



## First Parish Congregational Church United Church of Christ

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# First Parish Preserves Historic East Derry Meetinghouse Steeple with Funding from LCHIP Grants

**East Derry, New Hampshire** — The historic preservation team at First Parish Church is proud to announce the completion of a major phase in the multi-year rehabilitation of the church's 1769 Meetinghouse: the repair and rebuilding of the Tower and Steeple.

The \$500,000 project benefited from 2015 and 2017 grants by New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) totaling \$155,000. The rest of the funding came from generous congregational and regional donations, which were catalyzed by the support of LCHIP and the state's historic preservation community.

Preservation Timber Framing, Inc. of South Berwick, Maine was the primary contractor. Highlights of the large project include:

- Removal of the bell and lowering of the unsafe Steeple to the ground in September 2015,
- Removal of inappropriate 1990s steel beams and anchors inside the Tower,
- Significant repairs to the Tower timber frame, including inserting two new 60' tall white pine corner posts from above in November 2017,
- Reconstruction of 95% of the Steeple—exactly replicating the original materials and elements while improving the internal timber frame—and lifting it back on top of the Tower in June 2019,
- Application of extensive copper flashing and roofing (by *The Heritage Company*, E. Waterford, Maine) and refurbishing and re-gilding of the weathervane (by *The Chester Gilder*, Chester, New Hampshire), and
- Finishing external repairs, lead paint removal, and repainting in September 2019.

“As the continuous stewards of this community treasure since it was built in 1769 by Mathew Thornton and other early settlers, we at First Parish Church are thrilled to complete this next major step in the long effort to restore and prepare the Meetinghouse for another century of service to the church and the community,” said the Rev. Dr. Deborah Roof, senior pastor and teacher at First Parish.

“For nearly 30 years we’ve worked on historic churches, barns, community buildings, museums, homes, and more all over New England,” said Arron Sturgis, president of Preservation Timber Framing. “This Tower and Steeple project at First Parish stands out as one of the most challenging—but ultimately most satisfying—we’ve had the privilege to be part of.”

## **About First Parish and the Meetinghouse Preservation Effort**

First Parish Church was established in 1719 by Rev. James MacGregor, who led a group of Scots-Irish families from Northern Ireland to settle in the territory then known as Nutfield. The current Meetinghouse is the community’s second, and it has served both religious and civic functions continuously since its construction in 1769.

Learn more about First Parish Church at [www.fpc-ucc.org](http://www.fpc-ucc.org).

The current historic preservation effort began with a formal study in 2012. It has seen the building raised five feet then lowered onto a new state-of-the-art foundation; the construction of an adjacent Accessibility Connector to hold an elevator serving both historic and modern buildings; numerous repairs to the timber frame, clapboards and trim; and the installation of a new, safer heating system.

Learn more about the rehab work at [www.nutfieldhistory.org](http://www.nutfieldhistory.org).

The church has invested about \$1.6M so far. Initial funding came from years of donations by church members plus an internal capital campaign that raised \$800,000 from the small but passionate congregation. Additional funds came from a loan with Enterprise Bank, and the successful LCHIP grants.

LCHIP grant recipients are required to at least match the grant amount dollar for dollar. Much of the matching funds for the Tower and Steeple work came from community donations through the Friends of the Meetinghouse at First Parish, a 501(c)(3) non-profit with responsibility for community fundraising.

Fundraising efforts are continuing, as the remaining work includes completion of the elevator and Connector building, rehabilitation of the upper-story Sanctuary, and the rebuilding of meeting rooms and more in the lower level.

Information on ways to donate and support this work is available at the Friends’ website, [www.fotmh.org](http://www.fotmh.org), or by emailing [info@fotmh.org](mailto:info@fotmh.org).

## **About New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program**

The New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program is an independent state authority created by the legislature in 2000 with a legislative mandate to ensure the perpetual contribution of natural, cultural and historic resources to the economy, environment, and quality of life in New Hampshire.

LCHIP provides matching grants to New Hampshire communities and non-profits to conserve and preserve the state's most important natural, cultural and historic resources. The program has provided 466 grants which have helped to conserve more than 290,000 acres of land for food production, water quality, ecological values, timber management and recreation and supported 280 projects to rehabilitate historic structures and sites.

Grants have been awarded in all parts of the state and in 167 of New Hampshire's 234 communities. Forty-six million dollars of state money has led to a total project value of more than \$317 million. The money for LCHIP grants comes from fees on four documents recorded at the Registry of Deeds in every county of the state.

For more information about LCHIP, visit [LCHIP.org](http://LCHIP.org) or call (603) 224-4113

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*First Parish Preserves Historic East Derry Meetinghouse Steeple with Help from LCHIP Funding*

Click on an image to download a high-res file. The LCHIP logo is courtesy of the LCHIP office. The photos are courtesy of First Parish Church.



[LCHIP Logo](#)



[FPCnews-1.jpg](#) — The unsafe Steeple was lowered to the ground Sept. 9, 2015.



[FPCnews-2.jpg](#) — Guiding a 60' tall new corner post down into the Tower as a crane lowers it, Nov. 21, 2017.



[FPCnews-3.jpg](#) — Raising the restored Steeple, June 27, 2019.



[FPCnews-4.jpg](#) — Rehabilitated Tower and Steeple on the west end of the Meetinghouse; Accessibility Connector with elevator underway to the right, April 29, 2020.