

MEETINGHOUSES [started this folder at New Britain CT]

n.d. (ca. 1650-1770): "It is agreeable to one's mind to contrast the three forms of meeting-houses which obtained in New England up to this time [the completion of the Medford meetinghouse, first used on 11 March 1770]. The first was a one-story, square building, in naked and uncheerful simplicity, with straw-thatched roof; lighted, not by glass windows, but by the opening of outside shutters; and had within neither pews nor pulpit. The second was two stories high; had diamond-glass windows; a four-sided, sloping roof, of wood, with a turret in its centre for a bell; and sometimes a portico in front; and, within, a gallery, some pews, a deacon's seat, and a pulpit. The third was two stories high, had window-sashes and square glass, a two-sided roof, with a tower from the ground, and three porches; while its interior showed galleries round three sides, in which, fronting the pulpit, were seats for twenty-five or fifty singers; and, on the lower floor, wall-pews, three inches higher than the rest; two free seats, nearest the pulpit, for deaf old men and women; a deacon's seat, in front of the pulpit; and the sacred desk not at the end, as is now the fashion, but in the centre of one of the longest sides of the house, its top from eight to ten feet above the floor, and over it fastened a 'sounding-board.' ... [p. 339] It is not difficult to imagine the appearance of a congregation in 1650,--the men on one side, and the women on the other, sitting on wooden benches, in January, under a thatched roof, with one or two open window-places, without stoves, singing Sternhold and Hopkins and the New England Psalms, and then listening to a two-hours' service ["sermon" meant?] with devotion!" [MA/Medford; Brooks 1855, pp. 338-339]

n.d. (after 1672): "Here stood the old Church [finished in 1673], with its double row of galleries, a raised Platform with seats along the North and South walls, the floor also occupied with seats, two or three pews only being erected at the sides. ... There was no ceiling above, nor were the sides plastered, and the whole interior appeared thickly studded with spars [= rafters]." [MA/Dedham; Lamson 1839, p. 58]

1715-early 1830s: detailed description of Eliot, Maine's second meetinghouse + its use [Willis 1899, pp. [97]-103]

1747-1857: "The symmetrical building, two stories in height but without a bell tower, was a typical eighteenth-century New England meeting house. Similar to many gabled Georgian houses, the nearly square structure could be entered through three porches, each of which contained a central doorway. The front door was on the south side; the other entrances were on the gabled east and west ends. [new paragraph] Inside the building, a raised pulpit on the north side was surmounted by a high sounding-board, while the deacons' seat was before the pulpit. The body of the House contained long seats for general use and private box pews. Room for pews was allocated to those men who owned the largest estates, with 'the highest Person in the Valuation for real estate in the years 1747 & 1748 [given] [←square brackets in source] the first Choice of a Pew in said House and the next highest the second Choice and so successively.'" [MA/Lincoln; MacLean 1987, p. 94]

1750-1849: "The [third] meetinghouse [in Hatfield] stood in the middle of the street, perhaps twenty-five rods north of the brick schoolhouse. The pulpit was on the west side

[with the east side of the meetinghouse probably on the street], and over it was a sounding board. It was entered by a staircase on the south side, and at the right of the staircase, in front of the pulpit, was the 'Deacons' seat' and the communion table, while the galleries extended around the three other sides. There were two staircases leading to the galleries, one on the southeast, and the other on the northwest [not northeast?] corners of the house, and over each of the staircases was a large square pew elevated above the others, and called the 'high pews.' The house below was divided into square pews by what was called the 'broad aisle,' running east and west through the middle of the building with two narrow aisles, one at the north and one at the south of it. In addition to these there was one on each of the four sides of the house at the distance of the breadth of one pew from the walls, connecting with the doors and with the stairs leading to the pulpit and the galleries. The building was entered by three doors, one on each of the north, south, and east sides. At the north end there was a tower built up from the [p. 251] ground to the belfry, surmounted by a tall spire on the top of which was fastened a weather vane in the shape of a brass rooster. The tower was entered by two doors, one on the north and the other on the east side." [MA/Hatfield; Wells 1910, pp. 250-251]

