

MEMORIAL CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH

1640 - 2010

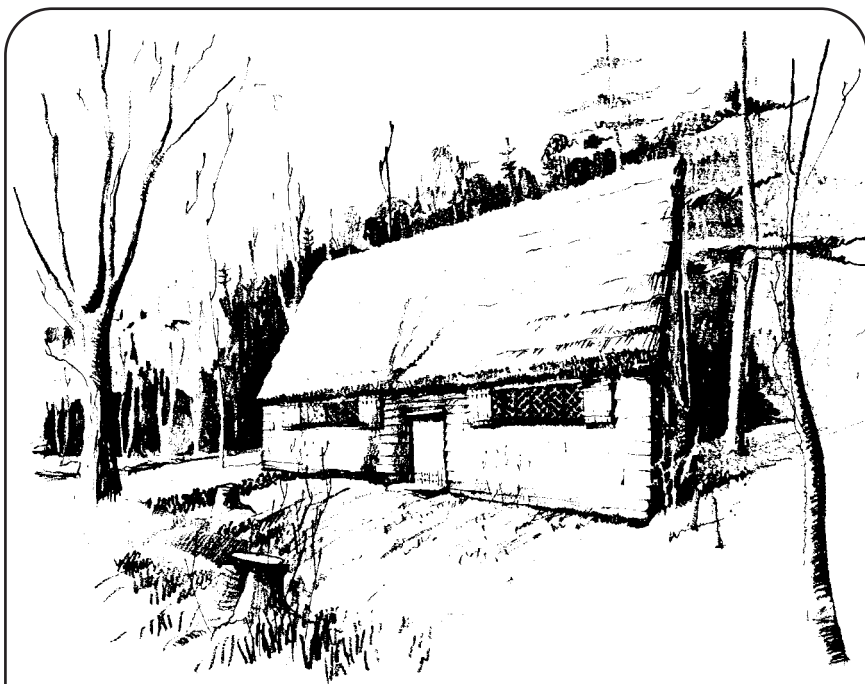
The roots of Memorial Congregational Church reach back to 1640, two years after Sudbury's settlement. The minister of the church at that time was Rev. Edmund Brown. The first church and town meetinghouse was built in 1643 and was located on the road now designated as Route 27, about one-half mile north of Wayland Center.

The people were called to worship by the beating of a drum. In the early records under a date in 1652 we find mention of this custom: "It shall be agreed with Edmund Goodnow, that his son shall beat the drum twice every lecture day, and twice every forenoon, and twice every afternoon upon every Lord's day, to give notice what time to come to meeting; for which the town will give him twenty shillings a year."

Minister Brown's first year salary was to be 40 pounds, one-half in money, the remainder in wheat, peas, butter, cheese, pork, beef, hemp and flax.

Mr. Brown remained the minister of the church until his death on June 22, 1678, serving a full thirty-eight years as spiritual leader to the people of frontier Sudbury.

Over the years, many Sudbury people moved over to town territory on the west side of the Sudbury River. It was a long trip to church on the other side of the river. And so, the west side inhabitants petitioned the General Court of the Colony for permission to build a meetinghouse and have a minister on their side. The Court gave its permission for a church and minister in June of 1708.



**FIRST CHURCH AND MEETINGHOUSE
1643-1653**

(Reprinted with permission of Wesleyan University
Press from *Puritan Village* by Sumner Chilton Powell)

Years elapsed before the west side meetinghouse was finally built. When they decided to proceed with the construction, a site was chosen for it on Rocky Plain, a region later to be known as Sudbury Centre. Its location was on the present site of the Unitarian Church at the Centre.

Services commenced in the new west side meetinghouse in the year 1722. The Rev. Israel Loring was the minister. He

left the east side parish on invitation of the west side people to be their minister. Relations between the east and west side parishes were very pleasant. For a while, the two ministers exchanged pulpits once every month. Each had an equal salary of 80 pounds a year. Town meetings alternated between the two meeting-houses.

Mr. Loring remained minister of the Sudbury church until his death in 1772. He died in his ninetieth year, just about a week after delivering the opening prayer for a town meeting in the meeting-house. He had spent sixty-six years in the ministry, fifty of them as minister of the church in Sudbury Centre.

In 1797, a new meeting-house was built at the Centre to replace the old one. This gem of simple Colonial lines, now called the First Parish Church, still sets in Sudbury Centre overlooking the town common. Its cost of construction was \$6,025.93. Its minister was Rev. Jacob Bigelow, who took over the church at the death of Mr. Loring.

