

# First Congregational Church of Wellfleet, Cape Cod

This handsome Greek Revival church, which overlooks the town of Wellfleet, is the fourth meetinghouse to be built by a congregation organized in 1723. The structure is classical in design, pilastered and pedimented, with molded cornices and caps. The beautiful detailing is faithful to its Greek heritage.

A first meetinghouse, twenty feet square, was built on Chequesset Neck in 1723. At this time the congregation had fifty-nine male members; no mention was made of females. A few very old gravestones and a memorial plaque remain at this site.

In 1740 a new meetinghouse was finished at the head of Duck Creek where another cemetery, now containing a Civil War monument, may still be explored. This building was enlarged and repainted in 1792. In 1829, however, the second meetinghouse was taken down and a larger, more elaborate one was erected.

Then in 1850 the present house of worship was set on the hill. Parts of the old structure were utilized when it was remodeled in 1873.

The niche for the organ was added at that time and, thus, we acquired our splendid Hook and Hastings instrument. The American Organ Society considers us more than fortunate to have this tracker organ.

In 1879 the tall, tapering spire was blown off during a terrific northeast gale; the spire landed point first in the yard across the street. The present belfry was then added to replace it. This one was struck by lightning in 1965 but a neighbor gave the alarm and saved the church from destruction.

The interior of the church-with its curved pews, detailed door and window trimmings, enormous ceiling rosette, and unadorned walls-presents an atmosphere of complete simplicity. Here all encourages total concentration on worship of the Creator.

Several lovely stained glass windows enhance the nave and the narthex, including a priceless one, done in Tiffany-style glass, depicting a ship of the Mayflower period.

Downstairs, in the northwest corner of the church hall, a small five by eight foot "cubby-hole" became Wellfleet's first library in 1874.

Town meetings were held in the hall for many years. When the meetings became too large and were convened elsewhere, the ladies of the congregation always served a town meeting dinner to hungry voters. Dinners and luncheons are still held regularly in the hall, as visitors soon discover.

For a number of summers the Church extended an invitation to Protestant Episcopal parishioners to hold their worship service in our sanctuary, at an earlier hour each Sunday, until their Chapel was completed in 1957.

The tower of the Congregational Church houses the "only town clock in the world striking ships' bells" according to Ripley's "Believe it or not". The mechanism for this was the ingenious invention of the late Selectman Lawrence Gardinier who built it in 1953.

An outstanding addition to the church were the Schulmerich chimes. These play Sunday mornings and on certain evenings during the summer months.

Local concert groups use the church frequently and enjoy the excellent acoustics in the nave. Secular groups, such as the Historical Society, also avail themselves of the facilities.

But of course what "makes" a Church is the warm love and fellowship of the congregation. The devotion shown by unnumbered men and women over the years and the selfless service of many faithful pastors is what gives meaning to this splendid structure and its people who are true to their Congregationalism which is an outgrowth of Pilgrim faith. They have contributed much to the life of the Town of Wellfleet.

Compiled by Alys Robicheau  
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