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New England Meetinghouses in the Seventeenth Century

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Part I: *The Meetinghouses in New England*

APPRECIATION of the role which seventeenth-century New England meetinghouses played in the development of American architecture has been handicapped by their nearly complete disappearance.¹ Of the 202 known to have been constructed between 1629 and 1700, only the second meetinghouse at Hingham, Massachusetts, 1681, has survived. Even this building has been enlarged, altered and restored so that it no longer has its original appearance.

Thanks to the very nature of the meetinghouses, a considerable body of written evidence remains to describe their construction and appearance. They were public buildings, needed for use by all persons in the towns, built according to the wishes of the voters and paid for by public funds. New England settlers had no choice of churches, but attended worship in their meetinghouses, usually one to a community, which were also used for

the town meetings about civic affairs. This public character of the meetinghouses meant that decisions about them were voted upon in town meetings and duly entered in town records by the clerks. Bills for construction and maintenance were also recorded. Many of these town records are still available and are the most important sources of information about the meetinghouses.² The written evidence is supplemented by a small number of eye-witness sketches.³ From these sources a general description of the meetinghouses may be attempted, including location, materials, methods of construction, interior furnishings and ornament. The unique position of the meetinghouses in the history of Christian architecture may then be suggested.

The meetinghouses usually occupied central positions in the towns. While in England the parish church was generally built beside the road, in New England the meetinghouse was sometimes built

in the middle of the road. At Hadley, Massachusetts, for example, the first meetinghouse of 1663 was to be "sett up in the common Street."⁴ Another frequent location was on a hill, as is still visible at Hingham, Massachusetts. Although European architects had been concerned with mathematical theories of town planning since the fifteenth century, there is little evidence that the New England colonists chose the sites of their meetinghouses according to such rules.⁵ They appear to have been governed by practical considerations of nearness to homes or convenience for defense if needed. Occasionally the townspeople held conflicting views about a proper site. At Simsbury, Connecticut, negotiations for the meetinghouse were begun in 1674 and arguments about the site finally settled in 1683 by drawing lots to determine "ye place where the providence of God by lot shall cast it."⁶

Once the location of the meetinghouse had been decided, a rate or tax was voted, workmen hired, and construction begun. Inhabitants might pay their share of the cost in labor as well as in money or in kind. Wood was the almost universal building material,⁷ framed by methods known today through seventeenth-century domestic architecture.⁸ The principal members of the frame were laid out on the ground, fastened together and then raised into place with pikes and secured at the corners. Studs were added and the walls filled with lath and daub or with brick.

Clapboard was the usual exterior wall finish. Daubing would not wear well in the severe New England climate. (The only meetinghouse definitely known to have had daubing on the exterior was the one at Weymouth, Massachusetts, where in 1682 the town voted that the walls

should be filled with brick and clapboarded up to the plate and the "Gable ends to be plastered."⁹) Shingles were also used as exterior covering (Norwalk, Connecticut, II, 1679), although less frequently than clapboard.

The meetinghouses were built either one or two stories high. If a meetinghouse was but one story high, galleries might be added later to provide additional seating capacity. Such galleries could be built at the gable end so that the attic (usually left open) would provide headroom. Or seats might be constructed on the summer beams. In the latter case, persons receiving permission to build such galleries were cautioned against "darkening the pulpit," i.e., building seats that would cut off light from dormer windows.¹⁰ When a meetinghouse was built two stories high, galleries might be constructed on three sides immediately or perhaps added one at a time.

The attic or loft was often left unfloored. When floored it could be used for the storage of ammunition or grain, as at Springfield, Massachusetts, I, 1645.¹¹ At least in the case of the second meetinghouse at Hartford, Connecticut, 1638, the attic was used as the court chamber.¹²

Several kinds of roofs were used on the meetinghouses. The simplest was the plain gable roof, used on rectangular buildings. The hip roof was used on square meetinghouses, with or without a bell turret at the top (Deerfield, Massachusetts, III, 1694). (Frontispiece.) On some of the larger square or nearly square meetinghouses the cross-gabled or four-gabled roof was employed, usually with a bell turret (Sudbury, Massachusetts, III, 1687). The meetinghouse at Hingham, Massachusetts, 1681, had, in its original form, still another kind: the hip

roof over a rectangular building with platform and turret on top. (Figure 1.)¹³
 The meetinghouses were lighted by

pews were arranged to face it, with a block of seats in the center of the floor and rows around the sides. Figure 2 shows

