

## *Second Parish Meetinghouse*

Depending on one's perspective, the west end's Second Parish was the Fourth Parish (as viewed from greater Newbury), or the Upper Parish (as viewed by parishioners near loftier, more remote, hills than Pipestave). By all accounts, the birthing of the Second Parish at Meetinghouse Hill, though difficult, was less agonizing than that of its predecessor.

As before, additional outward development and population shifts warranted another meetinghouse. Surveyor John Brown's [1729 map](#) depicting all households in the western precinct focused attention on the actual needs to be served (perhaps foreclosing some opportunity for dispute). It also has become a treasured legacy, giving us a clear idea of who lived where on the roads and lanes extant at that time in West Newbury almost three centuries ago.

With lightning speed by First Parish standards, on [May 20, 1731](#) the west end freeholders "voted to desire ye Honourable General Court to confirm and establish ye division. . . ." This of course drew immediate complaints: "Benjamin Hills and others opposed the report of the committee, and petitioned the General Court to give the new parish more territory and straighten the dividing line, ['which is now very crooked and inconvenient.'](#)" Nonetheless, William Johnson was installed as new parish's minister on [September 15, 1731](#).

[Sarah Anna Emory](#) provided a delightful word picture describing the meetinghouse atop a steep hill: "The meeting house, a square, weather embrowned structure, without steeple or bell, crowned a high hill, up which a stony road wound in steep

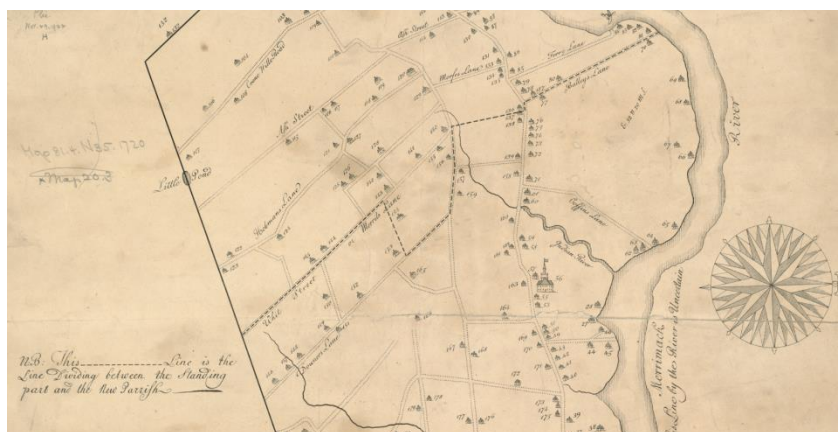
ascent. A horse block for the convenience of the pillion riders stood by the front steps, and a long row of low sheds, shelter for the horses, extended to the left."

"The interior," she wrote, "was a handsome specimen of the ecclesiastical architecture of the period. The wide front door led through a broad aisle to a high pulpit furnished with green cushions. A sounding board depended from the ceiling above, and the communion table stood in front. A sounding board usually was about eight feet in diameter, and shaped like an inverted wine-glass flattened toward the brim; it hung some six feet above the pulpit cushion."

The Second (or Fourth, in [Joshua Coffin's](#) terms) Meetinghouse contributed to the demise of the First Parish's building on Pipestave Hill. The initial structure so bitterly contested was no longer centrally located and had become derelict. Thus in [1758](#) a vote was taken to relocate the First Parish to a [new building site](#) to the east around what is now 806 Main Street, described in the [Historic Sites Inventory](#).

That same year, a number of townspeople [petitioned in woeful terms](#) for permission to join the Second Parish on Meetinghouse Hill, describing their plight at the First as "nothing but a long and tedious quarrel, a shattered, doleful and uncomfortable house to worship our divine master in, together with a total despair of being extricated out of our misery, would bring us." Ultimately, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the First and Second Congregational Churches peaceably merged into what is now West Newbury's only Congregational Church, located on Main Street at Elwell Square.

## Second Parish Meetinghouse



Marker Location: 27 Meetinghouse Rd., West Newbury, MA Latitude: 42.792976 Longitude: -70.985216

*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)