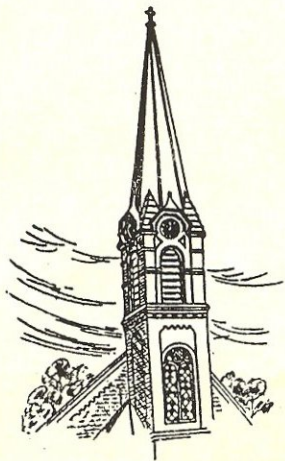


Central Baptist Church

Historical Tour during Southbridge Fest, June 9, 2007



There have been two buildings on this site. The building you are touring is the second building on the current site. The planners of the first "meeting house" selected this site because of its "convenience, elegance and beauty". The land for the meeting house and surrounding common was deeded to Daniel Morse and the proprietors of the meeting house by Jedidiah Marcy of Sturbridge for the consideration of the sum of one dollar. The building was dedicated early in 1800. The meeting house was owned and occupied by the Universalists, Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists until the town was incorporated as the town of Southbridge in 1816. At this time the Congregationalists withdrew. The Baptists had their first organization meeting on May 1, 1816. This resulted in the formation of "The First Baptist Society in Southbridge", for the purpose of defraying the expenses of maintaining religious worship in Southbridge according to the Baptist faith and order. The First Baptist Church in Southbridge was publicly recognized by an ecclesiastical council on January 28, 1817. The membership was comprised mostly of members from the Sturbridge (now Fiskdale) Baptist Church.

Between 1835 and 1837 the meeting house became the exclusive property of the Baptists, when the Methodists and Universalists withdrew to form separate societies. Because of serious differences with in the church over the management of its affairs, a large number of members, with the pastor, withdrew and organized the Central Baptist Church, which was duly recognized on October 12, 1842.

On November 14, 1863 fire destroyed the meeting house. The present brick church was built between 1864 and 1865 and was dedicated on July 11, 1866. The church is almost completely intact from its original construction. The architect was Samuel F. Thayer of Boston. The exterior is embellished with dental work molding and decorative brick layers. The "town clock" is housed in the church's steeple. It strikes the appropriate number of hours on the hour.

The church was remodeled in 1887 when the sanctuary was redecorated and an addition was made to the rear of the building, consisting of an organ loft, a pastor's study and a kitchen. Steam heat and electricity were also added at this time.

The stained glass windows are just that, stained or painted. The glass appears to be colored glass but the color is actually painted on. The windows date back to the original construction but by 1996 had fallen into disrepair, to the point that glass started to fall onto the sidewalk in front of the church. The church started a restoration fund and with a 75% grant from the Massachusetts Historical Society, raised a total of \$82,679.00. Exactly \$.75 higher than the total cost of the restorations. The windows were restored by Serpentino Stained and Leaded Glass of Needham Heights, MA, whom we feel did an outstanding job.

Since 1817 there have been 31 full and part time pastors at Central Baptist Church. The current pastor is Rev. Stan Bohall.

The church is a growing congregation. It's facilities are available for and used by other groups. Currently the Seventh Day Adventists use the church on Saturdays and an Alcohol Anonymous Group uses the hall each week.

Historical information provided with the kindness and friendship of Robert Briere and other members of Central Baptist Church. 

Sunday services: 10:00 a.m.