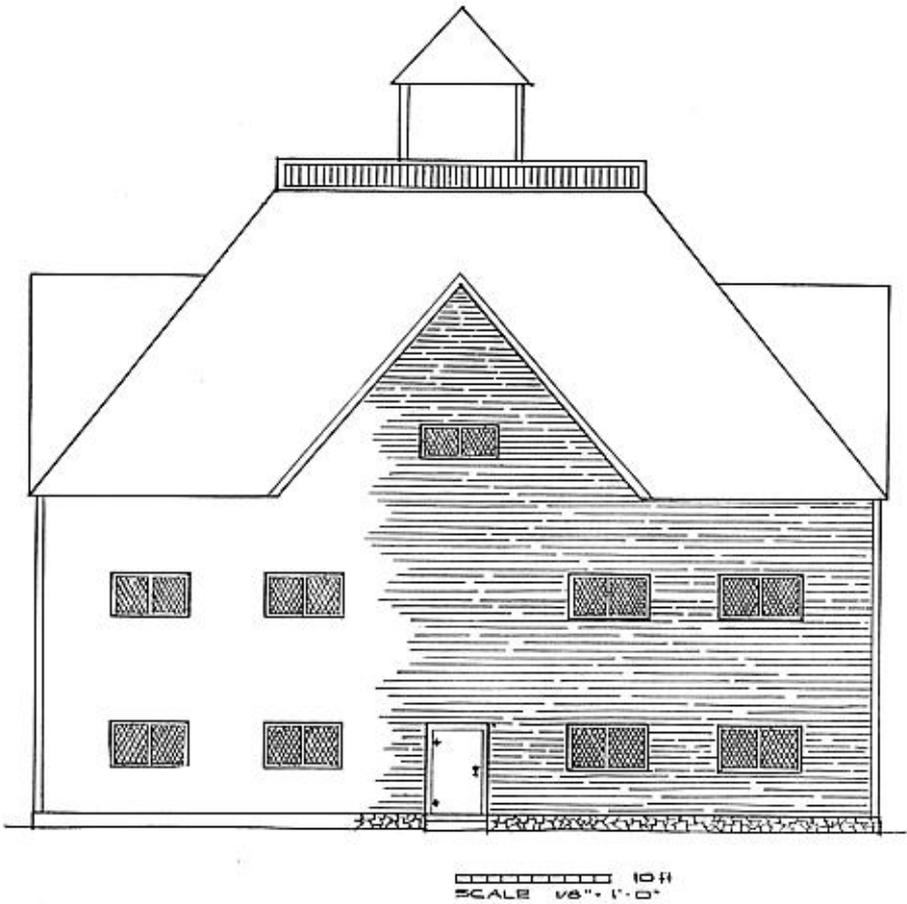


FIG. 1. HINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS, MEETINGHOUSE II, 1681
 Conjectural elevation by the author, executed by Edwin H. Close.

casement windows, usually finished with glass imported from England.¹⁴ Wooden shutters were sometimes used in winter, as on the New Haven, Connecticut, meetinghouse in 1651.¹⁵

The interior of the meetinghouse was dominated by the pulpit, built against the wall opposite the front door. Benches and

this plan in the New Haven meetinghouse of 1669, to which an enlargement was made in the eighteenth century. Pews were not necessarily built at the time of construction of the meetinghouse, but might be added later at the expense of individual owners.¹⁶ Men and women were seated separately, as were the young boys.

Seating was determined by the "dignity" or social position of the people, and the decision was usually left to a committee.

As for ornament, a certain amount appeared both on the exterior and interior. The most notable exterior ornament was the "pyramid" or finial used on the peaks of gables, appearing by the middle of the century.¹⁷ At least one eye-witness sketch of such pyramids remains on the Burgis View of Boston, made in 1722 when the Third Church Meetinghouse, 1669, was still standing. Pyramids were used on the four corners of the turret. This device survived from medieval timber construction in England and in modified form is still in use today.

The earliest reference to any kind of Renaissance ornament on a meetinghouse occurs in the records of Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1682.¹⁸ There the second meetinghouse of 1677 had "freezes" over the windows. Other meetinghouses may have had friezes or moldings or perhaps even pediments over doors and windows late in the century, but no record of them appears to have survived.

The question of paint on the exteriors of the meetinghouses is also problematical. Town records do not mention paint or any other preservative, except for the use of oil on window casements and tar for the turret at Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1682.¹⁹ On the other hand, a history of 1694 attributed to Joshua Scottow contrasts the simple meetinghouses of the first settlers with some of the more pretentious later ones, saying that the earlier buildings were not "painted with vermilion."²⁰ This passage suggests that red paint, as preservative if not as decoration, was used on some meetinghouses late in the century.

