

Church buildings in Marblehead during the Revolution

During the Revolution, there were three churches in Marblehead, all built of wood :

- The **“First Church”** (established in 1635, up on the Burial Hill until 1695) Its first two structures served as both a church and town meeting house until 1729. Later, in the mid-1800s, it became known as “Old North.”
- The **“Second Church”** (congregation formed and edifice built in 1715, but torn down in 1832, soon after it adopted Unitarian theology – so a more modern church building could be constructed, which burned in 1910)
- **St. Michael’s Anglican** (Episcopal after the Revolution), whose wooden church edifice was built in 1714, with a steeple that was torn down in 1793 (due to ‘rot’) but replicated in 2014 for the Church’s 300th anniversary.

1. The First Church (now called “Old North”) located at 8 Franklin St. 1695 to 1825

Marblehead’s First Church congregation heard their day-long Sunday services in a rectangular wooden building with wooden sash windows near the corner of today’s Franklin and Orne Streets, where the 20th century Mary Alley Hospital would later be built. (There was usually a break for lunch, which was the main meal of the day.)

That new church edifice had been built in 1695, with a belfry, but was enlarged in the mid-1700s, with a clock and steeple added at some point that century (possibly in 1763, when mariner Ashley Bowen, an Anglican and devoted member of St. Michael’s Church, drew an illustrated watercolor townscape that year, showing the town’s three church steeples).

The First Church congregation had first formed (“gathered”) in 1635 and worshipped in a wooden meeting house at the top of the Burial Hill that served both as a place for secular Selectmen’s and Town Meetings (which occurred quite frequently throughout the year), and a place for day-long Sunday service preaching.

This church, later called “Old North,” was called “The First Church” in the 1600s & 1700s. In 1715 /16, a **Second Church** congregation had formed and moved into a newly constructed edifice built for them on today’s Mugford Street (which was called “New Meeting House Lane” in the 1700s). That is now the Unitarian Universalist church — which was just Unitarian after the 18-teens. Then “Universalist” was added in the 1960s. (Marblehead’s pre-1830s Universalist congregation had moved out of their own large wooden church building on Pleasant St. and joined with the Unitarians before 1934, when the 1881 church building became the “Gut ‘N’ Feathers” badminton club).

By 1824, when the First Church’s new stone edifice was constructed, the First church was called “the Orthodox Church” because by 1820, that Second Church had adopted the newly popular Unitarian teachings, while the First Church retained its original Calvinist / Puritan-based religious theology. The First Church’s new stone edifice (its third structure) features three doors across the front to visually represent the older church congregation’s Trinitarian theology (Father, Son & Holy Ghost) – though only two of the doors are functional today.

After 1858, around the time of the Civil War, the “Orthodox Church” (the First Church, with its older, more traditional preaching) became known as “Old North” because in 1858, a **Third Church** congregation formed. It was referred to as **“The South Church”** because it was built further south in the town, closer to the shoe factories. However, the Third Church burned down less than 20 years later, in the town’s first major fire (1877), and most of the congregation re-joined Old North in its new half-century-old building. At that time, the interior featured a dark multi-colored paint scheme rather than its 20th c. unadorned white ceiling, walls and pews (as it had also looked in 1824). The pews date from the later 1800s, but were later painted white.

Miraculously, **two original wooden sides from the pew boxes** in the First Church’s original c.1648 building up on the Burial Hill (and then in the second edifice on today’s Franklin Street) survive. They were donated to the Marblehead Museum (then the Marblehead Historical Society) — one in 1899 (the year after the association was founded), and the other in 1979 (found and donated by noted furniture scholar Robert Trent, who attended high school in Marblehead, and published an article about the pew woodwork and their maker(s) that year).

Those three churches all had congregational worship formats (though only the First Church, “Old North” would remain part of what later became the “Congregational” church denomination in the United States) — compared to St. Michael’s Anglican (Church of England) liturgical worship and system of worship leaders (called rectors) that was, in the 1700s, part of England’s national ecclesiastical (hierarchical) governing body. (Once the U.S. was formed, after the Revolution, Anglican churches here became part of a national Episcopal church system.)

The other two churches in Marblehead during the Revolution were **The Second Church** (congregational type, established in 1715, later Unitarian), and **St. Michael's** (Anglican, then Episcopal, built in 1714 with a tall steeple).

