

## SUMMER RAMBLE 2019 NOTES

On our ramble, we will be visiting the first four churches listed below. This handout contains information on them and other religious communities in Groton.

1. First Parish (Unitarian) Church
2. Union Congregational Church
3. Old Baptist Church
4. Former Sacred Heart Church
5. Other Churches
  - a. Christian Union Church
  - b. St. James' Church
  - c. St. John's Chapel at Groton School
6. Other Religious Communities
  - a. Presbyterian Society of Groton
  - b. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church
  - c. Shirdi Sai Temple

Details that are listed for each church:

Name(s)

Address

Congregation established date

First minister

Buildings: date built, renovations, etc., locations

Interesting facts

FIRST PARISH Church of Groton Unitarian Universalist

One Powderhouse Road

Congregation established in 1663

First Minister: John Miller

Present building: 1754-55, originally Colonial Georgian, now Greek Revival

Parsonage: Built 1844 by Luther Blood. Willed to church in 1893.



Left: Woodcut image of the church in 1838, a year before it was turned; Right: Victorian Interior

When Groton was incorporated as a town, one of the first orders of business was building a meeting house, which would serve as a center of government and religion. Construction was undertaken beginning in 1662 on the town's first common, which was bordered by Hollis and Common Streets, and originally had roads on its other two sides as well. The first meeting house was completed in 1666, but while construction was underway, services were held in the house of Rev. Samuel Willard, the town's second minister, now at 153 Main St. This first meeting house was burned when the town was attacked by Native Americans in 1676 during King Philip's War. When the town was resettled in 1678, the second meeting house was built on Legion Common, at about the present site of Legion Hall. A third meeting house was built on the site of the present building starting in 1714, and completed the following year. In 1754, it was decided to build a larger meeting house on the same site, and the old third meeting house was moved across Lowell Road where it was used as a barn, and later attached to the old Groton Inn. The present structure, originally called the fourth meeting house, was completed in 1755, and is the oldest public building extant in Groton. It served as town hall and county courthouse until present day Town Hall was built in 1859. Originally, the narrow end of the church faced Lowell Road while the long side faced the common (see drawing above), but it was given a quarter turn in 1839, and at the same time the entrance was reworked and reformed into the Greek Revival style. The clock was made in 1809 by James Ridgway and was originally the town clock. For unknown reasons, after a new clock was placed on the Baptist church steeple in 1897, the Baptist clock became the town clock. The church's bell was made in 1819 by Paul Revere & Company and weighs 1128 pounds. The interior of the church was redone several times as well, including in 1877 which created a Victorian interior (see photo above). Its current decoration was put in place in 1916, to conform with the character of the exterior. The church was given a new spire in 1972, and the bell and clock tower were restored in 2016, which involved another spire replacement.

Fun Facts: The weathervane rooster is named Buddy. The church was featured on the cover of Life Magazine on November 23, 1942.

