

First Church of Christ  
Farmington, Connecticut

*Hartford*

HABS No. CONN-224

HABS

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Connecticut

Historic American Buildings Survey (Fed.)  
Harold H. Davis, District Officer  
29 Whitney Ave. New Haven  
Connecticut

First Church of Christ, Congregational (Meetinghouse) HABS No. CT-224  
Main Street, between School and  
Church Streets  
Farmington  
Hartford County  
Connecticut

Addendum to  
First Church of Christ  
Farmington  
Hartford County  
Connecticut

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PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL HABS No. CT-224  
(Meetinghouse)

An addendum to  
First Church of Christ  
Farmington  
Hartford County  
Connecticut

Location: Main Street, between School and Church Streets,  
Farmington, Hartford County, Connecticut

USGS New Britain Quadrangle, Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates: 18.680530.4620840

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Congregational Church

Present Use: church

Significance: Although moderately altered since its construction in  
1771, the First Church of Christ is Connecticut's  
finest surviving example of a colonial meetinghouse  
and was the church attended by the Africans involved  
in the "Amistad" Affair in 1841.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction: 1771
2. Original owner: Congregational Church
3. Builder: Captain Judah Woodruff
4. Alterations and additions: A Greek Revival porch with Doric columns was added in the nineteenth century. The present gallery posts, "slip" pews, and organ were added around 1836, at which time the old box pews were removed. The original pulpit was replaced by the present pulpit in 1901.

B. Historical Context: The First Church of Christ was the third church erected by the Farmington congregation (earlier meetinghouses were built in 1672 and 1708), and has been a center of social and civic as well as religious activities in the community. Its designer and builder, Judah Woodruff, built many of the houses in town. The present structure was built from timber purchased in Boston.

In 1841, the church played civic and religious host to the Africans involved in a mutiny aboard the slaver "Amistad." Captured in 1839 in Africa and shipped to Cuba, they were transferred to the "Amistad" for transporting to another part of the island. On the fourth day at sea, the captives seized control of the ship and demanded that they be taken back to Africa. The Spaniards who had been kept alive in order to pilot the ship initially headed for Africa but gradually turned north, hoping to reach a sympathetic southern port. Eventually, they dropped anchor in Long Island Sound where American officials were led to believe that the incident was entirely the fault of the Africans, who were arrested and taken to New Haven, Connecticut.

Strong public attention was aroused by the incident, which involved jurisdictional questions without precedents in American law, and which eventually reached the Supreme Court. Leading abolitionists such as Lewis Tappan and John Quincy Adams were involved on the part of the captives. In March of 1841, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of a lower court in stipulating that the Africans must be sent back to their homeland. Until passage to Africa could be secured, the Africans were sent to Farmington to live. They became an active part of the community for awhile, attending church services and other events in the First Church of Christ.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The First Church is an example of the more modest type of regional meetinghouse that was widely used by New England towns during the last half of the eighteenth century. This building illustrates the process of modification by which the traditional, square, seventeenth century side-entrance meetinghouses were transformed into rectangular Georgian churches with towers and spires at one end. The design of this church influenced the plans of others as details of its construction were made popular by publication in Asher Benjamin's architectural handbooks.
2. Condition of fabric: The church is in very good condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Walls: The main structure is two stories high and is sheathed in narrow graduated clapboards.

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL  
(Meetinghouse) HABS No. CT-224 (Page 3)

2. Structural system: This sturdy church is of frame construction. The spire is supported by eight posts that are carried 25 feet down into the body of the tower and fastened by hand-wrought bolts. The transverse roof trusses have cross girts a foot square and 53 feet long. Each truss, made of white oak, is estimated to weigh almost 4 1/2 tons.
  3. Porch: The original main side entrance now has a Greek Revival porch with Doric columns attached.
  4. Windows: The double-hung windows are arranged in two tiers, with rectangular lights of clear glass.
  5. Bell tower: On the north end, a bell tower is appended which is built on the ground and extends above the roof line. Near the top is a clock, and above it an open balustrade, in the center of which is the bell stage. The arch of the bell section is repeated just above. Topping the whole tower is a slender and graceful steeple which can be seen for miles.
- C. Description of Interior: The high pulpit is located in the large rectangular audience room on the long wall opposite to the main entrance door, as was the custom in seventeenth century meetinghouses. Galleries extend around three sides of the structure.
- D. Site: The main axis of the church parallels the highway.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

First Church of Christ, Congregational. National Park Service National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings form, 1967.

First Church of Christ, Congregational. National Historic Landmark nomination form, 1974.

Prepared and transmitted by: Holly K. Chamberlain, Historian  
HABS  
June 23, 1987

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National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013