2. The Second Church (1715 to 1832, after it turned Unitarian) 28 Mugford Street

The Second Church congregation broke away from the town's first church in 1715/16 and built a new meeting house on "New Meeting House Lane," with a new minister who, 22 years later, would be selected as President of Harvard College (til 1768). Its current building is its third edifice, after a 1910 fire burned its second structure.

That congregation turned Unitarian by 1820, under the ministry of the social humanitarian Rev. John Bartlett, who was also part of the small group of individuals (mostly women) who established the Marblehead Female Humane Society in 1816, following the three-year War of 1812, in which 1,141 men and boys had served, leaving several hundred widows, many fatherless families, and many families destitute, since so many men who returned were maimed or couldn't work. (The year 1816 itself was called "the year without a summer," because there was a frost in every month, due to the eruption of a volcano in Indonesia, Mt. Tambora, that inflicted most of the Northern Hemisphere with severe weather, freezing temperatures, and failed crops that led to famines.)

After Unitarian teachings were accepted officially, a new church edifice was built in 1832, but burned in 1910.

During the 1830s, four new religious structures were built in Marblehead for four new religions (Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, and Universalists) that were spreading widely as part of a national religious movement in the 1820s to 1840s called "The Second Great Awakening." In Marblehead, this was largely driven — and funded — by the town's women, who (as elsewhere) were seeking spiritual relief from the heavy post-Puritan / Calvinist preaching that had prevailed in most New England communities for the previous century and a half.

The **Baptists** and the **Universalists** built second new wooden Victorian-style church edifices in 1868 & 1881, respectively, which still stand. The Baptist Church became a Grace Church in 2005, and the dwindling Universalist congregation joined with the Unitarians sometime before 1934, when the "**Gut 'N' Feathers**" badminton club purchased the Universalists' large Victorian-style church building with its elaborate former entrance doors on Watson Street, and a large steeple was removed. The national Universalist organization formally joined with the national Unitarian denomination in the 1960s. And the **Methodists'** church edifice became condominiums in the mid-1900s, after a new church was built for them out toward the edge of town.

In 1858, a large wooden **Catholic Church** with tall double steeples in the front was built on Prospect Hill, but it burned in 1872. The present stone Catholic church on Atlantic Avenue was built in an English parish church style in the 1920s. The earlier wooden structure was built on the hill across from the 19th century work house (a dormitory for poor townspeople who worked for community benefit in exchange for lodging). In 1913, a new brick high school for the town would be built in its place there on Work House Rocks.

3. St. Michael's Church 26 Pleasant St. (& next to 13 Summer St.)

The church up on the small hill above Marblehead's main street was established and built in 1714 as an Anglican Church (Church of England).

As first built, it featured a tall steeple above a square-shaped church, with a cross-vaulted ceiling to enhance acoustics. Large rectangular vertical wooden sash windows with clear glass panes were topped with rounded wooden panels that were painted to look like the arched or round-top windows typical of Anglican churches.

During the Revolution (1775 to 1780s), church services were suspended for a while. In July 1776, after the Declaration of Independence was read at Marblehead's Town House just down the street, Patriot citizens rang the bell in St. Michael's belfry so hard that it cracked. It was later repaired in the metal foundry of Paul Revere.

The church's rector, **Rev. Joshua Wingate Weeks**, who lived in the church **Rectory** at today's **110 Elm Street** (and a private home after the later 1800s), fled Marblehead in the dark of night in May 1775 and never returned.

Apparent Loyalist church members were: **Woodward Abrahams**, **William Bodin**, **Henry Saunders**, and **Michael Coombs** ("among the most obnoxious of the Loyalists"). The last three men listed left town. But, like non-member **Stephen Blaney** (also "one of the most objectionable Loyalists"), they returned after the war.

Revolutionary Patriots who worshipped at St. Michael's included **Captain Samuel Russell Trevett** (a hero at Bunker Hill who later helped save the church financially in 1819) and **Colonel William Raymond Lee** (Col. Jeremiah Lee's nephew / Capt. John Lee's middle son), and their wives and some children, as adults. **Major Joshua Orne's** wife Lucretia (a daughter of church member William Bourne) is buried in the cemetery.

Grand-children of **General John Glover** (who did not worship there himself) and **Captain William Blackler** (his grand-daughter Lydia Blackler, who married John Glover Hooper, not in “King” Hooper’s line) were wed at St. Michael’s. John Glover Hooper was also a leader in resurrecting and renovating the church in 1833.

