

First Church of Christ, Congregational
(Center Church)
New Haven County
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-109

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-109

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)

Location: New Haven, New Haven County, Connecticut
New Haven Green on Temple Street before Elm
and Chapel Streets.

Present Owner: Congregation of First Church of Christ, Congregational.

Present Occupant: Congregation of First Church of Christ, Congregational.

Present Use: House of worship.

Statement of
Significance: Designed by Ithiel Town from a design supplied by
Architect Asher Benjamin of Boston. It is pre-
sumed to be inspired by James Gibbs' design for
St. Martins in the Fields Church in London, Eng-
land. Through thoughtful restoration and
renewal it remains almost intact. It may be
called the most prominent public building in New
Haven from the time of its construction to the
present.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The building has remained in the tenure and occupancy of the Center Church congregation since its construction.
2. Date of erection: 1814
3. Architect: Ithiel Town, 1784-1844
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Isaac Damon was originally contracted as builder, but Ithiel Town became both architect and builder, i.e., general supervisor for the construction.
5. Alterations and additions: Much of the interior of the auditorium was rebuilt in 1842 and 1843. The original pulpit, "a high and handsome one, supported by columns and reached by curving flights of stairs," was removed. At the request of a missionary, it was given to a church in Honolulu. The pulpit was replaced by one of white marble at a lower level. This was removed in 1868 and replaced by a reading desk. The reading desk was replaced by the present pulpit and platform in 1894.

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL 1-
HABS NO. CONN-109 (Page 2)

Galleries were lowered in 1843 by cutting off the bottom ends of the supporting columns.

Original pews (slips) on the main floor were removed and replaced by present pews. Some end rails of the original pews have been preserved. Present pews are fastened by tongues projecting downward through slots in the floor.

Four windows at the pulpit end were closed on the inside in 1843.

In 1856 the meeting house was piped for gas. The crypt was paved in 1879. In 1911 the present marble floor was laid in the vestibule. In 1912 the base of the portico was enclosed by an iron fence.

Exterior bricks were painted in the 1890's.

New furnaces were installed in 1931. After a fire in a defective flue, both chimneys were rebuilt in 1934 from their foundations.

The Davenport memorial window over the pulpit was installed in 1894. Nine additional stained glass windows were given to the church in the years following. The latter stained glass windows were removed, subsequently, because they were deemed not in harmony with the spirit of the building itself.

Two fire-stairs were added to the galleries in the late 1850's.

6. Important old views: 1937 HABS photograph.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Until 1818, when Center Church became solely a church and town meetings were held elsewhere, it played an important part in the city government. Since that time the historical events and persons connected with it have been numerous, including ceremonial affairs of State, memorial services for Abraham Lincoln and other Presidents, and many State visitors. (See supplementary material).

C. Sources of Information:

Primary and unpublished sources: Drawings executed at the time of the Center Church Centennial (1914) which are kept in the Parish House, 311 Temple Street, New Haven, Conn. (Copies submitted with this report).

Secondary and published sources:

Edmund Ware Sinnott, The Meeting House of the First Church of Christ in New Haven, Connecticut, Center Church, 1814-1960, published in New Haven, 1960, by the church. This is an authoritative source as it is founded on the church records which are very complete.

References for Center Church: Aymar Embury, Early American Churches, pp. 110-113; Talbot Hamlin, American Spirit in Architecture, Architectural Record, Feb. 1912, pp. 152-5.

D. Supplementary Material: (attached).

Prepared by: Jonathan B. Conant
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August 1964

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)

HABS No. CONN-109 (page 4)

D. Supplementary Material:

The following material was taken from a booklet entitled, The Meeting House Of the First Church of Christ in New Haven, Connecticut, Center Church, 1814-1960. It was written by Edmund Ware Sinnott and published in New Haven in May, 1960.

THE CHURCH TODAY

"The beautiful Meeting-House of the First Church of Christ in New Haven has raised its white spire in the middle of the Green since 1814, and here its predecessors also stood from the days when the colony was planted. It is indeed the Center Church of this old town. Throughout the years not only those who worshipped in it have cherished their ancient structure but all citizens of New Haven have been proud of it as their most admired and venerated public building.

