

FORM B - BUILDING

NRDIS 8/2/1984

Assessor's number
47-31

USGS Quad
Newburyport

Area(s)
L

Form Number
482

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town Newburyport

Place (neighborhood or village)

Address 14 Titcomb Street

Historic Name North Congregational Church
(Central Congregational Church)

Uses: Present Church
Original Church

Date of Construction 1861

Source Currier, History of Newburyport

Style/Form Italianate

Architect/Builder unknown; 1911 addition - A.G. Perkins

Exterior Material:

Foundation Granite

Wall/Trim Brick

Roof Slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

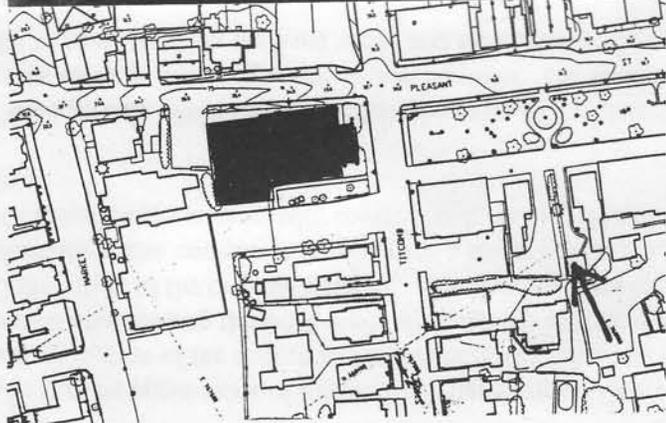
Major Alterations (with dates) 1911 - vestry addition,
mastic removed from exterior stained glass windows;
c.1960 - entrance; 1971 - steeple; various interior renov.

Condition good

Moved no yes Date

Acreage 16600 SF

Setting facing Brown Square



Recorded by Lisa Mausolf

Organization Newburyport Historical Commission

Date (month/year) June 1999

BUILDING FORM (14 Titcomb Street)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of the building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The present appearance of the North Congregational Church (now the Central Congregational Church) corresponds to the reconstruction of the church in 1861 after it was largely destroyed by fire that same year. The new church was reportedly constructed reusing the brick walls although the entrances and windows were redesigned in the Italianate style rather than the Gothic style of the original building. The building rests on a granite foundation and the red brick is laid in a stretcher bond alternating nine courses of stretchers to a single course alternating headers and stretchers, all laid in red mortar. The exterior of the building was originally covered with mastic. The church is oriented with its steepled facade facing Brown Square Park.

Characteristic of the Italianate style, the eaves of the church display a broad overhang accented by brackets which are paired at the corners, with single brackets in between. The windows openings are all arched with the curve echoed in the roofline of the sections flanking the front tower and the curved molding above the clock.

At the base of the front tower the arched entrance is filled with c.1960 doors and is fronted by modern brick and concrete steps which are semi-circular in plan. Above the entrance the large arched window is filled with four narrow panels filled with colored leaded glass and is protected by an outer window. The opening is capped by a brick lintel. The first stage of the brick tower is punctuated by a pair of round-arched windows. The second stage of the steeple is also square in plan and is covered in a "rusticated" metal with chamfered corners. Each side of the belfry is punctuated by three open arches with large consoles at the corners. Resting on the belfry is an octagonal drum and a shingled spire. The predominant window on the outer bays of the facade and the side elevations is an arched stained glass window containing two arched panels with a circular pane centered at the top and stone sills. The gable roof is covered with slate shingles. Inserted on the front wall is a marble tablet reading "Congregational Society. Founded 1768. Erected 1826 on the site of the old church".

To the rear of the church building is a two-story section serving as a hall/Sunday School. This section measures five bays wide on the Pleasant Street elevation. The first floor openings arched with multi-paned windows capped by three-light curved transoms. The openings on the upper level are segmental with brick lintels and contain 6/6 sash. A two-story, flat-roofed vestry addition is located to the south of the sanctuary.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Describe the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

A meetinghouse was first constructed on this site in 1768 by a group which had separated from the First Religious Society. In 1794 the group was incorporated as the Third Religious Society in Newburyport. The wood-frame building was oriented facing the Merrimack River and stood until 1826 when a new brick meetinghouse was built on the site. In 1860 the name of the Society was changed to the North Congregational Society of Newburyport. The Gothic-style building was destroyed by fire during a blizzard on March 21, 1861, leaving only the brick walls.

The brick walls were incorporated into the new building which was dedicated on October 23, 1861. (Unfortunately the Newburyport Public Library does not have the microfilm of the newspaper for that period.) As originally constructed, the exterior of the building was covered with mastic and the steeple was painted dark blue. The clock, known as "Old Betsey" was presented to the church by Miss Elizabeth Gerrish of Rings Island, Salisbury, in 1877. It replaced a clock destroyed by the 1861 fire. The bell in the tower was made in Sheffield, England and was presented to the church by Captain Joshua Hale and Josiah L. Hale. It reportedly first rang out on July 4, 1861. The church's original bell was made by Revere & Sons.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attached a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town
NewburyportProperty Address
14 Titcomb Street
Area(s) Form No.Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

In 1910 the three downtown Congregational Churches (the others being the Whitefield Church on State Street and the Prospect Street Society) decided to unite, keeping the North Church as their meetinghouse. Considerable changes were made to the North Church building to prepare it to become the Central Congregational Church. The mastic and outer course of bricks was stripped away and a new outer shell of bricks was set in place. A large addition was made to the existing vestry, according to plans by A.G. Perkins. The two-story, 34 x 53' addition was located on the southwest side of the old vestry, part of which was removed. Arthur Currier was responsible for the woodwork and the Cashman Brothers were the masons. The stained glass windows were added at the same time, the church was refrescoed and the steeple was painted a lighter shade of blue.

In 1931 a major remodeling of the interior of the church was completed including the reconstruction of the pulpit, redecorating and a new floor. At the rear of the pulpit the Bliss Memorial window was installed in honor of Charles Bliss (c.1920). The architects for the renovations were Mowll & Rand of Boston and the window was designed by the Alfred Bell studio of Boston. Unfortunately a short time later, in 1932, the interior of the church had to be largely replaced after the ceiling crashed, crushing chandeliers, wiring, cornices, pulpit, pews and the choir loft. Additional alterations were made to the sanctuary in 1952 and 1963. State inspection records indicate that alterations were made to the building in 1953 according to the designs of Bourne, Connor, Nichols & Whiting of Boston. The marble memorial stone on the facade of the church was restored to the building in 1959 after an absence of nearly 100 years. The stone was formerly placed above the entrance of the church but was omitted when the church was rebuilt after the 1861 fire. The church steeple was restored in 1969 according to plans by Gilbert Small & Co. of Boston. In 1971 a new steeple was installed, a replica of the original.

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Maps

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