In 1814, the church acquired a new pastor, Rev. Timothy Hilliard, to replace the Rev. Bigelow who had become too infirm to continue preaching. Mr. Hilliard resigned the next year to take up the practice of medicine in Kensington, N. H. Mr. Rufus Hurlbut accepted a call from the church and became minister.

Troublesome times began to creep into the New England Congregational churches. The severe Calvinistic theories of Congregationalism were being challenged by the Unitarians with a more liberal doctrine. Congregations became divided,

some accepted the new creed, ministers here and there left the old for this new liberal philosophy of Christian approach. Sudbury was to see its church among those hopelessly divided by the prevailing issue.

Mr. Hurlbut, the church minister, was an adherent of orthodox Congregationalism as practiced by the founding fathers. There were members of his congregation who did not share his views. A desire was expressed that Mr. Hurlbut would “exchange more with the neighboring clergymen. “

A showdown came one Sabbath morning, early in 1836, when Rev. Hurlbut and a minister guest arrived at the church to conduct the Sunday worship. The door to the church was locked, although activity could be plainly heard inside. The minister had been locked out of his church. He knocked on the door once and, receiving no answer, knocked again. Someone finally opened the door to a mere crack and the elderly minister was informed from within that the Parish had chosen another to conduct the service.

To the tall, dignified, gentlemanly Rev. Rufus Hurlbut, twenty-two years the pastor, this must have been a humiliating experience, although he probably appreciated he was a victim of the contrasting forces within the congregation of his age-old church.

To the unseen figure barring his entrance, Mr. Hurlbut requested that the church committee be informed that he wished to enter to introduce his minister guest. The request was granted and the two ministers were allowed to enter the church. On the floor of the edifice, down front in the

center aisle, Mr. Hurlbut presented his minister companion. It was a tense moment to him, the seated congregation, and certainly to the Unitarian minister occupying the pulpit.

In his quiet manner, Mr. Hurlbut assured the listeners that he would raise no trouble over the treatment accorded him. As for himself, he said, to accept the change would require that he abandon his convictions, and this he could not, and would not, do. With a sob in his voice, he ended with, "I go, never to return!"

As he passed slowly up the aisle and out of his church, many of the congregation rose to their feet and followed their old pastor out the door. Their exit was quiet and subdued, as it would be with the reverence they held for the house of the Lord. Through invitation, the ousted minister and his followers worshiped that Sunday morning in the nearby Methodist Church.

The displaced congregation continued to worship for the next several years under the leadership of Rev. Hurlbut at a hall owned by William Brigham near Sudbury Centre.

The consequences of the break-up also continued. During the latter part of 1836 and into 1837, the Church attempted to recover its early records from Dr. Thomas Stearnes, clerk of the church before the schism, who remained with the First Parish and refused to release the records to Rev. Hurlbut. The matter was formally closed, but no doubt not forgotten, when the church voted to excommunicate Dr. Stearnes for his refusal to return the records.

In 1839, a second organization grew among the followers of the Congregational tradition in Sudbury.

This group, including Enoch Kidder, a local shoemaker; Lyman Howe, landlord of the Red Horse Tavern (The Wayside Inn); A. B. Richardson, Israel Brown, Abel Dakin, Joseph Cutler, Roland Cutler and Gardner Hunt, felt that they should establish a religious society. A meeting was arranged for March 25, 1839, to be held in the Brigham building. The call for the meeting and its warrant were nailed to the Brigham building door.

The meeting voted to call their organization the Sudbury Evangelical Union Society, chose a moderator, three assessors and a collector-treasurer. The meeting voted to grant the sum of eight hundred dollars “for the support of preaching and other purposes the present year.”

The formal relationship, if any, between the Congregational Church and the Evangelical Union Society is not defined in their early records. However, it is well established that a close relationship did exist. For example, the minutes of Church meetings often used the phrase “The Congregational Church connected with The Evangelical Union Society. “ During 1840, deliberations concerning the call of a pastor were shared as evidenced by meeting records which indicate a call extended to a minister by the Church was to be contingent upon concurrence with the call by the Society. Finally, as discussed below, the Society undertook the task of having a new Church built which the Society and the Church were to occupy together.