"...Time has been kind to Center Church and to outward view it stands essentially as it was in the beginning. Across the years, however, the interior has been modified in several minor ways. In the forties of the last century the pulpit was lowered and new pews substituted for the earlier ones. The windows at the pulpit end were closed. Fifty years later some stained glass windows were installed and other alterations made.

"Most of these changes were improvements. No one would wish the western windows opened up again, or kerosene lamps brought back, or brick stoves used today for heat. Some of the changes, however, such as the stained glass in the windows at the sides of the auditorium, were not in harmony, many people thought, with the simplicity of a Puritan meeting-house. To restore this spirit was one of the aims of the recent alterations. The past can serve us still, and one of the great charms of a structure like Center Church is that when we worship in it we are carried back to those days of New England's golden age when beauty and simplicity joined to serve the cause of faith....

BUILDING THE MEETING HOUSE

"In 1812 the members of the First Ecclesiastical Society of New Haven decided that the old "Brick Meeting-house," erected in 1757 and the third on its site, was too small and too old-fashioned to serve its purpose longer, and they decided to build a new one. Such a decision strikes us as rather surprising since New Haven at this time was suffering heavily from

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 5)

President Jefferson's Embargo, begun in 1808, which prohibited all commerce with France and England. There was little trade into or out of the port of New Haven and business in town was thus seriously crippled. To make matters worse, the War of 1812 had just begun. However, the financial troubles that followed the Revolutionary days were receding and the religious apathy of the late eighteenth century, partly the result of the war and partly of the French Revolution, was being replaced by a wave of enthusiasm which once more filled the meeting-houses. Within a year or two the three largest churches in New Haven--our First Church, the United Church and Trinity Church--all decided to build new houses of worship....

"On November 11, 1812, seven members of the First Ecclesiastical Society offered to assume responsibility for erecting a new Meeting House at their own expense, paying for it by selling pews and salvaging material from the old house. This plan, which was unusual (sic) in New England, had the advantage that a small group of business men, called in the records the "Contractors," could do the job efficiently and relieve the Ecclesiastical Society as a whole of this task. The Society appointed another committee of seven to represent it and to help these men wherever possible.

"The first problem was to locate the new building. By law, this had to be determined by the County Court, and this body fixed on a position somewhat to the rear of the old Meeting-House and partly over the eastern end of the burying-ground. There was some opposition to this decision, as there almost always was when the site for any New England meeting-house was to be determined, but this soon quieted down.

"The next task was to find an architect and builder for the job. The committee had received favorable reports of Isaac Damon, who had recently built a large church in Northampton, other public buildings and many bridges. Two members of the committee were sent to Northampton and were well impressed. As a result, a contract was signed in February, 1813, with Damon and his associate, Ithiel Town, to build the Meeting-House for \$26,000 and what they could get from the materials of the old one, which now had to be torn down. It soon appeared, contrary to the expectation of the committee, that Damon was to have little to do with the project but had turned it over to Town. Town certainly was the builder in charge of erecting the structure and has generally been given credit for designing it, as is stated in the tablet in the vestibule of the church, where Town's portrait also hangs.

"Another architect also seems to have had a share in the

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)

HABS No. CONN-109 (Page 6)

project. The late Mr. J. Frederick Kelly, a distinguished authority on old New England churches, who had examined the records with care, found that \$40 had been paid by the committee to Asher Benjamin of Boston "for a plan." Benjamin had designed several churches and had influenced the character of many others through his books on architecture. Town had earlier worked under Benjamin in Boston and it was natural that he should turn to his old master now. The purchased plans, which may have been only a rough draft, were undoubtedly altered to suit the ideas of Town and the committee. We wish the final plan had been preserved, but it was probably never put into the formal state such as architects use today. The execution of the design, and the construction of the framing, which shows much originality, were certainly Town's. He was a man of high intelligence and a skilled engineer, who later made his home in New Haven. ...

"As so often happens in a program of this sort, extra expenses not anticipated at the start became necessary. The foundation had to be made higher and the ground level raised around it. Extra steps were put in and the insides of the pews painted. Town estimated that the cost of these changes would be \$2,500 but when he turned in the final bill they came to \$5,000! The committee refused payment but a compromise was finally reached at \$3,180.46. After this, Town was somewhat under a cloud with the committee and when a small job of ceiling the spire had to be done later, they engaged David Hoadley, architect of the United Church, for the job.

