

# HISTORY OF THE U.C.C. OF HALIFAX

Like many New England churches, the U.C.C. of Halifax has a long history and tradition. On July 4, 1734, the town of Halifax was incorporated, after becoming separated from the town of Plymouth. Part of the impetus for separating was the desire on the part of the inhabitants of the tract of land which would become Halifax to have a church located so that it could be easily reached by foot or horseback.

On November 1, 1731, several years before the formation of Halifax, the inhabitants were granted permission to meet among themselves. During that winter, the first religious service was held at the home of Deacon Robert Waterman. In time the residents began to feel the need for a more official meeting place than the Deacon's home, and on April 19, 1732, John Bryant signed a deed granting a parcel of land on which the building would be constructed. This area later became known as part of the town of Halifax.

Early New England churches were prominent in the community as they were the local meeting places for conducting town business in addition to religious services. Because of this function, they were commonly referred to as Meeting Houses. The U.C.C. of Halifax was no exception. However, it was not until October 16, 1734, that the Church of Christ in Halifax was "officially" formed by the Ecclesiastical council and the Covenant signed by 22 males and 31 females. The first minister, John Cotton, a graduate of Harvard College, served the congregation for 20 years, and stepped down only when a throat ailment forced him to retire from the ministry. In November of 1735, three Deacons were chosen for the church.

In addition, two "tythingmen" were elected at the Town Meeting each year. They were to keep order during the services and to take attendance. (Members were required to attend once in every four weeks, or pay a fine). The "tythingmen" utilized tything poles (called "sleep vanishers") to keep individuals attentive during the service. Since two long sermons a day were the norm, there was a tendency to nod, and the 8-foot pole would be used to tickle or prod the offending member. The original tything pole is still housed in the narthex of our church as a subtle reminder . . . On April 22, 1736, it was

voted that several gentlemen of the church were to have "inspection over children on Sabbath days noons, and . . . to overlook them in Meeting Time to prevent their playing." This official record of organized guidance of the children associated with the children of the Halifax Church credits us with being the first church in America to organize what is now called Sunday School. In March of 1739, the first parsonage was built. By 1752, the Meeting House had become too small for the congregation and construction was needed. A vote was made to cut the building into two parts, separate them by sixteen feet and add a new portion to rejoin them, setting up the pulpit in the middle.

Many years later, in 1821, the building acquired a steeple and churchbell, primarily with money raised from the sale of pews to congregation members. This larger building was used for another one hundred years, then was sold to the Town for \$700, and moved to the site of today's Town Hall. It was used as the Town Hall until it burned down in 1907.

The current church building was placed to the west of the original location, and was dedicated on December 7, 1852. The steeple on the new building withstood the gale of 1880, and several strikes of lightning, but on December 18, 1921, at nine in the morning, a strong gale tore the steeple off, turned it over and speared it through the roof, into the sanctuary, where the spire landed in an empty pew during a Sunday Service. A temporary structure was used until it was finally replaced with a permanent steeple in 1952, after a great deal of fund-raising by the "Save our Steeple Campaign," which brought in contributions from every state in the U.S., England, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

In 1966 Fellowship Hall was added to the church, and finally on April 9, 1978, with the mortgage paid off, the mortgage was burned in a celebration service. In 1995, another fund-raising effort finally made possible the addition of three tower clocks to the steeple, and a dedication service and luncheon was held for the occasion. With the church standing on the highest point of land in the town, the church spire is a beautiful landmark of the Town.