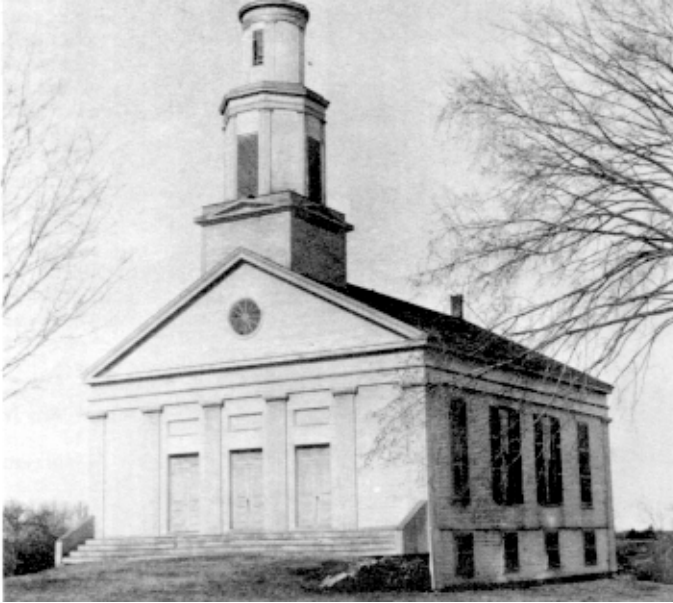
On April 8, 1839, the Society met once and decided to build a church. It was to be built "on the plan of the Orthodox house in Marlborow. " A committee was appointed to look into a possible location for the building. The meeting was adjourned to the next Tuesday, April 11th.

The adjourned-to meeting voted to strike off Sudbury from before the Society's title, and its name then became "The Evangelical Union Society in Sudbury." The site committee recommended setting the new church "on the ground near the Blacksmith's shop; owned by Mr. Jonas Tower", on Concord Road opposite Goodman Hill Road. It was voted to build on the recommended site provided the land could be bought for not over two hundred dollars. A building committee of twenty-three members was formed. It was decided to build a vestry along with the church, and the church was to have a bell. It was voted to borrow the money for construction, and to pay off the loan by the sale of pews.

A fall meeting of that year voted to build the church steps of wood, paint the buildings white, and put in a furnace. A December meeting voted to provide the minister, for the pulpit, a seat. In January, 1840, it was voted to reserve Pew No. 1 for the minister's use. The four pews under the gallery were to be free. There were 64 pews in all, and leaving the five free ones, the others ranged in price from \$40 to \$105, to a total of \$4,670.

In January, 1840, the Society and the Church moved to their new building. The Rev. Joseph W. Cross was called to be the minister, but he declined. The Rev. Horsford

preached the dedication service. Rev. Josiah Ballard accepted the call and became minister.



**EVANGELICAL UNION SOCIETY
1840-1891**

(Reprinted from Sudbury Town Report, 1967)

The Rev. Hurlbut passed away May 11, 1839. He was buried in the old burying-ground where a slate stone still marks his grave.

In March of 1852, Pastor Ballard asked to be dismissed from his duties, and the Society voted for his release. He

was much esteemed in Sudbury during his twelve years service to the church. In July, 1852, the Society voted to invite Rev. Charles V. Spear to be their minister. He accepted the call and was installed in October of that year. His salary was \$650/year.

Three years later, in 1855, Rev. Spear was dismissed because of poor health. Rev. Erastus Dickinson was employed as minister in 1856 at an annual salary of \$800. He remained the minister until he was dismissed in June, 1868. Rev. Dickinson left the ministry after leaving Sudbury, He was made postmaster of Ladewood, New Jersey, a position he held the fifteen years prior to his death.

After Mr. Dickinson, the church had no regular minister until February, 1870 when Rev. Philander Thurston accepted a call. The minister's salary had by this time increased to \$1,200. Four years later in 1874, Mr. Thurston was dismissed. The word dismissed, as pertaining to a minister, is not as it sounds. In most cases, it reflected a desire by the minister to leave. It would be kinder, and most times more accurate, if the records said the minister desired to resign.

An acting minister was next employed, the very kind and sympathetic Rev. George A. Oviatt. He remained in office for eight years until 1883. Here we find a record saying the minister asked to be relieved because of declining health. He died the year of his resignation at the age of 76. He was a Chaplain for a Connecticut regiment in the Civil War.

