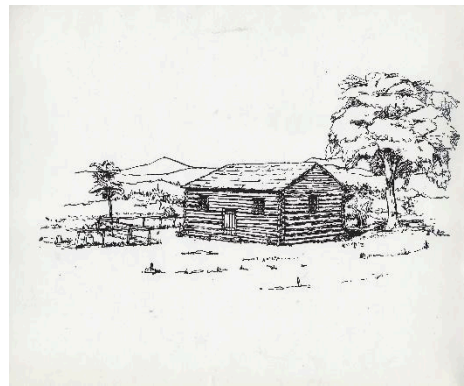


# The First Congregational Church of Pembroke, NH

## History 1733 - 2025

In 1727 a charter for the land now called Pembroke was granted to Capt. John Lovewell and his company of men for their services of defending early settlements from the Native American tribes which called the area Suncook. This charter for the town stated that a place of worship should be built within 5 years. On April 10, 1733, a contract was drawn up for the first church in the town (now called Pembroke). It read it was to be "...of good sound logs, 30 ft long by 24 ft wide, and 10 or 11 ft high – the roof to be covered with good, long shingles, well laid on and nailed, one door made and hung. The sides to be covered with good clapboards."



This building was located by the northeast corner of the Pembroke Street Cemetery (374 Pembroke Street) and gave its name to the Meetinghouse Brook which ran near it. At first services were held by such ministers as could be secured. The "Congregational Society in Pembroke" was comprised of Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Independent parishioners. As the years passed, they each broke off as their congregations grew creating their own memberships. This log meeting house was replaced in 1746 by a framed structure in a "raising." This structure is still standing having been moved to the Whittemore Homestead further south on Pembroke Street.

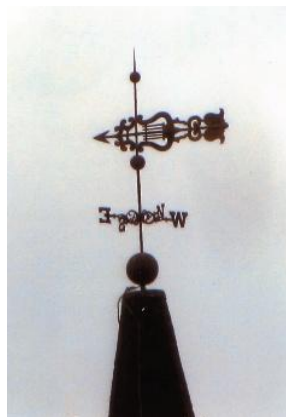


A new meeting house was built in 1807 on the site of our present church location at the corner of Church Road continuing the church's legacy of being the center of the religious and social life of the town. In April of 1836 this old meeting house was torn down, saving as much as possible, and reused to build a new building. It was voted to call this building "The First Congregational Society in Pembroke." The first lights were installed in

1853, sperm oil lanterns and candles. The year 1871 saw the addition of the high steeple.

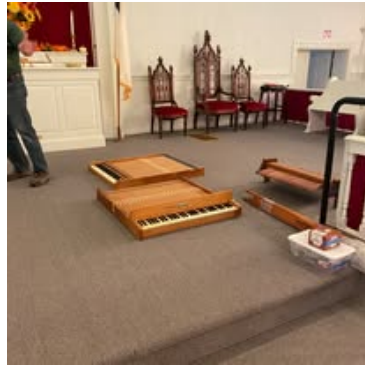


In 1883 a new Hook & Hastings (of Boston) organ was installed, it is still in service today 142 years later; luckily in 1925 an electric blower was added ending the era of hand pumping the organ! In 1895 a legacy was left in a trust for religious and educational purposes to the church by Emily P. Eayrs. This trust was used to build a chapel at the rear of the building to be used for social meetings and such other purposes as shall serve the best interests of the parish filling a long-felt need and adding greatly to the church's appropriate work.



In 1920 the church steeple was struck by lightning, freezing the weathervane askew for many years; it was repaired when a new roof was needed for the steeple in the last 10-20 years or so! Renovations and additions to the church in 1958 included the enlargement of the Chapel to add a Parish Hall, Sunday School rooms in the basement and a new vestibule. At that time there were 110 children enrolled in the Sunday School. If you closely examine the architecture of the present building, you can see where the Memorial Room was added to the southside and the larger Parish Hall improvements were added on. In 2000 a funding campaign was held to pay for the addition of more classrooms, conference rooms, storage, offices and 2 more bathrooms and this is the structure as it stands today.

The church sanctuary has seen renovations in the early 1970's and again in 1995 and new carpet was added more recently. Our organ had a major overhaul in 1991, which it deserved having at that time served the church for over 100 plus years.



Along with the 1994-95 church renovations the kitchen was updated and a new stove and dishwasher was added. The tradition of summer church suppers that started in 1951 had continued for many years morphing into fall suppers, necessitating much needed updates. The Parish Hall and the Memorial Rooms have been updated several times to keep up with their busy use. A Long-Range Planning/Land Use Committee Was formed in the late 1990's and in 2000 saw an opportunity to purchase abutting land and they then started working towards helping to create senior housing in town which was greatly needed. A sprinkler system was added and half of the sanctuary roof was replaced that year along with updated drainage.

