

## 1727

James Alexander one of the first elders of the church was also selectman and moderator. Given title of sealer of weights and measures.

## 1728

It was voted that the selectmen were to take a bond of Captain Cargill of thirty pounds penalty to keep up the Fulling Mills forever for the town's sake.

## 1729

The cemetery currently known as Forest Hill became town property through a gift by deed of Robert MacGregor.

The population reached approximately 700.

March 5 – Rev. James MacGregor died.

October 29 – At 10:00 p.m., a severe earthquake occurred, centered around Newburyport, Massachusetts.

October 29 – Nutfield residents were alarmed by earthquake shock. Rev. MacGregor arose to calm people; his frightened family asked him to remain with them to which he replied "I have a greater family which must be cared for." A renewal of the people followed, with additions to the churches.

## 1730

The westerly part of town presented a petition at the Town Meeting, "to be set off as a parish for the greater enjoyment of religious privileges."

## 1733

“Ocean Born Mary” born on ship which left Londonderry, Scotland while headed to Nutfield, was married at First Parish Church

Londonderry divided into two parishes, East Parish (current Derry and East Derry) and West Parish (current Londonderry)

## 1734

Communion Seasons were held twice a year and were very important to the church. In this year, Rev. Thompson had 700 communicants present (including some from other towns).

## 1735

Town votes that if a man is found sleeping in church, he should be punished by sitting in stocks.

## 1739

David MacGregor, son of Rev. James MacGregor, led 40 families to form a West Parish church, in present-day Londonderry.

## 1741

February 12 – Windham set off from Londonderry as a separate town.

February 25 – The West Parish in Londonderry set off from the East Parish, sparking a controversy that stretched out over several years, seen in the story of sweethearts Gabriel Barr and Rachel Wilson.

## 1753

A severe fever, resembling the yellow fever, took the lives of several inhabitants, including a few of the leading citizens.

## 1755

November 18 – A smaller earthquake is recorded by the Town Clerk at 4:10 am.

## 1769

Current FPC meetinghouse building was constructed.

Matthew Thornton (a signer of the Declaration of Independence) was on the Building Committee

Also on Building Committee were Colonel Daniel Reynolds, John Morrison, and Moses Barnett.

Meetinghouse was 61 by 45 feet, high enough for the introduction of galleries and a lofty sounding board suspended over a high pulpit. Had a steeple slender and higher than the present one. Sheep pen pews.

Population reached 2,500.

## 1770

March 5 – Boston Massacre. News probably read under the "Community Oak Tree" in FPC churchyard. Townspeople used to gather under this tree between Sunday sermons to eat their lunches and listen to reports of current events.

## 1793

The first classical school for young women was erected around 1793 on the East Parish meetinghouse common near the cemetery. The first teacher was Z.S. Moor. In 1814, a new and larger academy was built on the same site. This was later moved to Lane Rd. to become the Adams Female Academy.

## 1795

The first post office was established, and Dr. Isaac Thom was appointed Postmaster. It was in the Thom Tavern, opposite the brick house (bank) on present E. Derry Rd. It later moved to Harper's Store (the parsonage building of FPC) and then to the East Derry Store.

## 1797

The Third Society (Congregational) was organized in the East Parish, in part out of opposition to Rev. Parker's predecessor, Rev. Jonathon Brown. Reunited with FPC in 1810.

## 1806

A turnpike connected Methuen, MA and Concord, NH, passing through the Lower Village (near present traffic circle) and leading it to become a mercantile center.

## 1810

Reverend Parker spent hours recording the history of Nutfield (through 1850).

The reunited First and Third societies formally adopt an "Articles of Faith" document. The new congregation was independent of Presbyterian (FPC) and Congregational (3rd) sister churches, but followed a form of worship that was essentially Congregational.

## 1810 – 1830

Gallery clock installed in the Sanctuary sometime during this period.

## 1814

Parker helped to motivate the Pinkerton brothers to form Pinkerton Academy.

## 1815

December 4 – Pinkerton Academy opened its doors to students for the first time. The school was named for Major John Pinkerton and Elder James Pinkerton, old time merchants who gave an endowment sufficient to ensure the permanence of the school during the first seventy years of its existence.

## 1821

First use of wood stoves to heat the meetinghouse.

## 1822

Reverend Parker influenced the building expansion from the middle

Building to be split and expanded by 24' in the middle; many other changes. Construction takes two years.

The bell for FPC was given by Jacob Adams, later founder of the Adams Female Academy. It was recast in 1824 and again in 1860.

Wife of Rev. William Morrison raised the first tomatoes in town. She had brought the seed from her earlier home at Octoraro, PA.

## 1824

Adams Female Seminary, endowed by Jacob Adams, opened under the direction of Miss Zilpah P. Grant and Miss Mary Lyon. Miss Lyon later went on to found Mount Holyoke Seminary, now as Mount Holyoke College.