"There were a number of complications that had to be met during the two years while the building was going up. The War of 1812 did not end until after the church was finished, and a British squadron was blockading our coast most of the time. The huge timbers needed were no longer to be found in the forests near New Haven and had to be floated down the Connecticut river from farther north. This required bringing them down the Sound and through the blockade. When a request to do this was made of the British commodore he courteously assented to it, saying that he was not making war on religion....

"The problem of erecting such a tall steeple was also a complex one. Here Town's engineering skill was conspicuous. Henry Howe wrote in 1884 that he had talked to an old resident who told him this: 'The spire was built within the tower, and I saw it raised by windlass and tackle. I was a school-boy at the time. It took two hours and went up beautifully.' George Dudley Seymour remarks of this incident: "One can picture the

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)

HABS No. CONN-109 (Page 7)

the concourse gathered on our old Green to see the spectacle, and how thrilled they must have been when the tip of the spire first showed above the uppermost stage of the tower and then gradually rose to its full height above it.'...

"The new church was ready for use in the fall of 1814, though there seems to be nothing in the records to show when it was finished or whether it was formally dedicated. Over the center door, however, is this statement, written much later by Leonard Bacon: 'This house was dedicated to the worship of God in Christ Dec. 27, 1814.'" In its final report the committee states that the total cost of the building was \$34,323.46. This included the original estimate of \$26,000, Town's extras of \$3,180.46, interest on loans of \$1,968.77, and various minor costs including a 'gratuity' to the workmen of \$30. The sale of pews and other income came to \$33,198.59. How the difference was made up we do not know.

"Early references to the building call it the 'New Brick Meeting-house' in distinction to the 'Old Brick Meeting-house' It was not commonly called a church, however, until after the separation of church and state under the new state constitution of 1818. Just when it came to be referred to as Center Church is not known, but the name probably came into use gradually after this time.

"The years 1812-1815 saw the appearance of the New Haven Green completely changed through the erection of the three magnificent churches which for almost a century and a half have given the city its chief architectural distinction. It is natural that, from its central position among these and from its commanding spire, ours should be called 'Center Church.'...

THE ARCHITECTURE OF CENTER CHURCH

"... Center Church belongs to...the 'Golden Age' of New England architecture. The designers of these churches got their ideas chiefly from the English Georgian style, which itself came from the Italian Renaissance, largely under the influence of Sir Christopher Wren and his followers....His influence was felt here...through his student James Gibbs who published a book of designs, and through Asher Benjamin who wrote a series of Builders' books that took much from Wren....

.. the original design for this building may have been

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FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 8)

drawn by Asher Benjamin, though Ithiel Town is chiefly responsible for its execution. We believe, but only on circumstantial evidence, that Benjamin based his design on that of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, a London church built by James Gibbs in 1726, which stands in what is now Trafalgar Square. St. Martin's is larger and more elaborate...and constructed entirely of stone, but it has a pillared portico, a steeple somewhat like ours and a balustrade on the roof....

One of the outstanding features of Center Church is its wide and deep portico, with pillars standing well out from the front wall. In the triangular space, or pediment, above is a beautifully carved acanthus decoration. In the frieze below it, alternating with other carved ornaments, is a series of ox skulls, or bucrania, ornamented with garlands...Such decorations are often found in Roman classical architecture, and are thought to be derived from the wreathed skulls that once adorned the altars on which the animals were sacrificed....

Along the sides of the roof is a fine wooden balustrade surmounted by carved urns at intervals. The use of the urn, frequent in churches of this type, is repeated on the ascending stages of the steeple....

In the framing of the tower and elsewhere there are many large timbers. Most of these are white pine instead of the more commonly used oak and thus are relatively light. Town's engineering skill enabled him to get maximum strength with minimum weight, best shown in the trusses over the auditorium. These are of the 'scissors' type, higher in the middle than at the ends, and thus permitting the long clear span of our domed ceiling which has stood so well the test of time. All of the framing, reinforced with steel in critical parts in 1912, has been thoroughly inspected and is now in excellent condition.