UNION CONGREGATIONAL or Union Church of Christ in Groton

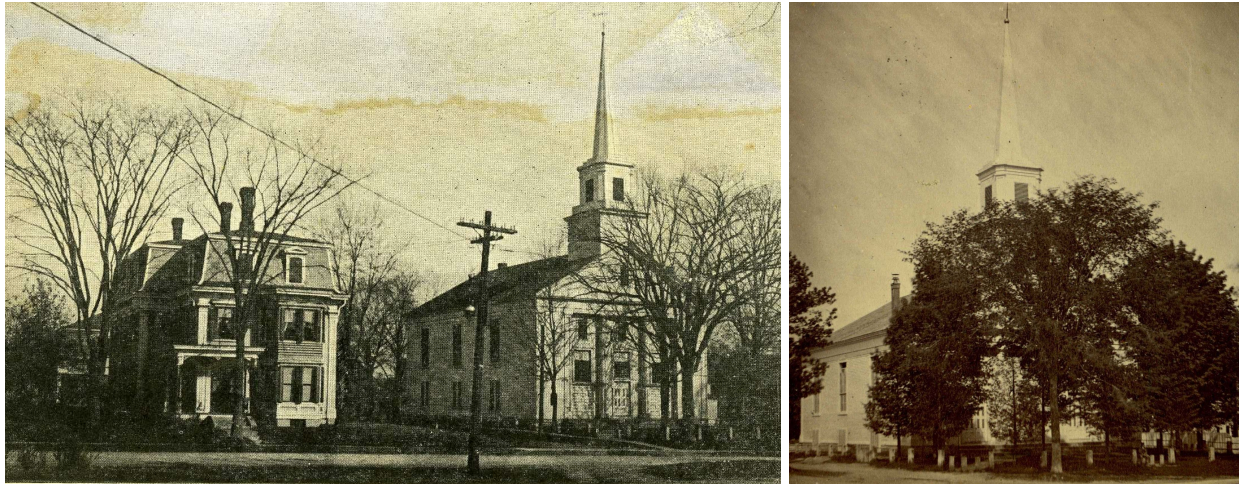
218 Main Street

Congregation established in 1826

First Minister: Rev. John Todd

Present building: 1827 Greek Revival

Parsonage: Corner of Main at Willowdale. Second Empire style built in 1878 for Dr. David R. Steere, purchased in 1966. Original parsonage was the Adams house (219 Main St) across Main Street, purchased in 1874.



Left: Postcard view of church and present parsonage; Right: Church before it was raised

This church was formed out of an argument of who would replace Rev. Daniel Chaplin as minister of the First Parish Church. Rev. Charles Robinson, a more liberal thinker, was selected by the committee appointed to find a new minister, against the written wishes of the ailing former minister. This outraged the more conservative majority of the congregation, who decided to form a new church, taking Rev. John Todd as their minister. He had previously been the interim minister at the First Parish church. This split also caused the end of the parish church in Groton, causing the former First Parish church to be re-christened the Unitarian church. The Congregational Church also offered a meeting place for another new church in Groton in the 1830s, the Baptist Church, before their church was constructed. In 1887, the entire church was raised to create a new first floor (see picture above). The church partnered with the Christian Union Church in West Groton and shared a minister between 1943 and 1971.

FIRST BAPTIST Church of Groton - old building; home of Paul Matisse since 1981

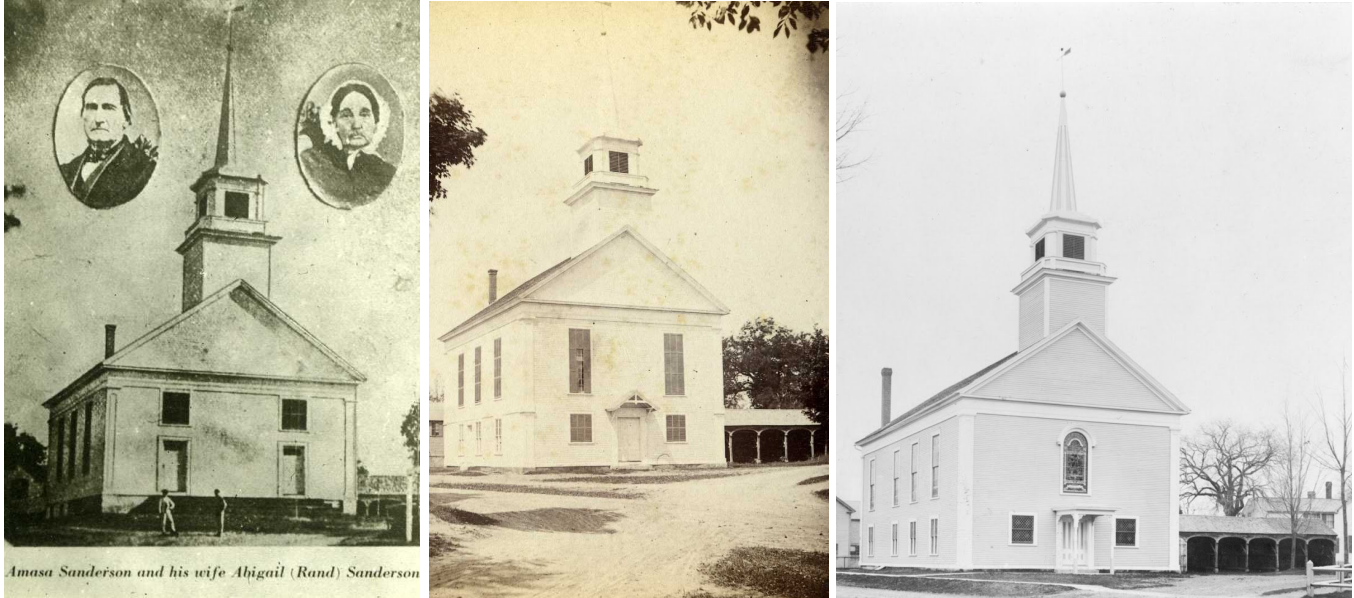
264 Main Street

Congregation established in 1832

Congregation moved in 1974

Present building: 1841 Greek Revival

Original parsonage: Next door at 274 Main Street. Now a business office.