The population having so increased, it was necessary to enlarge the First Church once more. This was done by sawing through the frame at the center of the north and south walls. The rear section was then moved 24 feet to the east, and the two halves were connected. (Construction started in 1822.)

## 1827

July 2 – The Town of Derry was born. This came to pass when the eastern part of Londonderry petitioned to be set off as a separate township, a request that was granted by the legislature. Derry received 22,600 acres and Londonderry 28,870.

## 1829

A bank was incorporated in the town by the name of "Derry Bank."

## 1845

The Meetinghouse (FPC) still served as place for government and religious, together.

A floor built to divide the building into two stories (as it is today). Sanctuary was on second story, town offices and meeting room on first. Interior was reconfigured, new doors added, two high galleries removed (east gallery remains as choir loft), all pews converted to straight bench pews, new interior painting and frescoing.

## 1846

The second floor addition was completed.

## 1849

November 13 – The Manchester and Lawrence Railroad opened, making West Derry (present downtown) a commercial center.

## **1853**

Pinkerton Academy became coeducational.

## **1854**

First organ (pump) installed.

## **1859**

The large granite stones from the vault of the bank at East Derry were used to build a town-owned tomb in Forest Hill Cemetery.

## **1860**

The current bell was cast: 2240 pounds, 48" diameter, 34" high.

## **1861**

The Civil War began (running to 1865).

## **1873**

House near the church built 1812 that served as James Thom Store is sold to FPC, which uses it as a parsonage for 100 years. Then rented as a private residence; refurbished and put on the market for sale in the Summer 2007.

## **1876**

Charles Bartlett opened a printing office in Derry Village, where the Derry News was first published.

## **1878**

Harriet Taylor bequeathed \$1,000 to the town to establish Taylor Library. Originally, the library was housed in the Upper Village Hall in East Derry.



## 1879

“Sam” said ‘the snowdrifts were so high on the Depot road that he could look down into the top of Hood’s chimney.’ “The Derry News

## 1883

No permanent pastor at FPC through 1884 (fourteen supply pastors fill the pulpit). Major restorations accomplished by congregation without leadership.

## 1884

Renovations inside First Parish church, including more frescoes, stained glass memorial windows, Parker plaque, new pulpit furniture, tin ceilings, and an oil-fueled chandelier.

Stained glass windows donated by and commemorate many active community members and leaders, including:

James C. Thom and Harriet Thom given by their son, Gen. George Thom, Pinkerton Academy student in 1827 and one of the highest ranking Derry man to serving in the Civil War. The Thom family descended from Dr. Isaac Thom, early Nutfield physician, proprietor of the Thom-Willey Tavern, and the town’s first postmaster.

Charles Parker, the son of Rev. Edward L Parker, Pastor at FPC from 1810-1850 and one of the town’s first historians.

A great spiritual awakening and increase in membership followed this restoration.

## 1889

October 4 – The town dedicated a new "Soldier's Monument" erected in memory of the men who served in the Civil War. According to it, 153 Derry men fought in this war, and 24 lost their lives in the service of the Union.

## 1895

The town voted money for the publication of Wiley's Book of Nutfield, authored by George F. Wiley.

## 1898

Spanish American War.

## 1900's

A. Bart Shepard played the organ at FPC for over 50 years. The original organ needed to be pumped and in later years son Alan Shepard (the future astronaut) was one of the young men given this job.

## 1905

Derry Public Library opened.

## 1914

World War (ran to 1918). 305 Derry men served, fifteen of them lost their lives.

## 1919

In this post-war era, Civil War veterans were honored on Memorial Day with a parade ending at FPC, with a fair and ham and bean dinner held there. Water came from the hand-pump near current East Derry Rd. A 36-square foot building known as MacGregor Chapel stood where the Town Garage is today, and horse sheds in the current parking lot accommodated the transportation of the day. The meetinghouse was heated by two wood stoves on the ground floor; the current MacGregor Hall and Dena's Kitchen spaces were a woodshed.

## 1923

November 18 – Future astronaut and Moon walker Alan B. Shepard Jr. was born in Derry.

## 1929

In 1929, the Taylor Library moved from the Upper Village Hall into a new building across the street, where it continues to operate today, retaining the friendly, small-town flavor of years gone by. Frederick J. Shepard gave the new building to the town for the library.

## 1930

June 2 – The Meetinghouse was neglected physically and the congregation hurting spiritually. Meeting held to consider a partial consolidation with Central Congregational Church. Discussions of closing FPC due to lack of financial support continue on and off.