The chief glory of Center Church is the spire....A remarkable feature of our steeple was discovered in 1912 when careful measurements were made of the building. The columns of the various stages were found to be tipped inward a very little so so that they give the effect of greater height to the whole structure....

EARLIER CHANGES IN THE MEETING HOUSE

... Early changes were only minor. The original 'Russian stoves' were replaced by iron ones in 1823, and the pits in the cellar where they were placed can still be seen. A clock

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 9)

was installed by Eli Terry in 1818 but it did not work well and was taken out. Another, purchased by New Haven as a town clock, was placed in the tower in 1826 but was removed to the City Hall when this was built in 1861. From this time until 1923 there was no clock in the tower, but in the latter year the present one was purchased by public subscription and installed. This is another example of New Haven's interest in Center Church.

"In 1842 and 1843 more radical changes were made. It was now voted 'to lower the pulpit and also to lower the galleries and rebuild the slips therein and to remodel the slips on the lower floor.' As a result of this action much of the interior of the auditorium was rebuilt. The original pulpit was a high and handsome one, supported by columns and reached by curving flights of stairs. At this time, on the request of a returned missionary from what were then called the 'Sandwich Islands,' this pulpit was given to a church in Honolulu where Dr. Maurer saw it not long ago. This pulpit was replaced in our church by one of white marble at a much lower level...It was removed in 1868 and replaced by a reading desk (later given to the church at Shelton Avenue and Division Street.) The present pulpit and platform were installed in 1894.

"The galleries were lowered in 1843 by two or three feet, in conformity to the change in pulpit level. The height of the original galleries can be seen as a faint ridge in the plaster above the present ones. Work on the galleries during recent changes has disclosed that the lowering was done by cutting off the bottoms of the columns.

"Another conspicuous change was the removal of the original pews (slips) on the main floor and their replacement by the present ones. Just what the old pews were like is not known, though some of the end rails have been preserved. The pews had no upholstery or cushions. Recent changes have disclosed an interesting fact about their size. In removing a row of pews at the rear of the auditorium it was found that the present ones are not fastened down by nails or screws but by tongues projecting downward through slots in the floor. Each tongue has two holes, and through these holes oak pegs were tightly driven so that the pews were firmly held in place. These slots are about three inches long and an inch wide. If one examines the floor at the aisle end of the pews today, he will find places where a piece of wood of this size has been inserted,

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 10)

evidently to fill a slot for one of the original pews. Measurement shows that these slots are evenly spaced about 32 inches apart. The width of the present pews is 30 inches, so it seems clear that the earlier ones were two inches of the best St. Domingo mahogany with turned ornaments of rosewood at each end "made in handsome style." The ones on the main floor cost (including painting) only \$5.75 apiece!

"At this time the four windows at the pulpit end were closed on the inside, doubtless because the light was trying to the eyes of the congregation. The wall was now frescoed, by an Italian craftsman, with Corinthian pilasters to give the impression of a deep, vaulted alcove behind the pulpit. This remained until 1888 when the wall was repainted. Other changes made in 1843 included upholstery for the pews and carpet for the floor.

"A few further changes were made over the years. In 1856 the meeting-house was piped for gas. The crypt was paved in 1879. In 1911 the present marble floor was laid in the vestibule, and in the next year the base of the portico was enclosed by an iron fence. New furnaces were installed in 1931. After a defective flue started a fire in 1934, both chimneys were rebuilt from their foundations. The church has been saved from fire on other occasions, for the records state that \$10 was given to the sexton in 1884 'as a reward for meritorious conduct in promptly extinguishing the fire on the roof of the church on the 4th of July.' Those were the days when the Fourth had a more fiery celebration than it does now.

"The Davenport Window over the pulpit was installed in 1894, and in the years following there were nine stained glass windows given to the Church in memory of various families or individuals in the parish. These have now been removed, and attempts are being made to place them in appropriate locations in other buildings. Colored photographs have been made of them which will be on exhibition and available for study.

"From time to time memorial tablets to various earlier ministers of the church have been placed on the walls of the sanctuary. In Leonard Bacon's day the historical tablet was placed over the front door. It was written by him and sets forth in compact fashion the history of the New Haven Colony and the church.

