

Churches during the Revolution:

During the Revolution, three churches, all built of wood, held Sunday services in Marblehead:

- The **First Church** (established in 1635, up on the Burial Hill until 1695) Both of 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. St. Michael’s roof structure was modified in 1728, the same time the Town House was being constructed, and the interior was renovated in 1833, after a resurgence of enthusiasm following the construction of a new stone church building in 1824 for the town’s first (Puritan, then post-Puritan) congregation (nearly two centuries after the congregation had been established, and 130 years after its second edifice was erected, then torn down in 1825).

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 (called “New Meeting House Lane” in the 1700s). That is now the Unitarian Universalist church — which was just Unitarian after the 18-teens, and then Universalist was added in the 1960s (though Marblehead’s Universalist congregation moved out of their large wooden church building on Pleasant St. and joined with the Unitarians before 1934, when the 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 perspectives, while the First Church retained its original Calvinist / Puritan-based religious outlook. The First Church’s new stone edifice (its third structure) features three doors across the front (even though only two of them are functional today) to visually represent the older church congregation’s Trinitarian theology (Father, Son & Holy Ghost).

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 would burn 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. The interior then featured a dark multi-colored paint scheme rather than its 20th-century (today’s, and originally after 1824) unadorned white ceiling, walls and pews. (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, and 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 / ecclesiastical, 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. Its current building is its third edifice, after a fire burned its second structure in 1910.

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 generally. (The year 1816 itself was called "the year without a summer," since there was a frost in every month, due to the eruption of a volcano, Mt. Tambora, in Indonesia 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. That same decade, four new religious structures were built in Marblehead for four new religions (Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, and Universalists) that were spreading widely as part of what is called "The Second Great Awakening" in the 1820s to '40s. 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 **Unitarians** built second new wooden Victorian-style church edifices in 1868 & 1881, respectively, which still stand. The Baptist Church became a Grace Church late in the twentieth century, and the dwindling Universalist congregation joined with the Unitarians sometime before 1934, when the "**Gut 'N' Feathers**" badminton club purchased the Universalists former large Victorian-style structure with its elaborate former entrance doors on Watson Street. The **Methodist** church building became condominiums in the mid-20th century, after a new church was built for them out toward the edge of town.

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

The present Unitarian structure was built after the 1832 edifice burned in a 1910 fire. The national American Universalist organization formally joined with the national Unitarian denomination in the 1960s.

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, Patriotic citizens rang the brass bell in St. Michael's belfry until 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.

Among the church's Loyalist members were: **Woodward Abrahams, William Bodin, Henry Saunders, George McCall, William Peach, William Hooper, Michael Coombs** ("among the most obnoxious of the Loyalists," who left town but later returned), and possibly **Stephen Blaney** (also "one of the most objectionable Loyalists," who also returned to Mhd.). Most of the others seem to have left and not returned to Marblehead.

Revolutionary Patriots who worshipped at St. Michael's included **Captain Samuel Russell Trevett** (who 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, even 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** (grand-daughter Lydia Blackler, who married John Glover Hooper, not in “King” Hooper’s line) were married at St. Michael's. John Glover Hooper was also a leader in resurrecting and renovating the church in 1833.

Church renovations included:

1728 — A building expansion of one entire bay with a completely new gambrel-on-hip shaped roof was built over the original triple-gable roof, which still remains underneath it and can be seen in the attic. Other 18th-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 church’s ceiling. (That 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 which 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 first organ in town (in a Gothic-style wooden case), and tall new windows with pointed-arches. This was a year after a new church edifice was built (in 1832) for the Unitarians (formerly the Second Church, congregational). And the same year a church structure was constructed nearby (in 1833) for a recently formed Methodist congregation (which also had pointed-arch windows). Churches for other new denominations (Universalists and Baptists) were also built within that 1830s decade, after the First Church’s third edifice, of stone, was erected in 1824.

1888 — The current stained glass windows were installed (manufactured in Boston). That same year, a major fire brought a virtual end to Marblehead’s mid-1800s shoe industry. And 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).

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

1920s — An ecumenical chapel out toward the edge of town, which later evolved into a second Episcopal church, **St. Andrew’s**, was built on Lafayette Street, near the Mhd./Salem border, on land donated by Isaac Wyman.

All 3 of those churches are still going strong, with congregations worshipping into their fourth centuries.

In the 1830s, other religious denominations were formed and built churches as well:

These new church structures were largely funded by Marblehead’s women, who were seeking new spiritual inspiration while they also improved the quality of life in Marblehead in many ways. You can read more about all that (not just the church history) in the book *The Women of Marblehead*, by Robert Booth, which was published in 2016 by the **Marblehead Female Humane Society** to commemorate its **200th anniversary**.

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

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

Baptist (church edifice built **183**_ / torn down for new edifice built 1868 / now a Grace church)

Catholic “Star of the Sea” (wooden church with two spires built **1850s** / burned / stone edifice built 1920s)

Jewish congregations formed in the **early 1900s** (synagogues were built further down toward Swampscott)