1752-ca. 1842: "This structure was so far advance as to be deemed fit for use in 1752, though the galleries were not made until 1787.... For ninety years it was in constant use as a place of worship.... Opening the double doors, on the south side, we entered an area of small square pews, whose floors were elevated about right inches above the floor of the central portion of the room. This latter was at first filled with slips on each side of the center or broad aisle, leading up to the pulpit. A narrow aisle passed quite around these slips furnishing access to the pews which occupied the entire walls except where the doors, on the east, the south and the west sides; the stairs leading to the galleries at the corners, and the pulpit at the center of the north side occupied the space. The slips in the center were afterwards, (in 1808) converted into square pews. The galleries were deep, filled with square pews along the south wall, and elsewhere with the long slips. The choir was ranged along the front and sometimes extended nearly the entire length of the galleries, the base on the west, the treble on the east and the tenor or 'counter,' with the leader on the south. The pulpit was an hexagonal structure, placed upon a pillar, about eight feet above the floor, and reached by a flight of stairs, was neatly finished and painted white; above it was suspended a canopy or sounding-board..." [CT/New Canaan; Canaan 1935, p. 16]

n.d. (between 1759 and 1842): "The following description of the fourth meeting house [built 1759, taken down 1842] was given by Nehemiah Cleaveland at the two hundredth anni- [p. 266] versary of the town of Topsfield in 1850. ... [new paragraph] "To many of us, the image of that old house, where, for eighty years, the Gospel was proclaimed, and its ordinances dispensed, must be ever dear. Venerable edifice! we see thee still, thy towering spire, thy glittering and ever-restless weather cock. There was thy pulpit—revered and awful rostrum, where, raised high in air, stood the holy man; there thy sounding-board, projecting, seemingly unsupported, like an impending avalanche, there, too, thy velvet cushion—soft as feathers could make it, and sending up, when pounded by a vigorous eloquence, clouds of sacred dust. There was thy lofty and spacious gallery—grand receptacle of all ages and both sexes, with its foremost seat, —venerable with wrinkled brows and snowy hair, and, the denser masses in the rear, where sober middle age, and

sprightly youth, were seen, distinct in their ascending ranks. There, too, in one of the angles, marked by his staff of office, sat the terrific tything-man. In front of the pulpit, rose, like some well-manned battery, the singers' seats. What volleys of sound did we not receive, unshrinkingly, from that noisy spot! How anxious was the pause, —relieved only by a slight shuffling [“shuffling” intended?] and by half-stifled hems, —which succeeded the reading of the psalm! How like a small thunder-clap, burst upon the ear that preluding note, which brought every voice to the right pitch! And then, who can recount the musical glories which hung clustering round Thanksgiving Day, —when the results of a month's preparation broke upon our heads in a perfect storm of sound? How fearful the strife when flute and clarionet, and viols, great and small, entered the lists with bass, and counter, and tenor, and treble! And oh! How our hearts beat, —let me use another's* words—“at the turning of a fugue, —when the bass moved forward first, like the opening fire of artillery, —and the tenor advanced next, like a corps of grenadiers, —and the treble followed with the brilliant execution of infantry, and the trumpet counter shot by the whole, with the speed of darting cavalry: and then, when all mingled in that battle of harmony and melody, and mysteriously fought their way through, with a well-ordered perplexity, that made us wonder how they came out exactly together!” Will the pictured memory ever fade of those square pews, with their little banisters, so convenient to twirl—so pleasant to peep through; their uncushioned seats, which were hung on hinges, and raised in prayer time, and which followed up the amen, with a loud [p. 267] rattling, running report, like an old-fashioned militia fire; and the flag-seated chairs, that stood in the centre, for mother, or grand-ma'am, or spinster aunt? There were the long, free seats—there was the Elder's pew, with iron stand for hour-glass and christening basin—and there the Deacons' straight, snug box, where those good men were wont to sit, with their faces to the people and their backs to the minister—the observed of all observers, and examples of the highest edification, when they happened to be dozy.' [*Samuel Gilman's, on p. 37 of his *Memoirs of a New England Village Choir* (1829)] [MA/Topsfield; Dow 1940, pp. 265-267]