Principal St. Michael’s Church renovations :

1728 — A building expansion of one entire bay was built with a completely new gambrel-on-hip shaped roof over the earlier original triple-gable roof, which still remains underneath it and can be seen in the attic. That roof modification occurred at the same time the town’s new purely municipal Town House was being constructed.

Other 18th c. century features still seen today include the reredos (wood panels above the altar, later faux-painted) and the **brass chandelier** with a unique gilded iron screen suspended from the cross vaults of the interior ceiling. The chandelier was a 1732 gift from a **Gerry family** ancestor, **John Elbridge**, Collector of the Port of Bristol in England at that time. The portrait of himself that he sent to accompany the gift can be seen in the Lee Mansion.)

1793 — The tall steeple was removed, “being rotten,” leaving a short belfry structure for the bell.

1833 — Interior renovations were made, including new pews (reoriented to face a different direction), the town’s first organ (in a Gothic-style wooden case), and tall new clear-glass windows with pointed tops.

1888 — The current stained glass windows were installed (manufactured in Boston). That same year, a major fire brought a virtual end to Mhd’s mid-1800s shoe industry, just as the seaside resort economy had begun.

Just 7 years earlier, in **1881**, a large new edifice with a tall bell tower had been built for the **Universalists**, which did not burn, and still stands today as the Gut ‘N’ Feathers badminton Club (since **1934**). **1881** was also the year a Corinthian Yacht Club began in M’hd., just 7 years after a branch of the Eastern Yacht Club started in **1874**, and the railroad from Boston came to town. A Marblehead Rowing Club began in **1878**.

2014 — A replica of St. Michael’s original steeple was raised for the church structure’s 300th anniversary.

1920s — An ecumenical / Episcopal chapel was built toward the edge of town, on today’s Lafayette Street, near Marblehead’s border with Salem, on land donated by Isaac Wyman.

It later evolved into a second Episcopal church, **St. Andrew’s**, whose larger structure was built by **1949**.

St. Michael’s **1833** interior renovations and improvements had followed a resurgence of religious enthusiasm that was underway before the 1820s in Marblehead and New England, and spurred the construction of those first four new religions. That was the same year a church structure (also with clear-glass pointed-arch windows) was constructed nearby in **1833** for the newly formed **Methodist** congregation — and just after the **Unitarians** (formerly the Second Church, congregational / small “c”) elected to construct a new church edifice in **1832**.

Churches for other new denominations (**Universalists** and **Baptists**) were also built during **1830s**. (*see below*)

A few years before that, in **1824** (after the town’s “Second Church” turned Unitarian), construction on a third edifice for the **First Church** congregation began, with sturdy **stone** as the building material. Like most of Massachusetts’ earliest churches, the First Church had been Puritan at first, then post-Puritan (though some regional churches and ministers remained more Calvinist in their theology), and later Congregational (UCC).

The First Church’s early rough-stone edifice (1824) was built nearly 200 years after its congregation had been established, and 130 years after the church’s second edifice was erected (built in 1695 and torn down 1825).

It would still be about **25** years before the First Church became known as “Old North” in Marblehead, after a new church (“The Third Church” / “Old South”) was built in **1858** farther south in the town, near the shoe factories. (That church burned soon after, in 1877). The 1824 stone church was re-faced with cut granite blocks in **1886**.

The new church structures in the 1830s were largely funded by Marblehead’s women, who were seeking new spiritual inspiration, while the women also improved the quality of life in Marblehead in other ways as well. That story (not just the church history) is told in the book *The Women of Marblehead*, by Robert Booth, which was published by the **Marblehead Female Humane Society** to commemorate its **200th anniversary** in 2016.

List of other churches & religious denominations formed & built in Marblehead in the 1830s & after :

Methodist (an early church edifice built **1833** / now condominiums / new edifice built **1950s** further out of town)

Baptist (early church edifice built **1832** / burned down in **1867** / new edifice built **1868** / now a Grace church)

Unitarian (second church edifice built **1832** / burned in **1910** / almost burned in **1877** but heroically saved)

Universalist (early church edifice built **1836** / torn down for a new edifice built **1881** / badminton club **1934**)

Catholic “Star of the Sea” (wooden church with two spires built **1858** / burned **1872** / stone edifice built **1920s**)

Jewish (congregations formed in **early 1900s** / 3 synagogues were built further out of town toward Swampscott)