

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

For HCRS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JAN 25 1982

date entered

JAN 11 1982

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic FIRST PARISH CHURCH

and/or common FIRST PARISH CHURCH

**2. Location**

street & number 218 Central Ave. not for publication

city, town Dover vicinity of congressional district first

state New Hampshire code 33 county Strafford code 017

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name The First Parish Church (Congregational),  
A voluntary corporation under the laws of the State of New Hampshire.

street & number 218 Central Ave.

city, town Dover vicinity of state New Hampshire 03820

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Strafford County Courthouse  
Strafford County Registry of Deeds

street & number Court House

city, town Dover state New Hampshire 03820

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title NONE has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records \_\_\_\_\_

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The First Parish Church of Dover is a rectangular brick structure measuring 86-1/2 feet in overall length, 68 feet in width, and 30-1/2 feet from foundation to eaves. Each side elevation of the building has four tall arched recesses, each of which rises from the foundation to a point near the cornice and encloses an elongated arched window. The sash of these windows have rectangular panes except at the top, where the muntins curve to form pointed arches. The front (east) elevation of the building is broken by a wide pavilion which projects 6-1/2 feet from the main wall; this is flanked by narrow sections of wall which are articulated by tall recessed panels in the brickwork.

The pavilion itself has three arched recesses on its facade, each enclosing a door on the first story and an arched window on the second. Both the front and sides of the pavilion and the face of the flanking walls of the main building are topped by stepped parapet walls which rise some five feet above the slate roof. The central section of this parapet is treated as the face of the lowest stage of a steeple which is otherwise constructed entirely of wood. The angles between the uppermost steps of the front parapet and the brick face of the tower are ornamented on each side of the tower by a heavy wooden volute in the baroque style. The face of the pavilion is further articulated by the continuation of the mutuled eaves cornice of the building across its surface. Two raking cornices of the same pattern are also applied to this face, creating a triangular pediment. The tympanum of this pediment is pierced by a lunette window which is filled with a grille-like sash with small rectangular panes.

The square lower story of the steeple is marked by large wooden clock dials on its north, south, and east faces. This stage is capped by a mutuled cornice like that of the body of the church, and by a balustrade with turned balusters and panelled corner dies with urn-shaped finials. Above this is an octagonal belfry with engaged ionic columns at each angle and louvered arched openings on each face. This stage is finished with a full ionic entablature with a modillioned cornice. The third stage of the tower is an octagonal lantern, also in the ionic order and differing from the belfry below only in having a smaller scale and in having glazed arched sash in each face. Above the lantern rises an octagonal spire of medium height, bringing the total height of the steeple to 146 feet. The spire is capped by a pineapple-shaped finial and a weathercock.

Attached to the rear (west) of the church is a brick chapel or parish house (1888-89) with wooden trim, nineteen arched windows treated like those of the main building, and four entrances.

The interior of the building consists of a single large auditorium within the main block. This room has a straight gallery across its east end. Pews on the room's main floor are of the slip type, and are arranged along the arcs of concentric circles with a focus at the altar on the west end of the room. The altar is set into a curved niche in the center of the west wall and is flanked by a second arched niche on the south, accommodating the organ, and by a doorway on the north, set beneath an arched architrave. In front of the altar is a raised dais enclosed by a balustrade and fitted with pews for the choir. Near the south end of the dais is a raised pulpit, while set into the center of the balustrade at the north front of the dais is a reading desk or lecturn.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Description continued -

At the opposite (east) end of the auditorium four doors provide access to the room at the first floor level, while two enter the gallery at the second. At each end of the gallery is a small room.

The hallway in the front (east) projection of the building is entered through three doors on the first story. Stairways at the north and south ends of the hallway provide access to second-floor vestibules which are lighted by the two outermost arched windows in the front of the building and provide access to the gallery. The third window, in the center of the facade, lights an arched recess in the center of the gallery; this was formerly a choir loft.