n.d. (between 1760 and 1831): “The old meetinghouse had galleries on three sides. In front, all around, was a seat for the singers. Immediately back of this was another seat, and back of all, pews. In the southeast corner of the gallery was a pew, set on posts over the head of the stairs, called the negro pew, but I never saw a negro occupy it. Men and boys occupied the west and south galleries, and the girls the east.” [MA/Greenfield; Thompson 1904, p. 538; recollections of Rev. Charles C. Corse, written in a letter to the author]

n.d. (late 18th c., early 19th c.): “The Meeting House was at first as crude as the homes, and was a place of no creature comforts. The seats were hewed planks; there was no heat in the building, the sermons were often long, but no sleeping was tolerated. The men sometimes used to stand up to keep from going to sleep. Two sessions of the service were customary down to the 1860's. [new paragraph] The pulpit in the South meeting house was a high construction, with a sounding board, typical in meeting houses of the period. The minister reached the exalted position by a flight of narrow stairs. The elder men used to sit near the front, in order to hear the preacher, and there was a seat reserved for the deacons. The pews were square, straight-backed, and were uncomfortable to sit in; that, with the absence of heating, made the service an uncomfortable experience, but it was considered

the necessary 'mortification of the flesh,' which was a part of their understanding of religion." [ME/Fryeburg; Barrows 1938, p. 69]

1771: (from chapter IX, titled "A Sunday Morning in 1771") "We enter [the meetinghouse] by the great door, whose face is covered with all kinds of announcements to the public. Opposite to us as we enter stands the pulpit, lofty and formidable in appearance. There is a large window behind it, a dome-shaped sounding-board above it, and a steep staircase leading up to its entrance. When the minister has ascended the stairs and shut the pulpit door behind him he is entirely lost to sight. At the foot of the pulpit and facing the congregation are the seats of the deacons. Before them stands the communion table, which is not served on sacrament days with unfermented wine, as we know from an order of the church at Milton in May, 1734, 'that the Deacons be desired to provide good Canary wine for the Communion Table.' [new paragraph] Next to the pulpit is the pew of the minister's wife. Out of it a narrow door opens [p. 129] into a closet under the pulpit, in which the town's broom, the demijohn of Canary wine, and the pewter baptizing-basin and communion flagons and cups are kept. From this pew a line of square pews runs along the walls of the house, around to the other side of the pulpit. They are of clearest oak, whose beauty is not covered by paints. They were made with the best skill of the village carpenters. They are topped by balustrades, and are so high that when the congregation is seated a few heads only appear in sight above them. Seats are hung by hinges on three sides of each pew, and are lifted when the worshipers stand up for long prayers, [p. 130] permitting them to lean against the partitions, where they get some assistance in standing. The pews are the upper seats of the synagogue. The lower seats are two ranges of benches in the centre of the house, fronting the pulpit and separated by the great alley. In the fore-seats of these ranges, elderly people and those who are hard of hearing are seated; the hind-seats are occupied by younger persons. Of the same rank are certain seats in the galleries, reached by stairs in the corners of the house." [MA/Wareham; Bliss 1889, pp. 128-130]

1772 + 1824-1826 + 1836: "The meeting-house was completed so as to be used for worship November, 1772, and the outside covering then on it is still sound. [new paragraph:] The interior of the house at first had pews nearly square, with a high pulpit and huge canopy or sounding board. In the gallery were three rows of long benches in front, with pews back of them. The building was not warmed except by foot-stoves, until 1824, when wood-stoves were introduced. In the winter of 1825-26, the pews and long seats in the gallery were removed, and slips with doors substituted for them, and in 1836 the pews were removed from the floor, and the old pulpit with its sounding board gave way to a more modern desk. New windows with blinds were also provided at the same time." [CT/Farmington; Camp 1889, p. 88]

1773-1838: "The *Old Church* [completed 1773] stood with its front to the road, and had a tall square tower upon the south-west end, lighted with long, narrow windows and covered with a concave roof, above which extended upward an iron rod supporting two brass balls, with a vane at its top. A porch was at the opposite end. One entrance was through the base of the tower, another from the porch, and a third was in the center of the front side.