The first minister called to settle in the ministry was Rev. Aaron Whittemore from Concord, Massachusetts in 1737. He served the church for over 30 years in this extensive parish; he was strongly evangelical in his religious beliefs and ministry. His salary was derived from the towns people through taxes. When the Presbyterian members split off during Rev. Whittemore's tenure and balked at having to pay the Congregational minister with their taxes plus pay a minister of their own, Rev. Whittemore's pay was notably diminished. In 1797 the two church societies reunited again. Thirty-eight other clergy followed Rev. Whittemore, though only one managed to pass his long tenure. Rev. Abraham Burnham preached for 43 (1808-1850); his pulpit bible is displayed in the sanctuary. In 1849 the Methodist broke off and built their own church at the intersection of Brickett Hill, 4<sup>th</sup> Range and Cross Country Road. A Baptist church was formed in 1865 and the Baptist Church of Suncook was erected in 1870 on Church Street in Suncook Village. The Baptist Church of Suncook was burnt in the late 1940's and many of their membership rejoined The First Congregational Church of Pembroke. The First Independent Society was organized in 1880; its active career was brief.

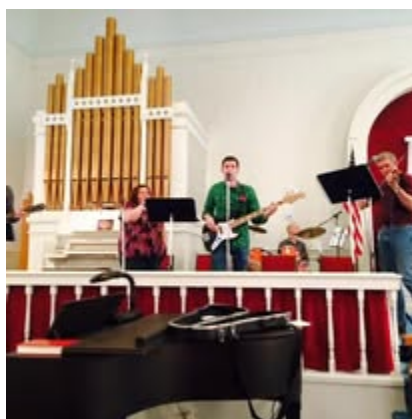
During Rev. Burnham's ministry in the early 1800's the women of the church met secretly to hold regular prayer meetings "there was much prejudice against such gatherings," this group was formally organized in 1871 as the Ladies Sewing Circle and thus began the programs for women of the church.

These programs continue today though they have gone through many changes and updates with the times. A Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was organized in 1889; supplying a fellowship of young adults. A Philathea Class which became a couple's club was very active in the church in the early 1900's and had a long history meeting and sharing Bible Study and fellowship. In the 1940's the Pilgrim Fellowship was started beginning youth opportunities over the years in various forms. A Children's Church was held for the Sunday School on Communion Sundays in the Chapel area and continued in the Parish Hall after those 2 expansions. It was a mini-worship service that included hymns, a message and Communion that was geared for a child's attention span and interests. There have been numerous small groups for youth, men, women, young adult and couples that have come and gone. Their names have changed but the mission of fellowship and Christian togetherness has remained steadfast.



Photographs from the early 1900's and the early 2000's

A Sacred Dance Choir in 1969 was formed and preformed in numerus places for over 14 years. It was briefly reinstated to perform at special services in the in the 1990's. Over the years there have been several inspiring ways to worship and spread the Word, such as Praisin' Puppets, Friday Night Thing (a teen coffee house and Bible study) and a variety of Praise bands. The most notable praise band being Redeeming Grace which played at Pembroke/Allenstown Old Home Days in the late 1990's -early 2000's.



The Praisin' Puppets along with leading Sunday children's stories also had performances at the Noah's Ark Fair (church function for many years), Old Home Day and in other area churches. The 1990's Men's Prayer Breakfast morphed into a Breakfast Broom Brigade; after a meal the men helped keep the facilities in good shape. More recently the Men's BBQ Dinners at the Herrings are well received, these meals are open to the men of the church and their guests.



Occasionally the church will hold Men's Breakfasts with inspirational speakers. The women of the church take part in regular Book Club discussions and Ladies Luncheons which bring in inspiring speakers too. There are Fall Bible studies and Spring Lenten study series; most recently resourcing programs by Rick Warren and Max Lucado. The Sunday School has always had its own mission ministry which has taken many forms; here are just a few, sponsoring a Compassion International child or two, Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child, Heifer Project, Food Pantry and more.

Over the years the Pembroke church has had many fun fundraisers; some of these include yard sales, church suppers of all kinds; a Noah's Ark church fair with silent auction, an auction of services and opportunities, Christmas concerts with Ken Medema more. There have been many pot-luck suppers as well as themed meals like chili feasts, Hawaiian Luau's and even a Pow Wow! We hold a yearly Trunk or Treat where we serve hot dogs and chili to area families; the Scouts join in by holding a Haunted House! We had well over 200 this year!