Left: Church before it was raised; Center: Church after it was raised; Right: Church after stained glass was installed

The plot where this church now sits was previously the site of Richardson's Tavern, a popular local establishment that sat on a small hill at the corner of Main Street and School Street (now Legion Street). The Baptists purchased this site in 1840 on which to build their first permanent home. The congregation first met in 1832 in the third floor hall of the house at 113 Main Street, on the corner of Broadmeadow Road. This space had previously been used as a ballroom for the tavern that was run in the building by Martin Jennison after he constructed it in 1803. At this time, the building was owned by Captain Josiah Clark, who was sympathetic to the Baptist Church, which at the time was still thought of as a dangerous sect. Subsequently, the first 28 Groton Baptists were allowed to meet in the Congregational Church, and they chose Rev. Amasa Sanderson as their first minister. The congregation grew slowly through the 1830s, but in 1840 they undertook building their own church, which was completed in 1842. In 1873, the small hill was removed from under the church building to create a new lower level. In 1896, the front of the church was redone with a stained glass window titled "Sower of the Good Seed," given in memory of Rev. Sanderson by his daughter. In 1897, Dr. Samuel Green gave the church an E. Howard Company pendulum clock now called the Town Clock. It is wound twice a week. In the past, this duty was performed by Harlan Fitch and now by Paul Matisse. See a YouTube video of Matisse taking the viewer into the clock tower and showing the clock and how it works: "Tower Clock Visit - Summer 2006 in Groton, MA." The stained glass window of the "Sower" was moved to the new church in 1981. Stats on that building below:

First Baptist Church of Groton; 365 North Main Street; Present building: 1974 contemporary red brick. Seats 400. Present parsonage: 1990 Garrison colonial in rear of church property.

## SACRED HEART CHURCH

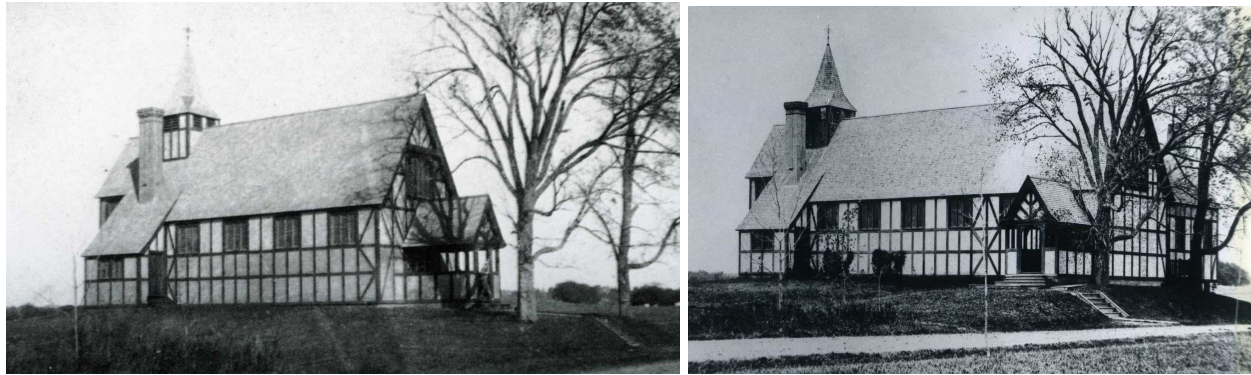
279 Main Street

Congregants in area since the 1850's, travelling to churches in other towns.

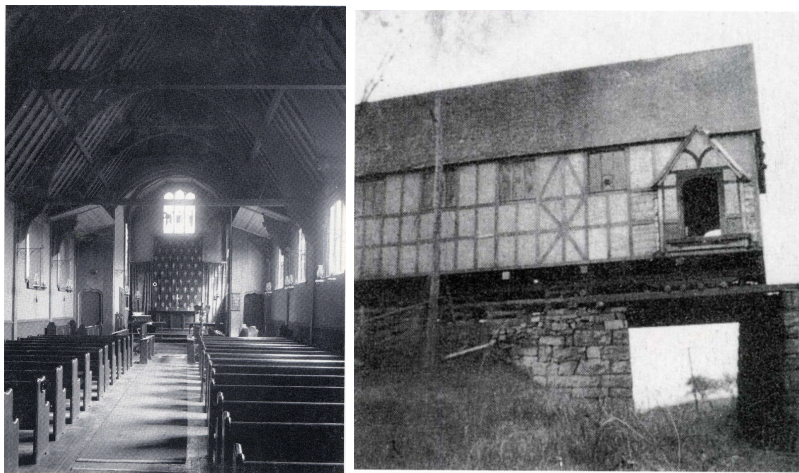
First Minister: Rev. Charles A. Finnegan

Present Building: 1887 Tudor Revival; moved to site 1904

Original Parsonage: A resident priest was assigned to the congregation in 1907 who lived with a local family until the parsonage at 271 Main Street was built in 1908/1910 (now a private residence.)



