

The Campaign for the Restoration of First Parish Meetinghouse

First Parish Meetinghouse (also known as *The National Memorial Pilgrim Church*) is located at the top of historic Town Square in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Our current meetinghouse is the 5th building on this site and was constructed during the period of 1893-1897 after a fire completely destroyed the previous building on the evening of November 22, 1892.



We are the oldest continuous ministry in North America, and our church records date back to Scrooby, England, in 1606.

What it Means to be a Guide in a Historic Building

By Julia Rose

I am a volunteer tour guide for First Parish Meetinghouse, also known as the National Memorial Pilgrim Church. As a guide, I have enjoyed meeting a variety of tourists from all around the world. As I begin my tour, I talk about the fact that First Parish Meetinghouse stands at the top of Leyden Street, the oldest street in America and the original site of Plimoth Plantation. There has been a place of gathering and worship on this site continually since the Pilgrims landed in 1620. First Parish traces its origin to the Separatists, a group of dissenters from the Church of England who met together in secret in the Manor House of William Brewster in Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, England.

As I take my visitors up the stairs, they encounter the first of our breathtaking Tiffany stained glass windows which tell the Pilgrim Story. These windows are unique in the sense that they depict some of the historically important events that shaped the lives of the Pilgrims and even our own history. When we enter our impressive sanctuary which contains some of the finest examples of quarter-sawn white oak in the country, visitors are immediately struck by the exquisite wood carving detail that First Parish is becoming known for.

Being a tour guide enables me to show off this important historic meetinghouse to a vast array of visitors, and for the 20 to 40 minutes we are together, I am able to share a common love of history and architectural beauty.

There is a lot more to my tour than the snippet you have read above, so please come by the next time you visit Plymouth and learn how First Parish Meetinghouse is an integral part of our distinctive American past and present.

We are the birthplace of religious freedom in the United States and a landmark worthy of preservation!

Show Me the Money!

By Jack Barwis

In the 1996 movie *Jerry Maguire*, the phrase "Show me the Money" was coined and now is part of the American vernacular. It speaks to a deep sentiment in at least western culture that money is the paramount social value. In other words, money is king. All else--love, kindness, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, etc.--are superfluous.



Well, we of the National Memorial Pilgrim Church do not subscribe to such selfishness. Our motivation in restoring this Meetinghouse is to sustain the rich history of the Pilgrim forefathers. Do we need money for this purpose? Yes. We believe that we have been entrusted with preserving this place of special American history.

Please consider what you can contribute to this effort. No amount is too small... or too large! *Thank you*

We wish to thank all of our supporters and donors who have made the process of restoration a lot easier along the way. It is only with your help and backing that we believe we can accomplish the many tasks that lie ahead.

Front Pocket Doors Restored



Westmill Preservation of Halifax, MA have restored our solid oak pocket doors to their original beauty & glory. These doors had succumbed to the ravages of wind, rain, snow and neglect for over one hundred years but now look the way they did on the day they were installed.

The work on doors consisted of removing them off-site to strip off the old finish. Then an application of new finish consisting of aniline stain, unwaxed shellac, and four coats of marine varnish was added.

While the doors were off-site, the ironwork was removed so it could be properly prepped, painted and a new coat of varnish applied.

This work is being funded by part of the \$307,000.00 grant by the Town of Plymouth Community Preservation Act.

Thank you CPC.

**www.restorefirstparishplymouth.org
Facebook – [firstparishplymouthrestoration](https://www.facebook.com/firstparishplymouthrestoration)
Pinterest – [First Parish Plymouth](https://www.pinterest.com/firstparishplymouth)**

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**First Parish Plymouth Restoration
19 Town Square
Plymouth, MA 02360**

info@restorefirstparishplymouth.org

Please contact us if you have any questions or want to help in our restoration efforts.

Donations to First Parish Restoration can be mailed directly to First Parish Meetinghouse Restoration, 19 Town Square, Plymouth, MA 02360 by using the enclosed envelope or you can donate online by going to our website at **www.restorefirstparishplymouth.org**.

All donations are tax deductible

Tennessee Pink Marble Enhances First Parish

By Dell Hammond

Tennessee pink marble, which is located in the Meetinghouse vestibule, staircases, and narthexes, is a primary design element in important buildings and monuments in the United States. It is highly valued for its color, luster, durability and imperviousness to stains. While pink is the most well-known Tennessee marble color, the stone also occurs in gray and dark brown.

A noticeable feature of Tennessee marble is the presence of jagged horizontal gray or black lines, or "stylolites. These form from residual insoluble materials left over from the natural limestone dissolution processes.