All these activities are a way of encouraging our fellow neighbors to join us in fellowship.

Over our long history we have held adult retreats (couples, men and women) at Pilgrim Pines Camp and Retreat Center and the Horton Center, Bay View Villa Convent and others. There have been many youth(Deep Freeze), men camps and women’s retreats at Camp Berea in Hebron, NH on Newfound Lake, where many of us have been spiritually enlightened and recharged. These retreats have created a bond between the staff at Berea and our church which has often led to some of their staff leading worship when we needed pulpit support.



A far-reaching ministry, which was started from one of your Lenten studies “Unbinding Your Heart,” is the Monday Night Prayer Group. Prayers are submitted either in worship during the Pastoral Prayer, a prayer box, through the mail, even at one time on a Prayer Wall placed next to the sidewalk! Prayer warriors pray over the needs and joys every Monday night at 6:30pm.

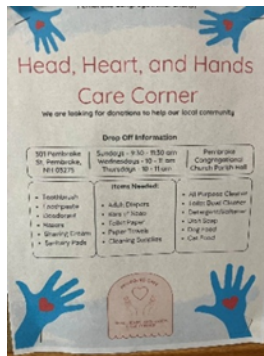


A Worship Planning Team that was chartered for one year but worked for many years under Rev. Jim Howard to select scripture, music and visuals to complement the worship experience. Out of this team we gained valuable equipment and knowledge to make our worship more meaningful by having hymns and scriptures up on a screen to enrich the worship experience. This is especially helpful on Sunday's where we have our Praise Band leading worship which is on about a six-week rotation. Our organist/choir director George Bozeman, who is a retired organ builder is amazing; he began almost 30 years ago as a substitute organist and we are so grateful that he decided to stay. He even sometimes joins in with the praise music even though he is more of a classical musician.



Some of this church's interesting missions include the sponsorship of refugee families; in 1958 three Hungarian families, in 1963 a Cuban refugee program and in 1979 Laotian families arrived. A long running ecumenical Thanksgiving Basket tradition and a local ecumenical food pantry in Suncook Village were inspired by this church. Pembroke Congregational Church has housed a Visiting Nurse program for seniors, an AA program, music lessons, yoga sessions, dance classes, area HOA meetings, Green Valley School performances, Joyce Sanborn Memorial Concerts, Teen Challenge services, collections for the food pantry, helped the Pembroke welfare department with support and many more needs of the community. We currently have an outreach called "Care Corner" which is open on

Thursday afternoons to supply toiletries, cleaning supplies, paper products and more that the area CAP food pantry does not supply.



In the early 2000's the church purchased neighboring properties which enabled the church to work with the Taylor Community out of Laconia to provide much needed senior housing in Pembroke. Half the project was successfully built and Taylor sold us back half of the land that they found they were not going to use. That land has since been sold and the proceeds have assisted in our continuing to be able to be open to the spirit and where it leads us spreading the Word and service of the Lord to our neighbors. On some of the property a local farm is able to use the land to grow vegetables and a Community Garden also uses that space, where area families can grow healthy food.

Our youth groups worked at teen Work Camps around the New England area for a number of years. At their suggestion we had 4 plus years that we held our own work camps helping families in the



from this to this



Pembroke, Allentown and Concord areas with much needed home repairs. These were a week-long whole church effort that combined hard work, vacation Bible School, breakfast and luncheon meals and

worship! Our home repairs were building better home environments for the residents and growing very meaningful faith experiences for the people we helped and the church family as well.

After the downstairs Sunday School rooms were built, the church provided a home to two preschools. The first was called Christopher Robin Preschool from the late 1950's to early 1980's. When that preschool closed Wonderland Preschool was formed which filled the need again for preschool education in Pembroke from 1984 until 2016 closing only when the public schools offered a free preschool. One of our conference rooms now houses a counselor office as another way to help area children and families.