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 11)

"Against the background of all these previous changes the recent construction was undertaken. Two ends were sought: first, to make our Meeting-House more serviceable for strengthening the activities and spiritual life of the Church; and second, to restore more of the original atmosphere of the interior. Many of the changes made over the years were undoubtedly improvements although they altered somewhat the character of the building. Restoring the galleries to use again is a change of this sort for it will make possible the seating of a much larger audience on occasion. New carpets, upholstery and paint have lightened the auditorium and made it a more attractive place in which to worship. The new chandelier adds greatly to its beauty. ...

"One of the most radical of the recent changes has been the removal of the nine stained glass windows at the sides of the Church.The objection was ... that such windows are not in harmony with the spirit of the building itself. The Puritan tradition was opposed to the extreme degree of decoration found in the Church of England...The magnificent John Davenport window was retained, not only for its loveliness but because a plain window back of the pulpit would be trying to the eyes.....

CENTER CHURCH AS NEW HAVEN'S MEETING-HOUSE

"...Especially during the earlier period of its history Center Church was the natural meeting place for the citizens of New Haven when great questions were stirring and needed to be discussed, or when there were important events to celebrate. The record is full of instances where this structure, as a true 'meeting-house,' served a vital purpose in the life of the city. Here are some of these:

"The 'New Brick Meeting-House' as it was called at first, had hardly been finished when, on February 13, 1815, news reached New Haven of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent which ended the War of 1812. This war was never popular in New England and New Haven had suffered more than most places because commerce had been cut off. Its end was therefore most welcome event and was celebrated by an impromptu mass meeting at Center Church, which was addressed by President Dwight and other leading citizens.

"February 22, 1832, was the hundredth anniversary of George Washington's birth and was widely celebrated the country over. New Haven's commemorative exercises were held in Center Church on that day....

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 12)

"In the same year there was a large gathering in Center Church to hear a group of delegates from the Cherokee Indian Nation who were visiting the eastern states in protest against the seizure of their lands.

"The two hundredth anniversary of the planting of the New Haven Colony was celebrated on April 25, 1838, by an imposing procession and by services in Center Church at which Professor James Kingsley delivered an historical discourse which lasted two hours and a half! Ithiel Town, builder of our church, designed a medal for the occasion and Leonard Bacon wrote a series of historical addresses which are a mine of information about early New Haven.

..."Center Church was also associated with more solemn events. Here were conducted the funeral services for many famous members of the Church and other citizens, too numerous to mention. Among them was Jehudi Ashmun, first agent of the African Colonization Society and later Governor of Liberia, who died in New Haven in 1828...On April 17, 1841, there were held in Center Church New Haven's memorial services for President William Henry Harrison on the occasion of his untimely death. At the news of Lincoln's assassination on April 15, 1865, a tremendous crowd gathered at the State House where Leonard Bacon, the most distinguished clergyman in the city, led them in prayer and was among the speakers.

"All through the middle years of the nineteenth century, the great question of slavery was agitating the nation. Leonard Bacon was among the leaders in the fight against it, and it was natural that Center Church should have been a place where it was frequently discussed....

"On March 16, 1856, there was a service at the North Church to honor the departing vanguard of Kansas pioneers, and four days later another was held in Center Church at which Henry Ward Beecher blessed the undertaking....

"Through the years many distinguished visitors have attended church in our sanctuary or spoken from its pulpit. President Monroe worshipped here on a June Sunday in 1817. Daniel Webster came to New Haven on March 29, 1837, and addressed a large gathering on contemporary politics from the pulpit of Center Church. ...

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)

HABS No. CONN-109 (page 13)

CENTER CHURCH AND YALE

"One who watches the academic procession on Yale's Commencement Day will notice the curious fact that it does not pass directly across Broadway and into the Old Campus but winds down through the Green and around the front of Center Church. This rather circuitous route is a reminder of the fact that from the beginning of Yale's history in New Haven until the year 1895, all its Commencements were held in Center Church or in the buildings which preceded this one.