Stair-cases led to the galleries within, from the tower and porch at each end. The outside was once painted white, but from long exposure at last assumed a shady hue. Twenty-six windows, in two rows, encircled it, with twenty-four panes of glass, eight by ten inches in size, in each. The pulpit was on the back side, opposite the front door, [p. 46] and so high that the preacher could view the galleries which surrounded the other three sides upon a level with his eyes. A huge sounding board overhung the sacred desk, and in small closets within it, opening on each side, the town's store of powder was kept. A rail encircled the communion table and the deacon's seats ["deacon's" *sic*] beside it. Upon either hand of the pulpit, from the galleries, projected small balconies with seats for the colored brethren, while directly below these, near the pulpit, sat the wardens, with long poles to wake the sleepers. A broad aisle led from the front door to the communion table with seats upon each side in front, for those whose hearing was impaired. Another [aisle] crossed this at right angles, extending from the doors at each end, while a third encircled the house a pew's length from the walls. The pews were inclosed with paneled walls and doors, mounted with a 'rail and banisters.' The seats within turned upward on hinges that the occupants might stand erect. Small holes through the floor served the chewers of tobacco for spittoons. The audience room was fifty-six by forty-five feet in size, nearly square, with twenty-four feet between ceiling and floor, which was scoured to snowy whiteness. No paint was anywhere to be seen. [new paragraph] Within those walls was many an exciting scene in political affairs. There many a tilt in town matters. There all elections were held, until in 1838 the present town house, formerly the old Baptist meeting-house, was purchased for the sum of three hundred dollars. [new paragraph] There too the people attended divine worship without any fire or place for building one; there all intentions of marriage were publicly cried from the galleries at church time for three consecutive Sundays. The singers sat opposite the pulpit, and sang the old songs of Zion to music from [p. 47] fiddles, flutes, bass-viols and divers other instruments of the olden time. At last the old edifice, in 1838, gave place to the present Congregational church standing on the same spot. There for more than a hundred years [1773-1874] the same gospel has been preached and the same psalms sung: [indented, smaller type:] 'For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, / Line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.' [Isaiah 28:10]" [ME/New Gloucester; Haskell 1875, pp. 45-47]

n.d. (before Revolutionary War): "Besides the pews, there was the pulpit, far up above the floor, and reached by a winding stairway on the west side, next to the minister's pew. The desk projected into the audience room, after the style of a shelf, and beneath it were the deacons' seats. The minister was elevated about ten feet above the congregation, and the deacons' seats were slightly elevated. These men of distinction sat facing the people, and apart from their families. This custom originated from their duties of 'Deaconing' off the hymns, and lasted long after that service was abandoned." [MA/Bedford; Brown 1891, p. 54]

1784: "LOCATION AND PLAN OF THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE. [new paragraph] The house was raised in 1784, the tower or belfry end of the house facing the west, and the underpinning of the south side being laid parallel with the street passing along the south side of the common, and some one hundred and fifty feet from the buildings on the south side of the street. This location did not interfere with the street on the east and west of the house, and there was a

