

First Parish Meetinghouse

According to Historian [Joshua Coffin](#), the dispute over siting the First Parish Meetinghouse continued for “many years with an obstinacy and bitterness, to which the annals of Newbury furnish no parallel”—and this was after the initial blowup about even allowing what to the eastern side of Newbury was a Second Parish out in what is now West Newbury.

[In Puritan New England, church and state were conjoined.](#) Local authorities enforced church attendance and collected taxes to pay for the church and pastor. Matters such meetinghouse establishment and siting became the subject of petitions and counter petitions to the government in Boston.

Having received no satisfactory response to their [1685 petition](#) to form a new parish, in [1689](#) some “west end people” took it upon themselves to build a 30-square-foot (5’ x 6’ ?) meetinghouse on “the plains” (likely near current day [Hoyt Lane and Storey Avenue](#)) and hire a minister. This affront to the existing church and municipal powers—not to mention the siphoned tax base—caused considerable consternation. In reply to complaints of establishment Newbury, the west-enders [asked the Governor and general court in 1693](#) “to pity and help them, to ease them of a heavy burden of travel on God’s day. . . . The bulk of us live four miles from the ould meeting house, some six or seven. Our number is above three hundred. Few of us have horses, and if we could get down to the ould meeting house, it is impossible it should receive us with them so that many [would] lay out of doors, the house is so little. Some of us have groaned under this burden this thirty years, some grown old,

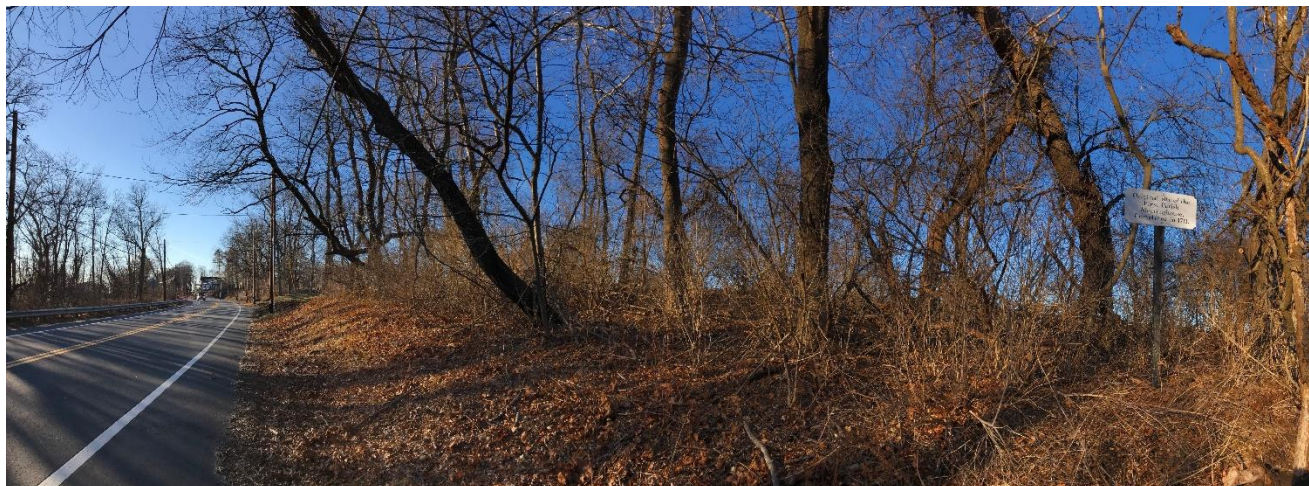
some sickly. . . . We beg the honorable court to establish peace among us a rational dividing line.”

With no definitive answer to their petition, in [1694](#) the west-enders set in slow motion a more formal process for their own meetinghouse. In 1695, they decided to build an expanded or new one. This provoked a long, bitter siting dispute. Over 60% voted for a [more central spot on Pipestave Hill](#), but a vocal and determined minority insisted on the preexisting location at the plains.

The stalemate was changed if not broken in 1708 when the majority [began self-help construction on Pipestave Hill](#). They proceeded to tax the minority dissenters for this, which necessarily prompted complaints to the government in Boston. On [June 22, 1710](#) the council in Boston approved the Pipestave Hill location, at which point those at the plains refused to use it. Thereupon under cover of night some in the [Pipestave contingent razed their opponents’ meetinghouse](#), whose outraged parishioners committed to rebuild.

Evidently concerned about preservation of the peace, in [1711](#) the court in Boston decreed that the newly reconstructed plains building could neither be finished up nor used. About this time some in the plains faction began defecting to the Episcopalians. It appears that this, perhaps coupled with [exhaustion on the part of the combatants](#), was the way out. By the beginning of [1714](#), when John Tufts (whose home is in the [2018 Historic Sites Inventory](#)) became First Parish minister, calm largely prevailed, ending almost 30 years of strife.

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Library of Congress image of Puritans going to church
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/pga.00038/>



Marker Location: 708-70 Main St., West Newbury, MA

Latitude: 42.808068 Longitude:
-70.958490

*Excerpts from 1729 map of proposed
First & Second Parishes*



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_plan_of_the_west_parish
or Newbury new town \(3855459597\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_plan_of_the_west_parish_or_Newbury_new_town_(3855459597).jpg)