Since the building of the Evangelical Society church and vestry on Concord Road near the center, all church meet-

ings of the Society had been held in the vestry at that location. On January 10, 1876, we find a Society business meeting called to meet at the “Wadsworth Hall in South Sudbury.” That would have been in the hall of the Wadsworth Academy which once stood on the present site of Memorial Congregational Church. On and off the Society held their business meetings in Wadsworth Hall until late 1879. The primary reason for this was that the majority of Church and Society members lived in the area of the “South” or “Mill” village. On November 17, 1879, the Society met at the house of Hamlet C. Harydon, as Wadsworth Hall had been destroyed by fire at some time during the two preceding weeks.

In February of 1880, work was begun to construct a Congregational Chapel on the ruins of Wadsworth Hall. However, it is not clear (as of this writing) what individual or organization specifically planned or funded the project.

On June 25, 1880, the Society voted to accept the new chapel and the land known as the Wadsworth Academy lot. The records of the meeting on that date imply that the Chapel was accepted from the proprietors of the now defunct Wadsworth Academy, many of whom were members of the Church and Society.

This Chapel remains in 1980 as the Church Parlor, adjoined on one side by the Sanctuary, and at one end by the Church offices.

Throughout the 1880's, the Church and Society split their worship and business activities between the 1840 Church at

Sudbury Center and the 1880 Chapel in South Sudbury.

Rev. Calvin Smith preached for a few months following Rev. Oviatt's resignation. Rev. David W. Goodale commenced in June, 1884. At a meeting of the Society on January 4, 1886, we find this entry in the meeting records: "J. B. Goodnow was appointed to a committee to expend the sum of two dollars on the burial lot of S. D. Hunt. " The next entry: "I move that the parish committee be instructed to go to Mr. Goodale and express our gratitude for his labor among us and our regret that we are unable to raise as much money as we granted last year." It passed by a unanimous vote. He stayed on for another year but, in the fall of 1887, Rev. Warren Richardson became acting pastor.

On January 7, 1889, the Society voted to offer for sale their church and land near the Centre. At a meeting of the Society, February 17, 1890, it was voted to build a new church building at the chapel site in South Sudbury. Simultaneously, the Church was incorporated under the name of the Memorial Congregational Church in South Sudbury, and the assets and debts of the Evangelical Union Society were transferred to the new corporation.

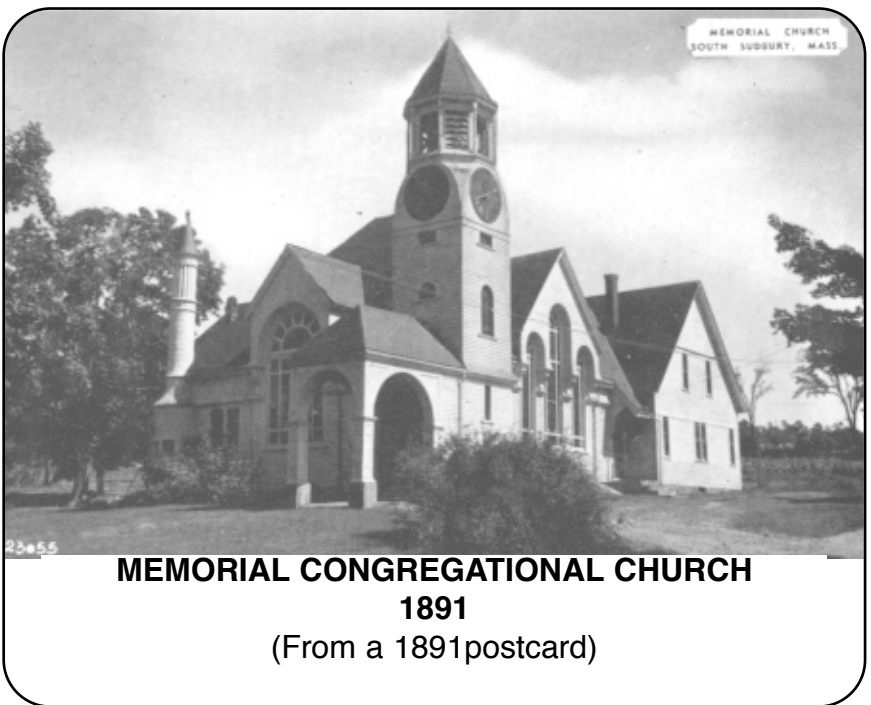
Plans for the new building prepared by Mr. Haynes were approved at a Society meeting on May 5, 1890. On October 27, 1890, it was voted. to transfer to Memorial Congregational Church the bell, organ, furnace, and other furniture in the old church.

