

200 Years Ago!!!!
An Important Time in the Life of Our Church
Part 4 Ready, Get Set, Build
Excerpts from William D. Metz'
The History of the Kingston Congregational Church

The immediate purpose of establishing the Presbyterian Society in the Pettaquamscutt Purchase, of course, was to build a meeting house. Thirty-one persons pledged themselves to one-half or more shares of the cost of construction, "intended to be not more than two thousand five hundred dollars," and to be divided into one hundred shares. That Elisha Potter was the leading spirit among these people seems certain as he donated the land, one-eighth of an acre (officially at dedication of building – LESK, Book 13), but also subscribed twenty-five shares. The next largest number of four was pledged by both Thomas S. Taylor and Thomas R. Wells. Taylor was a storekeeper and postmaster, and Wells was the cashier of the newly organized Landholders' Bank. In all there were sixty-two shares subscribed, and since each share entitled its owner to one vote, Potter became chairman, and with Wells and Taylor formed the committee to superintend the building of the meeting house and to handle all other business of the society. Wells was chosen treasurer and Alfred Gardner the secretary,

Starting on March 6, 1820 the committee of Potter, Wells, and Taylor were officially appointed to draw up plans and supervise the erection of the church building. The building committee moved rapidly to fulfill its responsibility. On March 18th it recommended, and the society approved, that the meeting house be thirty-four by forty-eight feet in size, with nineteen foot posts. The committee was instructed to have the necessary timber cut immediately, and that it proceed "with all practicable dispatch to have the proposed meeting house built." The treasurer was ordered to collect one-quarter of the amounts subscribed by June 10, 1820. By July 22 the frame had been prepared for raising. Two and 3/8 gallons of spirits encouraged (or rewarded?) the men who did the work. Two months later, on September 23, the steeple was put in place. It took only a quart of spirits for this task! In all, it appears that construction of the meeting house required 17 men for a total of 849 1/2 days of work, and that the men were provided board by John T. Nichols at a cost of \$212.25. By the end of 1820 the meeting house was ready for use.

The term "meeting house" is perhaps inappropriate, for this building was intended to be and designed as a church. The meeting houses of the colonial period in New England had been used for secular purposes as well as for worship, since they were the only large structures capable of housing gatherings of the entire community and the established Congregational churches embraced all inhabitants. In Little Rest, where the courthouse had been built in 1752, separation of religious and secular use was clearly indicated. The result was that the new meeting house in Little Rest was designed and built as a church, its basic architectural features being those long associated with religious edifices: a rectangular structure with a gently sloping pitched roof, entrance at one narrow end and pulpit at the other, with the belfry and steeple above the entrance.

One rather unusual feature of the Kingston church among Congregational churches is that the tower, with its belfry and steeple, projects the full height of the building.

Fortunately, the builders of the Kingston church have not been forgotten. (p. 50-51)



Other notes:

The total cost of the building was \$2,200 – that's \$300 less than proposed.

Second Herbert J. Wells aided the society on December 3, 1920 to purchase 1/8 of an acre south of the building from M. W. Noyes (LESK, Book 41)

Few changes have taken place in the appearance since the official dedication in January 1821.

Two cylindrical stoves were added in the rear corners in 1839 with stove pipes under the balconies to chimneys on the south side.

In a great snowstorm and gale blowing from the west on Sunday, January 18, 1857, the steeple of the church was blown down. Work to rebuild began that spring building on the same model except for the windows.

In 1899 the extension to the sanctuary was constructed ((\$1,147.47) to accommodate the new organ donated by the Wells' family. A new hot air heating system in the addition's cellar, chandeliers, lamps, and carpeting were also installed. At this time some excavation was done under the church proper.