small triangular piece of vacant land on the north side of the building. There was a door on the front side in the middle of the house, opening to the south; a porch and door at each end. The pulpit was considerably elevated at the north side of the house. Its front was a section of an octagon projecting from the general panelled front of the structure. The access to the pulpit was by a single flight of stairs on the west side, turning at a right angle from the floor to the pulpit door. Below and in front of the pulpit was the deacons' seat and a swinging table [likely for communion]. Above the pulpit was a 'sounding-board' which corresponded in shape with the front of the pulpit. The belfry was built in 1803, and one porch removed. In the front gallery was a space arranged to accommodate the choir, with [p. 67] two pews at each end. The pews were all square, with narrow seats all around, except at the entrance or door; consequently a considerable proportion of the audience presented only a profile view to the preacher while [he was] addressing them. The pews were finished with panelled sides, above which was a wide rail supported by turned balusters about eight inches long. The most noticeable arrangement in respect to the pews,—universal in meeting-houses of that date—was that all the seats were hung upon hinges, and were so arranged as to be easily raised when the worshippers stood, as was always done in prayer time. Each pew had six or eight separate seats, to be raised or let fall without regard to the noise they made, and as it was done pretty nearly in unison, the effect can easily be imagined upon one unused to such a fusil[l]ade. Two free seats on each side of the broad aisle in front of the pulpit, were generally occupied by aged people—the men on the west side, and the women on the east side. There was a row of pews all around the walls of the house, with an alley between them and the 'body pews;' a broad aisle from the front door to the pulpit and a narrow, short alley from that each way to pews which could not otherwise be reached. [new paragraph] There was a wide gallery on the south side and each end of the house, supported in front by small pillars. In the galleries was a row of pews around the walls of the house, with a narrow walk for access. Between it and the front of the galleries, on the east and west sides, were three long and three short free seats, which were entered by descending one, two, and three steps from the doors to the front of the galleries. Those on the west were for males, and those on the east for females." [NH/Milford; Ramsdell 1901, pp. 66-67]

1789-1892: "The house is sixty-four feet, eight inches in length, and forty-eight feet, six inches in width. Height to ceiling inside twenty-eight feet, height to gallery ten feet and a half, paneled and moulded front five feet high, panels showing 24x54 inches. The frame is of oak timber. The clapboards were cut four feet in length, and scarfed or ship-lapped at their joints with each other, nailed with wrought nails, for which the holes were bored with a hand gimlet by Simon Hartwell. The southern [p. 19] entrance, with double doors, is 4 ft. 10 in. by 9 ft. East and west entrances 3 ft. 4 in. by 6 ft. 5 in., doors to audience room 3 ft. 9 in. by 6 ft. 7 in. the aisles separating the body pews from those next the walls were elevated about 7½ inches above the central aisles, a similar ascent leading into the wall pews. Pew doors 22 in. wide, height of pews 40½ in. of plain paneled work surmounted by a rail, which was put on continuous next the aisle, and tradition has it that the joiners exacted from each pew owner a quart of rum as a prerequisite to cutting out the rail and hanging the door to his pew. Joseph Geary, owner by purchase of No. 21, refused this tribute, and on the first Sunday of occupancy of his pew brought to 'meeting' a couple of short ladders by which his family might gain access to the pew. The next Sunday his door

was properly hung and he had by the strategy above noted, saved his rum for his own use, and probably gained the reputation of a sharp but might mean man. In the rear of pews numbered 41, 42, 52, 53, were free seats, provided for the aged members of the congregation, who desired to be as near as possible to the minister, and several of whom were not able to be the owners of pews. These seats were taken out between 1825 and 1830, and their places occupied by pews. Most of the pews had seats on three sides, some having seats on all sides, elevated 17 in. above the floor, and hinged to allow of being raised while their occupants stood during prayer and the singing service. [new paragraph] The pulpit was reached by a flight of steps with an abrupt ascent, (rise, $9\frac{3}{4}$ in. run, $8\frac{1}{4}$ in.) to a landing, whence a couple more of steps lead to the platform. The reading desk was semi-octagonal in form. Over it hangs the antique sounding board, at an elevation of 7 ft. above the platform, octagonal in shape, 5 ft. 9 in. across and 13 ft. $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. below ceiling. Under the pulpit were two receptacles, closed by sash and glass, one of which contained the vessels used in the communion service, the other filled with a small library of religious books, including several volumes of sermons, from which, on the Sabbaths when the society were without regular preaching, sermons were read by different persons appointed by the deacons. ... [p. 20] ... [new paragraph] The east and west porches are 14 feet long, $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, each having entrances at the end and on the South face, and a flight of stairs nearly four feet in width with landing and return, to reach the galleries in the body of the house. The gallery fronts are supported on columns, each turned out of a solid piece of timber, having a base 13 inches square and 32 inches high, the swell of the turned section being 9.7 inches in diameter. The choir occupied the front of the South gallery.... [see SC 1788, 4 November + late 1789 and after for more on choir seating]" [NH/Hillsborough; Densmore 1890, pp. 18-19, 20]