"The connection between our Church and Yale has been close, particularly in the early days. John Davenport was greatly interested in education. He sponsored the establishment of the Hopkins Grammar School. The founding of a college at New Haven was also near to his heart, but at first there seemed to be no resources for more than the one already established at Harvard. Indeed, for a long time contributions from the New Haven Colony were essential for Harvard's support. Finally, in 1700 ten ministers of the New Haven Colony, under the leadership of James Pierpont, the Minister of our Church, met to found a 'collegiate school,' located at first in Saybrook. In 1716 this moved to New Haven and in 1718 it became known as Yale College.

"Since ours was the only church in the town, Yale students naturally attended it. In 1720 seats in the 'northeast part of the fore gallery' were assigned them, with the graduates in the fore-seat and the undergraduates behind. For this privilege the students paid one shilling each per year. This was raised in 1739 to two shillings and sixpence, and in 1752 to five shillings....

"In 1746 it was voted to allow the College to build a pew 'northeasterly of the pulpit' for the use of its presidents....

"In the excitement of the Great Awakening, about the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a demand from many of the Yale students and faculty for preaching more in harmony with the spirit of the times than that which they listened to under the Rev. Joseph Noyes, then Minister of our Church; and in 1757 a church was established in Yale itself and has continued to the present time....

"Yale Commencements were first held in the second Meeting House. In 1742 the Society voted that 'the Rev'd Clap of Yale Colledge shall and may from time to time annually Improve

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 14)

the Meeting House in sd Society for the Commencement exercises.' Just how he was to 'improve' it is not clear. When the 'Brick Meeting-House' was built in 1757, permission to hold Commencement in it was formally voted by the Society's Committee...

..."The whole occasion was essentially a religious rather than a secular one. Music was not a part of it until 1819, and nothing but sacred music was played until 1846. Evidently when the fine new Meeting House was completed, a few individuals seem to have felt that Commencement was somewhat too secular an event to be held here, and that there was even some danger in harming the structure itself....In August, 1837...Mr. Harrison was appointed 'a committee to see that a sufficient number of constables are obtained to prevent the audience from injuring the house.'

"Word apparently got around at about this time that permission would not continue to be granted to use Center Church. This brought forth an eloquent letter preserved in our records, from Professor Chauncey A. Goodrich who apparently was in charge of the Commencement arrangements....He points out that the College received formal permission to use the newly-built Meeting-House in 1757, as before, and that this permission was renewed again in 1815 when the present one was built. ...for nearly sixty years more these gatherings of academic pomp took place within our walls.

..."Only a few alumni are now living who received their sheepskins in our Church, for since 1895 a larger auditorium has been necessary for these gatherings.

BURYING-GROUND AND CRYPT

"In that part of the Green at the sides of Center Church and behind it are still interred the remains of four or five thousand persons who died between the planting of the colony and the year 1797, when the new Grove Street Cemetery first was used. It is a sobering thought, as we watch the throngs of people who pass back and forth across the Green each day, that beneath their feet are resting the ashes of most of the men and women who lived in New Haven and for the first century and a half of its existence. No headstones now mark their graves and only a single tablet on the rear wall of Center Church calls attention to their presence there.

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 15)

"For about twenty years before our present Meeting-House was built, the old burying-ground, no longer used, was badly neglected and was overgrown with weeds and barberry bushes. Many of the stones had fallen, been broken or were taken away....

"There was a good deal of discussion as to what to do with the old burying-ground after the new one was established. The Common Council finally appointed a committee, with James Hillhouse as its chairman, to handle the matter. They removed most of the stones to the Grove Street Cemetery where they may still be seen. The ground level was raised considerably, bringing it up to that of the foundations of the new Meeting-House....

"The oldest stone removed was that of Samuel Hudson, who died in 1673....One stone, indeed, remains, that over the grave of the regicide judge John Dixwell, still to be seen behind Center Church.
...

..."It (the new Meeting-House) was placed somewhat farther back than the old one and was thus built over that part of the burying-ground directly to the rear of the old house. In the process several graves had to be disturbed....(The Church) was high enough above the old ground level so that it could be built directly over the stones, and fortunately these were left just as they were. Under Center Church, therefore, there is now a Crypt, something very unusual for a Congregational Church to possess....