## 1934

December – FPC plans to close at year-end. Rev. Addison invited to preach last two Sundays prior to closing. Church leaders convince him to stay and preach through March; he stays seven years. Much renovation occurs: downstairs painted and furnished, new dishes and glasses for the kitchen, silverware donated by the Hood (dairy) family, sanctuary painted and pulpit furniture donated by Katherine Eastman Hood, stained glass windows repaired, wood furnace installed in Southwest corner downstairs and smaller stove in current Parker Library. East Derry Improvement Society removes horse sheds at no cost.

## 1939

World War II (running to 1945). Derry men serving: 718 (out of population of 5,000).

## 1945

The service of Rev. John Gaskill as FPC pastor 1942-1946 interrupted by call to service as Army chaplain in WWI 1944-1945. (His wife substituted for him). Believed to be the first American clergyman to enter the Dachau concentration camp.

## 1944

Se-Lo-Ki woman's service group established. Name derives from "SE – Service for our Master; LO – Love for all mankind; KI – Kindness for our brother; These we seek to find." They managed numerous church functions and programs, raised money for various purposes, supported the Sunday School Program, and generally served with great enthusiasm and effective results until the group was gradually phased out in the 1970's.

## 1950

Korean War (ran to 1953).

## 1952

FPC By-Laws amended to allow women to vote at church meetings.

## 1953

Modernization takes place under Rev. Robert Henderson: forced-air furnace installed (so pastor or sexton no longer had to arrive early on Sunday to fire up the wood or coal stoves), sanctuary painted, pews varnished, carpet and tiles installed (still there), mimeograph purchased, new timbers added to support the roof under the bell.

## 1955

New hymnals purchased.

## 1956

November – Annual Sugar Plum Fair started by the Se-Lo-Ki women's service group.

## 1957

Nathaniel Head leaves bequest of \$4000 for a new organ. Organ purchased in 1959.

## 1960

Vietnam War (ran to 1975).

## 1964

October 25 – Petition to dismiss pastor (signed by Henry Murphy and five others) read after Sunday service. Real issue was use of Sunday school materials from the "liberal" UCC (which the parish had repeatedly voted against joining). The issue was debated at a meeting the next Tuesday, with cries of "communist" flung at supporters of the pastor. The vote was split 67 – 67, the pastor stayed on another three years. Many members resigned, and went on to later form Calvary Bible Church on Hampstead Rd.

## 1969

NH State historic marker sign #58 installed on church property along East Derry Rd. It reads "In April 1719, sixteen Presbyterian Scotch-Irish families settled here in two rows of cabins along West Running Brook easterly of Beaver Brook. Initially known as Nutfield, the settlement became Londonderry in 1723. The first year, a field was planted, known as the Common Field, where the potato was first grown in North America."

## 1973

The Helen Noyes Christian Education Building was added to the original meetinghouse, providing four classrooms, a nursery, a pastor's office, restrooms, and Noyes Hall in the lower level. Funded by bequest of Helen Noyes, long-time superintendent of FPC Education Department.

## 1982

September 10 – FPC added to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the East Derry Historic District.

## 1985

Carillon (tower music system) installed, in honor of Bart Shepard. Updated in the 90's by Nancy Sienkiewicz.

With great growth of Derry and huge growth and prosperity in FPC under Rev. Diana Augspurger from 1975 – 1988, the congregation decided to add a new addition. The Currier Building (named for long-time hospitable parishioners Al and Sue Currier) provided for new church offices, a new kitchen, the large Currier Fellowship Hall, five classrooms on the lower level, with additional restrooms. FPC incurred a large mortgage

## 1986

Pew doors and other artifacts from 1769 building previously donated by Annie Shepard, grandmother of Allan B. Shepard, found in storage at church.

## 1988

Beloved pastor Diana leaves. Several interim pastors fill the role. Economy bad, job market sluggish, people unemployed, pledges down.

Established a relationship with the NH Historical Society Museum (year approximate). Their Tuck Library still holds records of early FPC sessions.

## 1989

Call made to and accepted by Rev. Nelson (Jim) Howard. Church has 400 member families, decide to hire Director of Christian Education and an Associate Pastor (along with senior pastor, administrative assistant, part-time secretary, and custodian).

## 1990

Persian Gulf War (ran to 1991).

1810 – 1830 Gallery clock (in sanctuary) repaired through a gift from John E. Webster, whose ancestors were active members of FPC.

November – Repairs to Tower Clock made by Philip A. D'Avanza of Goffstown NH. John E. Webster made a donation to restore the mechanism. A capital improvement campaign raised \$250,000.

Hand-chimes donated by Charles Reynolds, son of choir director Helen Reynolds and Ned Reynolds, descendant of Col. Daniel Reynolds who helped build the church.

Marilyn Ham and other FPC members attend a national meeting of Partners for Sacred Places in Boston to learn about church restoration programs. The FPC Historic Preservation and Restorations Committees are formed as a result.