The Evangelical Union Society of Sudbury held a last meeting on January 2, 1899, and dissolved the Society.

The old Congregational Church at the Centre was sold in November, 1892, to Charles O. Parmenter for \$500.

The new Memorial Congregational Church sanctuary was dedicated March 25, 1891. The 1891 sanctuary has become the high-ceiling portion of the 1980 sanctuary. The chancel of the 1891 church was located where the choir loft is in the present sanctuary. Delivery of the keys was made by A. W. Rogers, and accepted by Deacon F. F. Walker. The sermon for the occasion was preached by Rev. Arthur Little, D. C.

On September 7, 1892, the Church voted to engage Mr.



Darius A. Moorehouse as Pastor for a period of six months to begin October 1, 1892. At the third annual meeting of the Church on December 28, 1892, it was agreed to retain Mr. Moorehouse for an indefinite period with three months notice of termination by agreement of either party.

By September, 1894, the Church was again searching for a minister and, on November 5, 1894, it voted to extend a call, which was accepted, to Rev. Clarence W. Rouse. Mr. Rouse was installed as minister on December 20 of that year.

Financial problems plagued the Church during this period which led the Church to vote, on August 18, 1897, to “reduce the ministers salary to \$1,000, due to the continued debt of the Church, and to require the minister to pay rent.”

At its annual meeting on December 31, 1902, the Church voted to build a “frost proof closet” in the parsonage.

On May 7, 1903, Rev. Rouse resigned to accept the call of the First Presbyterian Church of Newton, N. J. The rest of the year was spent seeking his replacement.

On February 4, 1904, the Church secured the services of Rev. Elbridge Cutler Whiting as acting minister for a period of three months. This call was extended in April to an “indefinite period” which turned out to be nine years. Rev. Whiting remained in Sudbury for many years, operating the Whiting Hall School.

The Young Men’s Club was granted permission in April of

1906 to put a rope in the Chapel for “gymnastic purposes”.

At its annual meeting in December, 1910, the Church considered the installation of electric lights in its buildings. The matter was left to the Standing Committee, which apparently had electric lights installed sometime within the next three years.

Rev. Whiting resigned in December, 1913. The search for a new minister was not a smooth one. In May, 1914, a call was extended to Rev. Arthur Varley, but he declined. On October 21, a call was extended to Rev. Herbert B. Hutchins, but it was later withdrawn because insufficient funds were available to make repairs to the parsonage, which were a condition of Rev. Hutchins' acceptance of the call.

A third call was extended on December 2 to Rev. G. Wolcott Brooks. Rev. Brooks did accept this call in February, 1915, but only after acceptance by the Church of conditions put forward by Rev. Brooks involving repairs to the parsonage. The Church had to borrow \$500 for those repairs.

Rev. Brooks had left the Pastor's position by early 1916 and was replaced by Rev. Thomas Street. Rev. Street was compensated with a salary of \$1,000 per year, four weeks vacation, and free use of the parsonage.

In January, 1917, the Church voted to abolish the practice of raising money by renting the pews and horsesbeds.

The minutes of a special Church meeting in December of

1917 indicate the Church was once again without the services of a full-time minister. This situation may have prompted the Church to vote on January 28, 1918, to choose a committee "to confer with the Methodist Church relative to uniting in church services." In May the Church voted to extend an invitation to the Methodists to attend its services.

The Church voted on January 1, 1919 "that it is the sense of the meeting that dancing be discontinued in the chapel".

In January, 1920, after two years without a fulltime pastor, Rev. Joseph L. Hoyle began his ministry at Memorial Congregational Church at a salary of \$1,200 plus use of the parsonage. Rev. Hoyle was to stay as pastor until December, 1923.

Rev. John O. Haarvig replaced Rev. Hoyle on April 2, 1924, and also stayed approximately three years. He left in March of 1927 to move to Plymouth Congregational Church in Fall River. His successor was Thomas Street, who had held that position back in 1916 and 1917. Rev. Street served until April 1, 1929 when Albert B. Reynolds became the pastor.

After a series of meetings in early 1931, the Church voted to install a new heating system for the Sanctuary. Eight hundred dollars was borrowed for the project.