"In the Crypt are 135 stones, covering the remains of 139 persons, and they mark the graves of some of the most distinguished men and women in New Haven history....under the foundation below the pulpit window, is buried Theophilus Eaton, first governor of the New Haven colony.

"In the Crypt is also the grave of Margaret Arnold, wife of Benedict...the Honorable James A. Hillhouse who died in 1775... The oldest stone is that of Miss Sarah Trowbridge, dated 1687. ...Over the door into the auditorium above, are the names of all those whose remains thus rest beneath the Church. This Crypt was restored and brought to its present condition in 1879. At this time the surface was covered with cement and lighting installed.

"There are stones of many kinds--marble, slate, sandstone, and ordinary slabs from the fields. The more pretentious ones are of table form. It is curious that most of them are not oriented parallel to the sides of the Church or of the Green, but are lined up nearly north and south....

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL
(CENTER CHURCH)
HABS No. CONN-109 (page 16)

"Congregational Churches are not consecrated buildings, in the sense that Episcopal ones are, but the presence of the ashes of these men and women under our Meeting-House and of the hundreds of others who lie buried in the Green outside its walls give a real sense of consecration to this edifice which no modern church can possibly possess. It is another of those precious assets that we have in Center Church and reminds us of our responsibility to cherish well this ancient fabric, rooted so deeply in the past. We are indeed, as St. Paul said, compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses and we should strive to be faithful to their memory."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Inspired by the English Georgian style and James Gibbs' St. Martins in the Fields, London, England, the First Church of Christ, Congregational is the fourth meeting house built on the site by the congregation.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; well maintained by the congregation which has used it continuously since its construction.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The church measures approximately 72'-1" x 90'-0" overall, excluding the front portico which is 13'-6" x 61'-3". The width is divided into three bays defined by brick piers and arches, and the length is six bays, excluding the portico and defined also with piers and arches. The bays on the front and rear are further defined by engaged wooden pilasters which are doubled on the ends, i.e. there are six pilasters on these walls.
2. Foundations: stone.
3. Wall construction: Red brick bearing walls strengthened with piers and arches.
4. Porches, stoops, etc.: The east portico projects from the main structure in a pedimented form, including, however, the brick base of the square tower which extends out to the Doric columns framing the center bay. These columns rest on a stylobate of six steps, with a 1912 iron fence and gates planted on the fifth tread. The wooden entablature supported by the columns consists of a plain architrave, a frieze with alternating panels of concentric circles with ox skulls and garlands, and a cornice with mutules. The pediment, also of wood, is ornamented with a garland of acanthus and cornucopias in a scroll-like design. The raking cornice also incorporates mutules. In the last bay of the north and south sides there is a stone porch and ramp with iron rail.
5. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys toward the front of the building.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are three doorways on the east portico, each set within a wooden arch which springs from plain wooden pilasters. The arches are rusticated to imitate stone and painted white. The arches are framed with heavy wooden rusticated pilasters supporting a horizontal entablature. The double doors have eight recessed wooden panels in each. There is a solid wooden paneled fan above each opening; the doors in the last bay on each side are recent additions. They are 12 panel wooden doors with 10 light transom fans above.
- b. Windows: On each side there are two rows of tall windows with arched heads. The sash are d/h 15/15 on the first level. On the second level they are d/h 15/15 plus since the vertical muntins extend into intersecting arcs above the 15 rectangular lights; on the rear wall there is a Palladian-type stained glass window which was added in 1894. Above this window is a circular window. Originally there were four windows at the pulpit (rear) end of the building. These were closed in 1843. (See Edmund Ware Sinnott, The Meeting-House of the First Church of Christ in New Haven, Connecticut, New Haven, May 1960, pp. 12-13).

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Classical cornice with wide overhang and mutules.
- c. Tower: The square brick base of the tower begins at the stylobate inside the portico with the face slightly set back from the line of the columns. The brick of the first stage extends through and above the portico roof with windows incorporated in an inset brick panel on each face. A classical cornice terminates the brick wall above which the second stage begins. It is a relatively low section, incorporating the clocks on each face. The first clock was installed in 1818 having been replaced by a second one in 1826. This was removed to the City Hall in 1861. From that date until 1923 there was no clock in the tower. The clock installed in 1923 is framed at the top by a molding supported by brackets. The third stage begins above this molding. It is also

square and each face is designed as a temple front, the base of which begins at the clock molding. Engaged Ionic pilasters and columns support pediments and urns. The fourth stage is a slender octagonal drum resting on a pedestal base; the Corinthian order with projecting entablature is used at the angles. A slender glazed window with round head is placed on the four primary sides. The entablature at this stage is finely scaled and richly membered.