Left: Chapel in 1890; Right: Chapel in 1894, showing 1891 expansion



Left: Interior in 1896; Right: Chapel moving in 1904

When Groton School was founded in 1884, one of its chief principles was to be an Episcopal boarding school. But up until 1887, the school had no chapel. It was in that year that William Amory Gardner, one of the first three teachers at the school and the nephew and adopted son of Isabella Stewart Gardner donated \$3,000 to the construction of a chapel, in memory of his brother, Joseph Peabody Gardner Jr. who had died by suicide the previous year. The English architect Henry Vaughan, a pioneer in the Gothic Revival style, was selected to design the chapel. He based the design on St. Peter's Church in Melverley, Shropshire, England, built circa 1475, which he had used as inspiration for many other churches. The original chapel was built of wood half-timbering and stucco, with an interior that looked just like an English late medieval

hall. The structure was enlarged in 1891, including a wing to the side. At this time the original front entrance porch was moved to the side, where it was later enclosed. However, by 1899, the school had outgrown the 150 seat chapel and gave it back to Gardner, who in turn donated it to the Catholics of Groton, who had long hoped for their own church. The present property in the center of the town was purchased from Mrs. Jennie Hemenway, and male parishioners dug and laid the foundation. Using rollers and drawn by horses, on September 27, 1904, the building was moved from Farmers Row to the present site. During the process of moving the building, the wing built to the side and a lean-to that had been the original side entrance had to be removed. Also, a great deal of the stucco and half timbering was damaged and subsequently replaced by clapboards. A few years after the structure was moved, the half-timbering was painted out. Later, when the church added a new front entrance, the stucco and half timbering fell off the front as well, leaving only one side with its original treatment. In the 1950's, a basement was dug to provide more space and gas was brought in. In 1966, a house on the next door property was demolished to make a parking lot. In 2006, the church closed, and the congregation joined with that of Saint James' in West Groton and Saint Joseph's in Pepperell to form a new parish named Our Lady of Grace. The building lay empty for several years until it was bought in 2018 and is being renovated into a private home.

## Other Groton Churches



CHRISTIAN UNION Society of West Groton

37 West Main Street, West Groton

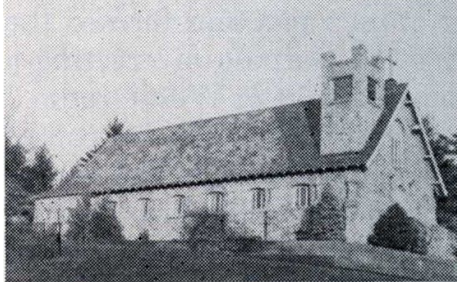
Congregation meeting by 1865 in private homes (13 Pepperell Road "The Chapel") and unused schoolhouses in the area on Pepperell Road and West Main Street.

Built: 1885 Victorian Eclectic style

Renovations: 1927, 1943

Addition: 1950 "Parish House" at rear of building.

Parsonage: Bought existing home at #2 Bixby Hill Road at Pepperell Road. Sold 1943.



#### SAINT JAMES Roman Catholic Church

St. James Avenue, West Groton (between Pepperell and Townsend Roads)

Built: 1929 fieldstone with slate roof. Granite from Townsend, lumber from Hollis, NH

Designed by Rev. Edward Mitchell, priest at Sacred Heart.

Parsonage: 29 Old Orchard Road (neighborhood behind church).



#### SAINT JOHN'S Episcopal Chapel at Groton School

Farmers Row

Built: 1899-1901 Gothic style by English architect Henry Vaughan.

Chapel for students and faculty of Groton School. Public invited to special events.

#### PRESBYTERIAN SOCIETY of Groton

Congregation established 1780 by loyalists in the American Revolution who followed the ex-minister of the First Parish Church, and met at his house at 1 Chicopee Row until he fled to Amherst, NH in 1782.

#### SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY Lutheran Church

Congregation established 1989 as a mission from St. John's Lutheran Church, Sudbury

In Groton Grange building (1873), 80 Champney Street

Moved to share space with Federated Church, Washington Street, Ayer.

#### SHIRDI SAI TEMPLE 99 Shirdi Way, Finished 2018