## 1992

August – Meeting held to vote on recalling Rev. Howard. Two-third vote for him to stay, but this caused a major rift: many members resigned from board positions, refused to pledge, or just left the church. Rev. Howard eventually resigns in March the next year.

## 1993

Original (1884) pulpit furniture re-upholstered by parishioner Jane Mallison. Great Auction held to fund improvements for the 275th Anniversary in 1994.

Established a relationship with the Boston Congregational Library to assist FPC with preserving archival objects and ephemera, and organizing a Preservation Committee (year approximate).

## 1994

Nutfield region (Derry, Londonderry, and Windham) celebrates 275th Anniversary with festivities centered on FPC, the "Olde Meetinghouse on the Hill." Includes an official US Postal Service postmark commemorating the event. Thirty Scottish clans invited; many attended, with traditional costumes, music, and flags. Numerous historic artifacts, photos, etc. cataloged and displayed. Official Program published, documenting history from 1719 – 1994.

Music Room is renovated and named "The Shepard Music Room" in honor of A. Bart Shepard (father of astronaut Alan Shepard) who started playing the pump organ for church at age 14, and continued for many years. He was also a leader and major benefactor of FPC.

The "old kitchen" in MacGregor Hall is dedicated to Altadena (Dena) Spoffard, long-time servant of and supporter to the church.

September 30 – James Garvin, Architectural Historian from the NH Division of Historical Resources, completes detailed *Report on the First Parish Church (Londonderry Meeting House) East Derry, New Hampshire* assessing the evolution, significance, and maintenance needs of the building.

## 1995

Through the NH Division of Historical Resources, Marilyn Ham presented our experiences in raising funds for the clock tower restoration project to other historic churches (date approximate).

## 1996

The Civil War monument was taken down, renovated, and returned.

Late in the 90's, parish raises \$385,000 for a capital improvement campaign.

FPC establishes partnership with Dangamvura Church, Mutare, Zimbabwe.

## 1997

Parishioner Helen Batchelder leaves money in her will for historic preservation. Council allocates some of this plus directed pledges and donations to Historic Preservation Committee. Archivists later hired to help organize historic records and artifacts (year approximate).

## 2002

Foley & Buhl Engineering, Inc. performs study and issues *Report on Structural Conditions at East Derry First Parish Church*, with many recommendations for repairs, photos, etc.

## 2006

May 6 – Heritage Day started at FPC as yearly event with educational and historic presentations and fun activities for the community, aimed at increasing appreciation for local history. Antique appraisals by Skinner Auction House, Boston (Antiques Roadshow TV show).

## 2007

May 5 – Second Heritage Day. Antique appraisals by village resident Hercules Pappachristos. Highland Games by the Cobban family.

July 18 – Town of Derry celebrates 180th anniversary of its founding (split from Londonderry) with major festivities at FPC, where the town meeting vote for the split had taken place.

## 2007 continued

July – Application for a grant for restoration funds prepared by parishioner Charles Stewart and submitted to the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). Not awarded.

## 2008

July 27 – Third Heritage Day celebration.

December 15 – Brought in by the Building Rehabilitation Committee, Arron J. Sturgis of Preservation Timber Framing Inc. delivers *First Parish Tower and Roof: Structural Damage Assessment and Initial Project Proposal*. No action taken.

## 2009

July 27 – Third Heritage Day celebration.

October 28 – New Hampshire Preservation Alliance holds annual Seven to Save announcement at FPC, and FPC makes the list.

## 2010

March – New staff reinvigorates Building Rehabilitation Committee, with mission to shepherd planning and fundraising for much-needed repairs to the historic building.



## 2011

July – Historic Preservation and Restoration Committee (HPRC) sends GAR Upton Post Memorial Civil War Flag to professional restoration expert. Project cost \$6,500, beautifully repaired and framed flag returned in February 2012, mounted in MacGregor Hall.

July – HPRC commissions custom manufacturing of replacement globes for sanctuary chandelier; 10 purchased for ~ \$8,000, half funded by a grant, half a disbursement from the Memorial Fund.

August 22 – Working with Building Rehabilitation Committee (BRC), Norman E. Larson, AIA, of CPW Architects LLC, delivers Historic Building Conditions Assessment, with estimate for multi-year repair and refurbishing approaching \$1.5 million.

August-September – Facilities Board and BRC commission meetinghouse exterior painting and repairs (to trim and cupola) at cost of \$82,500.

September – BRC submits LCHIP grant application, seeking \$29,000 for exterior painting, critical electrical work. Not awarded.

## 2012

May 19 – Fourth Heritage Day celebration. Appraisals again by Hercules Pappachristos, good participation by Town of Derry, Upper Hall, Taylor Library, Friends of Forest Hill Cemetery. New Meetinghouse Guided Tour package and training developed, lecture Series with Town Historian Rick Holmes and others, Highland Games again by the Cobban family, TowerCam installed in steeple for remote viewing, and more.