- d. Balustrade: There is a continuous balustrade with turned balusters and urns mounted on the roof.

C. Detailed Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plan:

- a. Crypt: One of the most interesting parts of the existing church is the crypt with tombstones which seem to be set in the paved floor. Since the present meeting house was built over part of the old city burying ground, but at a higher level, it was built directly over the gravestones, many of them marking graves of the most distinguished men and women in early New Haven history. The paving now covering the floor of the Crypt was installed in 1879. (See D. **Supplementary Material**).
- b. First Floor: The three entrance doors lead from the portico to a vestibule which has a set of stairs at each end leading to the choir gallery, below which are stairs leading to the basement crypt. The auditorium is a single rectangular space surrounded on three sides by a gallery. These galleries were lowered two or three feet in 1843 by cutting off the bottom ends of the supporting columns. At the western end of the auditorium was the pulpit which was replaced in 1868 by a reading desk. The present pulpit and platform were installed in 1894. There are three aisles separating the four ranges of pews. These existing pews are replacements of the original which were apparently two inches wider. The white pews with dark wooden trim are each enclosed with gates. The gallery is supported by Ionic columns, forming five bays on each side and curving on the east end to support the choir gallery and organ.

2. Stairways: The two stairways in the vestibule are enclosed in a solid wooden paneled railing. In addition, there is a stairway on each side of the western end of the auditorium leading to the respective galleries. They have an open balustrade painted white with a dark mahogany handrail and are presently carpeted with red, as are the aisles and pulpit.
3. Flooring: The aisles are carpeted; the bare wooden floor under the pews is painted light gray.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The smooth plaster walls are painted a light buff above a white wooden wainscot which is at the height of the backs of the pews. The plastered ceiling contains a large circular panel; the diameter is equal to the width of the room, It is framed by large fans radiating in relief from each corner. There is a large rosette in the center of the circle and an ornamented band at the outer edge. This band contains alternating panels of foliate forms and guttae in low relief.
5. Doorways and doors: At the three entrance doorways to the auditorium, there are single 12-paneled doors at each side and a pair of 8-recessed paneled doors in the center. Each of the doorways is set in a paneled reveal. The two side doors near the western end are also 12-paneled doors which are set in paneled reveals.
6. Decorative features and trim: The trim around the doors and windows is very simple in contrast to the richness of other areas executed in wood. The accent on the western end is the pulpit wall with the stained glass window set in a Palladian-like framework in full relief from the wall. This is balanced in the choir gallery by the ornate organ pipes enclosure, a screen of five arches supported by Corinthian pilasters and colonnettes. The arches on the sides are wider than the three in the center. The whole is painted white behind which are the gilt pipes. The gallery is supported between columns with a simple architrave and dentillated cornice, above which is a solid paneled railing with small scaled egg and dart moldings framing the panels. Surmounting the solid part of the railing is a row of small spools approximately 8 inches high capped by the handrail. All of the decorative woodwork is painted white.
7. Notable hardware: None.

8. Lighting: There is a large modern pewter chandelier suspended from the rosette in the auditorium which is supplemented by pewter wall sconces mounted between the windows.
9. Heating: Modern central heat. Sinnott states that the original "Russian" stoves were replaced by iron ones in 1823 and the meeting house was piped for gas in 1856. New furnaces were installed in 1931 and both chimneys were rebuilt from their foundations in 1934. (Ibid. pp. 12-13).

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The First Church of Christ, Congregational, is on the west side of Temple Street with portico facing east.
2. Enclosures: A small area behind the church on the west is enclosed with a cast iron fence. There are several tombstones within the enclosure.
3. Landscaping: The church is set among the elms of the New Haven Green, along with two other churches of the same period.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records and 5 sheets of measured drawings were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President. The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichey, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.