1790 + 1792: "In 1790, it was voted to build a new meeting house 54 feet square. This was changed to 63 by 46 feet, and in 1792 the final decision was to have it 64 by 48 feet. There was to be a projection 12 feet in length and 23 inches wide [??]. The windows in the gallery were to be 'Simecurcle.' There was to be a steeple, and a 'vain or wheather cock on the top of the speir.' The underpinning was to be of hewed stone two feet above the ground. [new paragraph] While this was building, the meetings were held in the hall at the tavern of Oliver Barron. There was to be one tier of pews round the gallery, and two rows on each side the broad alley, and 52 square pews on the floor, each $6\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in size. They were to have bannisters, and were not to be painted. The cushion on the new pulpit was covered with baize which cost 10 shillings. The whole trimming for the pulpit cost £15. It was voted that the Town raise £400 and the old meeting house and the pews in the new, except the minister's pew, for building the new meeting house. [?]" [MA/Chelmsford; Waters 1917, p. 680]

1791: "The subject [of building a meetinghouse] came up again June 27th, 1791, when the town '*voted to build a meeting house in Majr. Smith's field east of his house, 48 feet in length, 38 feet wide and 24 feet posts,*' By October 10th the building was begun.... [new paragraph] The town arranged for the sale of the pews which were to be "*ready finished.*" The pew no. 12, at the right hand of the pulpit, was reserved for the settled minister. Two porches about thirteen feet square were to be built at each end of the house sufficient in height to provide stairways to the galleries, which ran around three sides of the building.

[p. 208] ... [new paragraph] This house fronted the south. There was the main entrance. From the door the broad aisle ran toward the pulpit, which was high and was reached by stairs at the north side. Over the pulpit was the sounding board, pear-shaped, and suspended by an iron rod from the ceiling, ending in a roughly shaped hand which held the sounding board. In front of the pulpit was a semicircular hinged shelf, which when turned up served as a Communion table. In front of this table were two seats for the deacons, who faced the congregation. There were fifty pews. Of these, twelve were '*body pews*' and twenty ranged along the walls of the house, while eighteen were in the galleries. The singers occupied seats in the front of the gallery facing the pulpit, with a ledge for their books before them, and there were three steps downward to the front. Pews occupied the front in the side galleries; behind them were seats for those who did not own pews. [new paragraph] There were many windows of clear glass without shutters, shades or curtains. Behind the pulpit there was one with a semicircular top. There was no heating apparatus of any kind, except the foot-stoves filled with live coals, that were in winter carried to and fro by those who came in sleighs. There was no carpet or cushions. The outside of the house was painted a dull yellow, which soon became a dingy brown." [VT/Pomfret; Vail 1930, vol. I, pp. 207, 208]

1792 – see 1790

1798: "The church as it then stood was completed only to the bell deck, and was entered by three doors,--afterwards altered to the three arched windows of the entry,--opening from a platform which ran across the whole front of the church and was reached by a long flight of stairs at either end. The body of the house was 'respectably' finished. The pulpit at the west end was a tall, semi-circular structure reached by stairs on either side, bringing the speaker's head nearly to the level of the galleries. It was painted white, the only other white paint in the interior being on the pillars supporting the galleries. Behind it was a large square window with side lights, while above and below were eight windows, as on the sides of the house, all of 8 x 10 glass. [new paragraph] The galleries occupying three sides of the house were unpainted, being made of clear pine, every panel a single board free from knots or cracks. Shapely columns of great size supported them, thoroughly in harmony with the other parts and proportioned to the massive appearance of the galleries they supported. [new paragraph] The pews were 10 feet long, with high backs and doors, which allowed the occupants to be securely buttoned in. There was a single seat at the end where the youngest or most roguish child could be placed next the mother...." [ME/Hallowell; Page 1900, p. 12]

[between 1798 and 1817]: "It [the Congregational meetinghouse] was made with a gallery on each of the sides, and seats in these galleries rising one above the other as if constructed on an inclined plane. The seats in each gallery were long slips, and there were four or five slips in each gallery. The music of the sanctuary was then, as now [1876], a very important part of worship, and the front slip in each gallery was sacred to the use of the singers and the 'players on instruments.'" [CT/Derby; letter from Rev. Charles Nichols (born 1798; lived in Derby until 1817) "To My Dear Christian Brother, Rev. Mr. [J. Howe] Vorce," written at CT/New Britain, 24 June 1876; quoted in Orcutt 1880, p. 294]