The long list of buildings that have used this type of marble includes the U.S. Capital Building staircase to the Senate and House chambers, Lincoln Memorial entrance tripods, Grand Central Station main concourse floor and the National Gallery of Art. Our favorites are the lions in front of the New York Public Library and the 170-ton First Amendment tablet on the front of the Newseum in Washington, D.C.

The original cost to First Parish Meetinghouse in the 1890's was \$3,831.00. A few years ago refastening a single loosened stairwell panel cost \$18,000.00.

This exquisite Tennessee marble is just one of the many reasons why we need to restore and maintain this architectural treasure for generations to come.

Another Successful Tour Season

Our 2014 Meetinghouse tour season is over and we wish to thank all the visitors who came to take a tour of First Parish Meetinghouse. We had approximately 1,500 people walk through our front doors this past year from all over the globe and most of the continental United States.

Even though we are closed for tours during the winter months, we will conduct group tours during this time of year but you must contact us beforehand at **info@restorefirstparishplymouth.org** and make special arrangements. The Meetinghouse is always open for services every Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

Our 2015 tour season opens on Memorial Day weekend, May 21, 22, 23/2015 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. From that point on we will be open every Thursday, Friday & Sat. from 10-3 until the end of October.

2014 Lecture Series Continues

By Donna Petrangelo

When Roberto Rosa recently spoke at First Parish about the many challenges involved in stained glass restoration, his passion for his craft was evident. Imagine having to repair cracked or broken glass (perhaps reduced to tiny shards), weakened lead came, or painted portions that have faded with time or been marred by improper cleaning approaches (think Brillo!). These challenges are not for the faint of heart.

Rosa, a nationally recognized and award-winning stained glass restoration specialist, is Vice President of Serpentino Stained Glass in Needham, MA, where First Parish's treasured Robinson windows and many of the sanctuary's side windows presently are being restored.

Beginning with the Egyptians' use of colored glass in vases and bottles, Rosa also provided an historical overview of how the craft of stained glass evolved over the centuries. The development of silver stain, for example, allowed artists to use larger pieces of glass when painting quite realistic facial features and John LaFarge's creation of opalescent glass resulted in glass with whorls of varied colors that are visible even in dim light. Focusing on First Parish's Tiffany windows, Rosa described how layers of opalescent glass were used create depth, and how textured (drapery) glass makes the folds in clothing appear more realistic.

"Challenges in the Art of Stained Glass Restoration" was the second in the First Parish Restoration Committee's 2014 series of free lectures, which is supported in part by a grant from the Plymouth Cultural Council.

One of the 10 Most Endangered Historic Sites in Massachusetts

Preservation Massachusetts recently solicited applications for this list, and the Restoration Committee completed and submitted a very lengthy application on behalf of First Parish Meetinghouse. Following a site visit by a representative of PM, we are waiting to hear if we were selected.

Stay tuned.

Work Continues on Windows

By Jan Palmer-Tarbox

On a recent visit to Serpentino Studios with a few of our major supporters, award-winning stained glass restorer, Roberto Rosa, explains the process.



Work is progressing on the John Robinson Windows, and visitors were able to view a section of the restored center window. Here Roberto demonstrates how each piece is removed and then reassembled, like pieces of a puzzle. In some areas there are three layers of glass. The glass is carefully cleaned, and wherever possible, original lead is reused.



Our window restoration (which is being handled by Serpentino Stained Glass of Needham, MA) is being funded by a \$307,000.00 grant by the *Town of Plymouth Community Preservation Act*.

First Parish & the Arts and Crafts Movement

By Donna Curtin

Arts & Crafts authority David Berman, owner of Trustworth Studio, presented an illuminating lecture on the movement and its influence on the design of First Parish Church to a rapt audience in early September. To understand the church's architecture and interior decoration, Berman looked back to the origins of Arts & Crafts in Victorian Britain.

The English Arts & Crafts movement, kindled in the closing decades of the 19th century, was more than an architectural style or a design aesthetic, according to Berman; it was a social movement that gave homage to a mythical golden age of truth, beauty and love, and valued above all that which was crafted by human hands. William Morris, one of the movement's most influential proponents, detested the overly elaborate machine-made commodities being churned out in the industrializing nation, and sought a handmade counterpoint in artisanal medieval tradition. His intricate and exquisitely crafted designs for furnishings, wallpapers, and textiles attracted a wealthy clientele, which made him exceedingly successful, but paradoxically underscored the widening gulf between the elite classes and those that worked with their hands, to Morris's distress.