A special meeting of the Church on June 12, 1935, was asked to consider "the possible federation of Memorial Church with either or both of the other churches in town." This discussion was deferred to the annual meeting on October 9, 1935. At that meeting the related article was

phrased: “to see what action will be taken in regard to keeping the Church open after December 31st next.” Apparently the Church members were not ready to give in to their problems of low attendance and poor financial support as the article was “laid on the table” indefinitely.

Rev. Reynolds remained as minister until 1936 at which time he was succeeded by Leslye H. Barrett. Rev. Barrett held that position until September, 1944. Dr. J. Carrell Morris was then selected as lay leader, for a period of one year while the search which led to the call to Rev. Frederick Duplissey in 1945, was conducted.

In 1946, the pipe organ which had been installed in 1891, was retired in favor of a new electric organ. Dedication services for the new organ and the redecorated sanctuary took place on September 6, 1946.

Rev. Duplissey’s term lasted only until 1947. His replacement was Ralph Bayes who served until 1950. He was succeeded by Rev. John D. Copp in 1950 and Rev. Ernest Bodenweber in 1953.

The early and mid-1950’s saw the Church bursting at the seams with Sunday school activities. As a result, a fund drive was undertaken to finance construction of the church school wing. That project was completed on January 8, 1956, when the dedication service, conducted by the minister, Rev. Ernest Bodenweber, Jr., was held.

The need for space continued to grow throughout the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. This led to construction of the

Ames Hall wing of the church facilities, including four new classrooms and much needed kitchen facilities. The Fellowship Hall, later to be named Ames Hall, became the focal point of many church gatherings. The September 13, 1964 dedication service of the new facilities was also conducted by Rev. Ernest Bodenweber.



1891 Chancel in 1965
(Baptism with Reverend Paul Cross Officiating)

Rev. Bodenweber left Memorial Congregational Church in early 1965 and was replaced by Rev. Paul Cross. Mr. Cross served until October of 1972.

Rev. Larry Anderson, the Assistant Minister under Reverend Cross, filled the minister's position for several months following the departure of Rev. Cross. His service was followed by the interim pastorship of Rev. Richard Borngen while the search for a permanent minister was conducted. That search concluded with a call to Rev. Stanley Russell in May of 1973. Rev. Russell took over as permanent minister in August, 1973.

In early 1974, the 28-year old organ was replaced by a sophisticated electronic organ.

During 1974, several major gifts of money enabled the congregation to have the sanctuary enlarged and the church parlor and offices completely remodeled. The axis of the sanctuary shifted from the north/south direction of the 1891 sanctuary, to a west/east axis in the new facility. The new chancel was located in a major addition to the west side of the 1891 building.

Reverend Russell resigned his position in the mid 1980's. Reverend Mary Moscella-Clark served as interim pastor during the search for a new settled pastor.

Reverend John Moyer accepted a call to be pastor in 1988 and served until March of 1995.

Reverend Stephen Alspach served as interim pastor following the departure of Reverend Moyer. During that interim period, the congregation undertook a study of the question of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation that wel-

comes gay, lesbian and bisexual persons as well as all others who have experienced rejection into the full life of the congregation. The congregation passed a resolution declaring itself to be an Open and Affirming congregation at a Special Meeting in May, 1996.

In November, 1996, Reverend Lisa Schoenwetter became the first woman to serve the Memorial Congregational Church as its settled pastor.

A major construction project began with a fund raising effort in January, 2000 and concluded with a rededication of the Church building in April, 2002. That project involved one addition to create a new entryway at the level of the parking lot and a second addition to create new meeting rooms on the First and Second Floors of the building. The project also included installation of an elevator to provide handicapped access from that new entryway to the upper and lower levels of the church. A complete automatic fire sprinkler system was also installed as part of the project.

In a separately funded project, a new hybrid (electronic and pipe) organ was installed in October, 2001 in the Choir Loft of the Sanctuary.

Reverend Schoenwetter left Memorial Congregational Church in 2008. Reverend Dirkje Legerstee served as Interim Pastor until the selection of Thomas O'Brien as Settled Pastor in 2010.

NOTE: This “History of Memorial Congregational Church was prepared by Harold and Betsey Cutler in 1980 and updated as required since that time. It is based upon research and writings of Leslie Hall, Forrest Bradshaw and the Cutlers.

As with any documentary prepared with limited time and resources, this “History” has many identified and unidentified details which the authors would like to expand upon. Any assistance in filling in such details would be greatly appreciated.