1798 + 1822 + 1828: "The building was completed in 1798. This house was finished with square pews, and falling seats, and had a gallery on three sides. The entrance was on the south side, directly from the Green, also on the east, and through the belfry on the west. The pulpit was on the north side, more than ten feet above the congregation, with a large old-fashioned sounding-board over the minister's head. [new paragraph] The first stoves were placed in the house in 1822.... [new paragraph] An alteration was made in the house in 1828. The square pews and gallery were taken out; the lower floor was raised, and long pews built; the pulpit lowered, and a porch built on the south side for an entrance and music-gallery." [ME/Gorham; McLellan 1903, p. 174]

n.d. (ca. 1800): "A vivid description of this meeting-house, as it appeared at the opening of the present century, was given by Rev. Dr. William A. Stearns...in an address delivered at Bedford in 1868, from which the following is taken:-- [new paragraph, smaller type:] The first meeting-house stood on the north side of the Common, very near the road, the west end facing towards the village. It was painted, or rather was covered, or rather half covered,--for the paint was nearly worn off,--with a thin coat of dark, dirty yellow. It had no bell, steeple, tower, or cupola. ... There were three outer doors, one opening south, one towards the east, and one towards the west. ... [new paragraph] In the interior of the house, the pulpit stood on the north side, next the road. In the front was a gallery of pews; on the left hand, a gallery of long seats, which the singers occupied: on the right, a gallery, filled mostly by single men, who had no other seat; up back, high in the corners, or cock loft, as they called it, were the negro pews, rarely occupied by more than one or two of that class of worshippers. Up over the front gallery, in the ceiling, was a scuttle, opening, if it ever was opened, into the roof, It had a mysterious look to children, and I used to hear it said sometimes in the village that it was the place where the tithing-man put naughty boys. I believe the town [gun]powder was kept up there for some years. The pews below were square, high, and with bannisters under the railing, which the children, when standing, could look through, and would amuse themselves with turning and squeaking when they could do it with impunity. The seats of the pews, rarely cushioned, were hung on hinges, so that they could be turned up for comfort in standing during the long prayer, 'which often reached half an hour in length.' Oh, I remember, as though it were yesterday, how those old seats used to come clattering down when the prayer was over, as if they were saying, according to the different spirit of the worshippers, 'Amen, amen; glad you are done, glad you are done; amen!' The house never had a fire in it, and in the winter, oh, how cold!" [MA/Bedford; Brown 1891, p. 54]

1800: "In 1799, the first meetinghouse had both fallen into decay and become too small for the growing town. A new house of worship was erected and dedicated on the first Sunday in January, 1800 [6 January; Bartholomew Brown's anthem "Hail, glorious day" was sung on this occasion]. Its dimensions, according to the recorded vote, were required to be not more than seventy-five nor less than seventy feet in length, and not more than sixty nor less than fifty-five feet in width. It cost \$8500, a large sum for those days. At the time, it was said to be the most elegant and important structure of its kind in the county. It was ornate both within and without. Its pulpit was high, reached by a considerable flight of stairs, and over it was a sounding board suspended from above and held by a hand protruding from the ceiling. [p. 35] On the wall back of the pulpit were painted two angels,

one represented as ascending, singing 'Glory to God in the highest'; and the other as descending, singing 'On earth peace and good will to men.' It was said by Rev. Dr. Joseph Allen of Northborough in his history of the Worcester County Association: 'The great meeting-house in Sterling, with galleries on three sides . . . was not too large for the accommodation of those who attended public worship. The whole front gallery was occupied by the choir....' Above was an alcove furnished with seats where the colored people sat. ... The pews were high and square...." [MA/Sterling; Sterling 1931a, pp. 34-35]

1822 – see 1798

1824-1826 – see 1772

1828 – see 1798

1836 – see 1772