Troubled by the inequities of their age, Morris and other young makers of craft, including artist Edward Burne-Jones and illustrator Walter Crane, were drawn to socialism as a means to effect a better world. Their concerns about the new industrial age also emerged in their artistry, as in the case of Burne-Jones' lushly beautiful series of paintings, *The Legend of Briar Rose*, where an enchanted sleeping maiden is an allegory of lost beauty. Walter Crane also illustrated the *Sleeping Beauty* legend several times, including for a set of painted panels decorating a cabinet. He incorporated a hopeful sign: an emptied hourglass by the maiden's sleeping form symbolized the potential reawakening of beauty in the world, through the renewal of craft tradition.

Arts & Crafts adherents believed workmanship could amend the harshness of the mechanized world by creating beauty in the everyday. The movement also emphasized a reliance on local materials and local craftsmen, particularly evident in architecture. In Gloucestershire, Alice Jordan Foster (sister of Eben

Jordan) commissioned architect William Richard Lethaby to design an Arts & Crafts church in 1902. The Brockhampton Church was built on site with traditional thatch roofing and carved interior woodwork with designs of local flowers.

Arts & Crafts reached American shores in the late 19th century, and its influence was significant in the Boston area. In 1887, the wealthy Yerksa family of Cambridge retained the architectural firm of Hartwell & Richardson to design a newly fashionable Arts & Crafts home. The resulting Shingle Style residence was a stunner; the intricate Celtic design interior included carved and embossed woodwork, stenciled canvas wall covering, frieze decoration with gilded composition panels, stained-glass windows, and wrought-iron gas-and-electric light fixtures. For over a century after its construction, these hand-crafted original features remained in nearly untouched condition; sadly, they were compromised in a recent remodeling.

The intrinsically high quality of Arts & Crafts construction makes surviving examples all the more significant. In 1899, as the Boston Arts & Crafts Society hosted a special exhibition to highlight the movement, a new Romanesque meetinghouse



designed by Hartwell, Richardson & Driver for First Parish Church was completed in Plymouth. Like the masterful Yerksa house, First Parish's interior – the only intact original interior of a Hartwell Richardson church – features extraordinary craftsmanship and a rich design vocabulary.

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Decoding its symbology, Berman noted the sanctuary's massive trusses and acanthus-carved king-posts representing the vault of heaven, or possibly evoking the inverted hull of a ship as a nod to the Pilgrims' arrival

The century-old golden oak pews, still sturdy and tightly joined, are carved at the ends with

Scallop shells, the symbol of spiritual pilgrimage. Elaborately carved organ screens are bordered with grape vines, emblem of the true religion.



Celtic knotwork carved into the curved oaken lectern suggests the linkage of heavenly and earthly realms.

The sanctuary's green, gold, and red paint scheme reflects the naturalistic Arts & Crafts palette. Striking decorative borders are stenciled onto the rough plaster walls, and hand-worked with gold leaf and/or gold paint infill, some of which has deteriorated or suffered damage. Original chandeliers appear to have been made for electricity rather than gas; tipped electric carbon bulbs would have shown off the pierced decoration of the metalwork.

The Arts & Crafts movement flowered through 1914, when the death toll of the Great War severed the tradition and the idealism that had nurtured it. First Parish Church is a valuable surviving example of the skillful craftsmanship created under the spell of this powerful movement. Though Arts & Crafts is no more, the tradition of workmanship hasn't ended entirely. Berman ended his lecture with a picture of a locally made needlework scene of Alice in Wonderland, drawn and embroidered by Plymouth resident Elizabeth Creeden, and based on the stitchery of May Morris, William Morris's daughter.

One Step Closer to Being Listed on the Register of Historic Landmarks

Last October the Restoration Committee voted to pursue individual listing for First Parish Meetinghouse on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is our belief that such listing would increase national awareness of the important role First Parish has played in America's history and of the Meetinghouse's desperate need for restoration.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission determined that First Parish was qualified to pursue such listing because it met the following criteria:

A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

The Restoration Committee enlisted Preservation Consultant Eric Dray of Provincetown, MA, to complete the daunting application. Dray engaged in months of research that focused on First Parish's historical importance and the building's significant unaltered architecture and Arts and Crafts interior.

At a meeting on September 10, 2014, at the Massachusetts Archives, Eric Dray presented the salient points of the application to the commission members. Lee Hartman, Plymouth Director of Planning, reinforced the Towns enthusiasm and support for this endeavor, and Restoration chair Jan Palmer-Tarbox spoke briefly about the importance such listing would bring to our restoration efforts.

Massachusetts Historical Commission members then voted unanimously to forward our application to the Department of the Interior, where it will be reviewed on the federal level. We hope to be notified of the final decision regarding listing on the National Register by the end of the winter.

Honorary Committee

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Peggy M. Baker, *Director Emerita,
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First Parish Meetinghouse Restoration Committee

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Rick McDonald

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Julia Rose

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