The First Congregational Church has hosted Boy Scouts by adopting the first charter to become the sponsor in 1922. The church and Troop 270 have had a nurturing relationship together for youth in our community for years letting them use our Parish Hall for their meetings and activities. More recently we have given them the use of one of the downstairs classrooms and a storage room for their own meeting space and they still use our Sanctuary for their Court of Honor Ceremonies. The Pembroke Boy Scouts were established as Troop 70 and became Troop 270 in 1953 after a brief hiatus. The church has been involved and supporting them most of this time. The relationship has gained much for both the scouts and the church; like Eagle Scout Projects at FCC such as an Outdoor Chapel, a Firepit, finishing off of a Youth Room, cleaning out/repairing and organization of the shed and more. The scout's benefit by having a space to call their own and they help out with various projects such as spring and fall clean up at the church. We also supported the Girl Scouts of the area by providing a place for their meetings and activities. "February 2019, BSA National updated the program name to Scouts BSA and welcomed girls in the ranks as equals. On March 25, 2019 Troop 270g was chartered. Male and female youth ages 11-17 are welcomed inclusively and enthusiastically into Troop 270."



In the same vein, the Pembroke Women's Club used our church to hold their meetings for many years, sharing our Parish Hall and kitchen for many of their fundraising breakfasts and dinners and programs.

In 1961 the church voted to join the United Church of Christ while Rev. Hubert Topliff served in the pulpit. That association with the UCC worked for many years; but as with many things The First Congregational Church of Pembroke began going in one direction and the UCC another. Through the process of many years of accessing where the Holy Spirit's direction was leading us, searching through

many pastors and various programs to find a pastor called to our ministry we realized we just don't fit the UCC mold. One very meaningful process we underwent was our Saturday morning Visioning Workshops that were open to all parishioners. Through these strategic group planning sessions, we prayerfully created new mission and vision statements which have led us since. Our mission "To Know God and Make Him Known" and our vision "For every person in our community to have a relationship with God" have provided the basis for our church governance and a new direction for the future. Every step is now run through the process of asking "does this help us to *know God and make Him known?*" Using this template in 2024, the Leadership Team researched and studied the UCC and other denominations and presented our findings at the Annual Meeting on May 19, 2024. After much discussion our church prayerfully and thoughtfully voted (with only one dissenting vote) to leave the United Church of Christ and become a Bible based and led congregation, independent of any denomination. It was asked at the meeting if this would change who we are; it was agreed that our church has always been led by our mission and always welcomed anyone who came through our doors and that all are welcome to worship, teach, and preach the Word of God in our church, our community and our world.

Our current pastor Rev. Duffy Johnson is retiring and at a Special Meeting of the church on November 19, 2025 we voted in Pastoral Search Committee to look for a new pastor to join us in following God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to serve, lead and most of all love our fellow man.



**Ministers who have served  
The First Congregational Church of Pembroke, NH**

MINISTER	DATES SERVED	# YEARS
Rev. Aaron Whittemore	1738 – 1767	30
Rev. Jacob Emery	1768 – 1775	7
Rev. Zacheus Colby	1780 – 1803	23
Rev. Abraham Burnham	1808 – 1850	42
Rev. John Merrill	1850 - 1853	3
Rev. Robert Crossett	1854 – 1855	1
Rev. Lewis Goodrich	1856 – 1865	9
Rev. Nathan Carter	1865 – 1866	1
Rev. Benjamin Merrill	1866 - 1870	4
Rev. Lyman White	1871 – 1875	4
Rev. Edward P. Stone	1875 – 1877	2
Rev. Cyrus Perry	1877 – 1879	2
Rev. Cassander Sampson	1879 – 1885	6
Rev. James Odlin	1885 – 1886	1
Rev. Franklin Wood	1886 – 1887	1
Rev. Arthur Ward	1887 – 1891	4
Rev. Edward Tenney	1891 – 1893	2
Rev. Paul Bourne	1893 – 1904	11
Rev. Ezra Riggs	1905 – 1909	4
Rev. Thomas Harwood	1909 – 1917	8
Rev. E. T. Blake	1917 – 1924	7
Rev. Earl Osborne	1924 – 1929	5
Rev. Earle Buchin	1929 – 1938	9
Rev. Manuel Snow	1938 – 1932	4
Rev. William Deane	1942 – 1947	5
Rev. D. Glengyle Deale	1947 – 1959	12
Rev. Jessie Deale	1951 – 1959	8
Rev. Hubert Topliff	1959 – 1974	15
Rev. Calvin Wright	1974 – 1979	5
Rev. Peter Lovejoy	1980 – 1993	13
Rev. Hank Beairsto (Interim)	1993 – 1995	2
Rev. Dan Stauffacher	1995 – 2005	10
Rev. David Travers (Interim)	2005 – 2008	3
Rev. Jim Howard	2008 – 2015	7
Rev. Linda Hey (Interim)	2016 – 2018	2
Rev. Betty French (PT Bridge Interim)		
Rev. Arthur Urie (PT Bridge Interim)		
Rev. Duffy Johnson	2019 – Present	6