Original appearance: The exterior of the church has changed little since its construction. The tower clock, made by Benjamin Morrill of Boscawen, New Hampshire, was installed in 1935 and resulted in the addition of three circular clock dials on the lowest stage of the steeple. The exterior was further changed in 1878 when stained glass windows replaced the original sash; the present sash, which suggests the appearance of the originals, were installed in 1961. The broad flight of stone stairs which span the full width of the building's pavilion were added in 1913.

The interior of the building has undergone more extensive changes than the exterior. The first major change occurred in 1834 when a former vestry beneath the tower was opened up as a niche for an organ and choir, thus providing direct illumination of the auditorium by the central window in the building's facade. In 1878 the present slip pews replaced the original 114 privately-owned box pews, and the side galleries, which originally extended to the west end of the auditorium along the north and south walls, were shortened on the west and given curved ends. In 1946 these side galleries were entirely removed and the auditorium was further remodelled with the installation of the present altar and dais. Further redecoration of the room took place in 1963 and 1964.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** *c. 1825* **Builder/Architect** Capt. James Davis

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

**Architecture:** The First Parish Church in Dover is a locally-designed example of a type of Federal period church building based on innovations by the New England architects Charles Bulfinch, Asher Benjamin, and Alexander Parris. It is one of relatively few New Hampshire churches that reflect these innovations, and has undergone fewer exterior modifications than its nearest prototype in the state.

The First Parish Church was designed by Capt. James Davis (1793–1850), a local builder who also supervised its construction. The joiner's work was completed by local craftsmen, among whom was George Pendexter, a carpenter who had previously executed the exterior finish on the nearby William Hale House (1806; NR 1981).

Davis clearly based his design on that of St. John's Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (1807; NR 1978), some 12 miles away. This church designed by Alexander Parris of Portland, Maine, originally had a facade with stepped parapet walls and baroque volutes much like those on the Dover church. The removal of these features from the Portsmouth church in 1848 has obscured the original stylistic connection between the two structures.<sup>1</sup>

Parris, in turn, had based his 1807 design on several Boston prototypes. The Boston architect Charles Bulfinch had used frontal parapets to screen the gable roofs on his Holy Cross Church (1800) and his New North Church (1802). Asher Benjamin had used similar principles in his designs for the West Church (1805) and the Charles Street Church (1807) in Boston; he published his design for the former in The American Builder's Companion (1806), a book popular enough to have passed through six editions by the time the First Parish Church was built. Bulfinch, Benjamin and Parris all used designs with baroque volutes similar to those on the Dover building.

The steeple of the Dover structure, on the other hand, is evidently a simplified derivation from that of the meeting house of the First Religious Society of Newburyport, Massachusetts (1801), some 35 miles distant from Dover.

The Dover First Parish Church thus reveals the influence and persistence of a little-recognized variation on the standard Federal meeting house plan in New England. As the product of a local designer and local builders, the structure is an important index to the taste and building skills of one of the leading towns in early nineteenth century New Hampshire.

<sup>1</sup> James L. Garvin, "St. John's Church in Portsmouth: An Architectural Study," Historical New Hampshire, XXVIII, 3 (Fall, 1973), pp. 164-168; 174, n. 28.

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED  
UNIT NOT VERIFIED

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

The First Parish Church, Dover, Memorial Address (1883) Alonzo H. Quint  
History of First Parish Church, Dover, NH (1970), Donald R. Bryant  
The History of New Hampshire (1784), Jeremy Belknap  
History of New Hampshire (1888), John N. McClintock  
History of Dover, N.H. (1923) John Scales

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1/2

Quadrangle name Dover East, ME - NH

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 1 9 3 4 7 5 3 0 4 8 3 5 3 0  
Zone Easting Northing

*OMB 8/25/83*

B                    
Zone Easting Northing

C                  

D                  

E                  

F                  

G                  

H                  

Verbal boundary description and justification

Tax Assessor's Map No. 9, Lots 83 and 84.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donald R. Bryant, Attorney & member of Historical Committee

organization First Parish Church date 11/25/80  
Historical Committee

street & number 218 Central Avenue telephone (603) 742-5664

city or town Dover state New Hampshire 03820

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

Commissioner, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development

title NH State Historic Preservation Officer date January 19, 1981

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

William A. Brauman date 3.11.82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration