

[See historical photos and postcards of First Church](#)



When we speak of our church as First Church Congregational, instead of First Congregational Church, we are recognizing that it not only is the first (and only) Congregational Church in Rochester; it was, for many years, the only church in Rochester. Quite a number of Quakers had settled in Rochester, but it was not until 1781 that a Friend's Meeting House was built. This was built near Jonathan Dame's house, but later moved to Gonic. The first Methodist Church was built in 1825, and churches of other denominations followed rapidly.

Rochester was incorporated as a town in 1722, but it was not until 1728 that settlers started to clear the land and built primitive log cabins.



It was voted by the town proprietors in April 1730 to build a church. The building was finished and dedicated on June 24, 1731. Because it was the only public

building, it was used for town meetings and for any other meeting of importance to the townspeople.

On May 9, 1737, the Rev. Amos Main became our first minister. He was a man of many talents. Only his death -- on April 5, 1760 -- ended his ministry. He had served the church and town for 23 years. Pastor Amos Main was the first moderator, physician and barrister, as well as the first pastor of Rochester. A statue was erected in his memory many years after his death. The unveiling was celebrated on July 13, 1896. The statue still stands today, at the intersection of North Main Street and South Main Street in downtown Rochester. The bronze plate on the pedestal reads: *This monument is erected to perpetuate the memory of Rev. Amos Main, the first settled minister of the First Congregational Church of the Province of Rochester from May 9, 1737 to April 5, 1760, when he died aged 51 years.*

At a church meeting on March 22, 1743, it was officially determined that the church would be designated a Congregational Church. After Parson Main's death, the ministry was pastored by the Rev. Samuel Hill. It was during his tenure that the parsonage was finally built on the top of Haven Hill. After only four years, he died and was buried in the burying ground on the hill. His tombstone can still be found there.

Rev. Joseph Haven, a young man who had graduated from Harvard College, was the next minister of the church. His ministry lasted almost fifty years, starting in 1776 and ending in 1825. During these years, the church had fallen into a sad state of disrepair and the decision was made to move the church to the Common, since the town was now moving down that way. It was in 1780 that the new church was finished -- on what is known as Rochester Common. (Nine years later, George Washington was elected president of the United States.)

And now, with new people moving into Rochester, many of them not church members, there was strong resentment of paying taxes to support the church. There were also new denominations starting to spring up. In 1791, the town voted to keep Congregational Society Accounts separate from town accounts. In 1799, the selectmen petitioned for a charter for the Congregational Society, under the name of First Parish, and asked that all parish business be separate from town business. The petition was granted by a special act of the legislature in 1819; thus the bonds between church and state were severed.

In 1842, the congregation voted to move the church building to its present location at the corner of South Main Street and Liberty Street. The move took place the next year, 1843. The church was moved, and was raised up so the sanctuary was now on the second floor, and a new first floor was created underneath.



This is the way South Main Street in Rochester looked in 1910. First Church is seen along the left side of the street. You can see lots of postcard images of Rochester history at the [History of Rochester](#) site maintained by Robert Griffin.