Ornament was not used extensively

on the interiors, but neither was it deliberately avoided. Symbolic or liturgical decorations were of course not used. Yet care was taken to include wainscot or paneling if funds permitted.²¹ Turned banisters or balusters were frequent on bench ends and pew doors. One such door has been preserved from the first meetinghouse at Bristol, Rhode Island, c. 1684, although the banisters have been renewed. (Figure 3.) Unfortunately no other seventeenth-century fittings seem to have survived. Pulpits were probably much like seventeenth-century pulpits in England, such as the heavily turned example at Leighton Bromswold, Hunts, or the more delicate one at Cottisbrooke, Northants.

In some instances the records concerning the meetinghouses have been extensive enough to permit conjectural sketches. At Malden, Massachusetts, for instance, the contract with Job Lane for the second meetinghouse of 1658 was preserved until its publication in 1850.²² It has since been lost. An elevation drawn according to the given dimensions, 33 feet square and 16 feet high, shows a two-story building with a turret as specified in the contract. (Figure 4.) Neither town records nor building contracts have been found to specify lengths of rafters, and conjectural drawings cannot indicate roof pitches with certainty. English carpenters' handbooks of the period do fortunately include the most usual lengths of rafters for thatch and shingle roofs. Since the Malden roof was shingled, the rafters have been indicated 24 feet 9 inches long for the 33-foot width of the building, according to the proportions indicated by John Browne.²³ A floor plan was included with the publication of the contract in 1850, and the arrangement

of doors and windows in Figure 4 follows that indicated on the plan. The two windows in the second story were to be

given in town records so that details of doors, casements, etc., can be represented with some hope of accuracy.

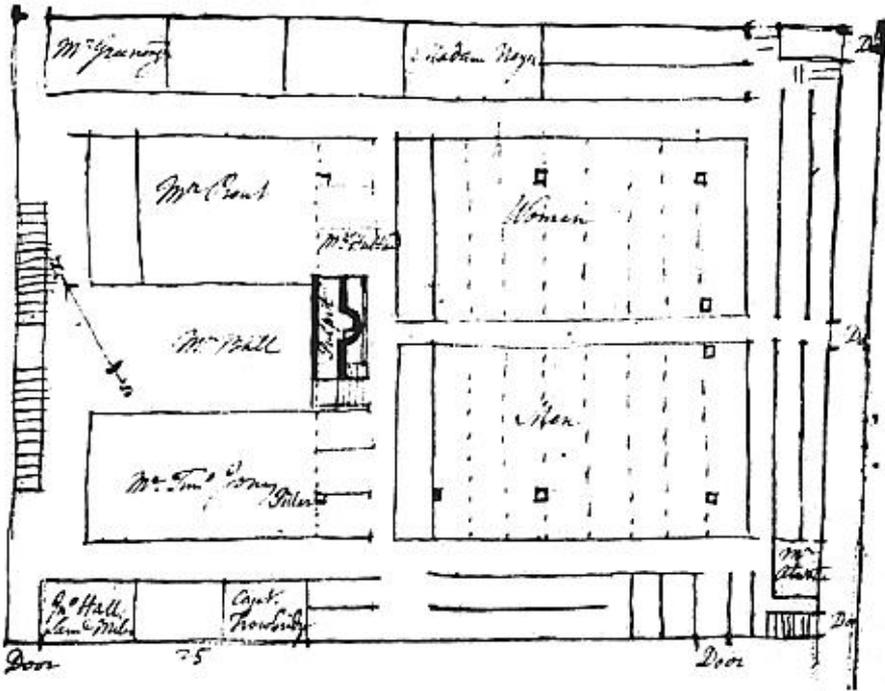


FIG. 2. NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, MEETINGHOUSE II, 1669

Plan drawn by Ezra Stiles, probably in 1772, showing original portion of meetinghouse and addition made on northwest side, immediately behind pulpit.

Courtesy of the Yale University Library.

“on each side of the desk” and have therefore been indicated toward the center of the building where they might light the pulpit. This location of the pulpit on the entrance wall was unusual, but clearly stipulated in the contract.

Since none of the seventeenth-century meetinghouses have survived unaltered, such drawings as Figure 4 can do no more than suggest the probable appearance of the buildings. Specifications in the carpenters’ guides supplement dimensions

As for the rate at which meetinghouses were built during the seventeenth century, by far the greatest number of new meetinghouses (32) were constructed from 1620 to 1640. These were the years of the Great Migration of colonists to New England. During the next forty years to 1680 the pace slowed to 16 or 18 new meetinghouses per decade. In the last twenty years of the century the number of new buildings decreased even more. These new buildings were all for

newly established congregations. As communities grew or as meetinghouses were destroyed by fire or just weathering, many original buildings had to be re-

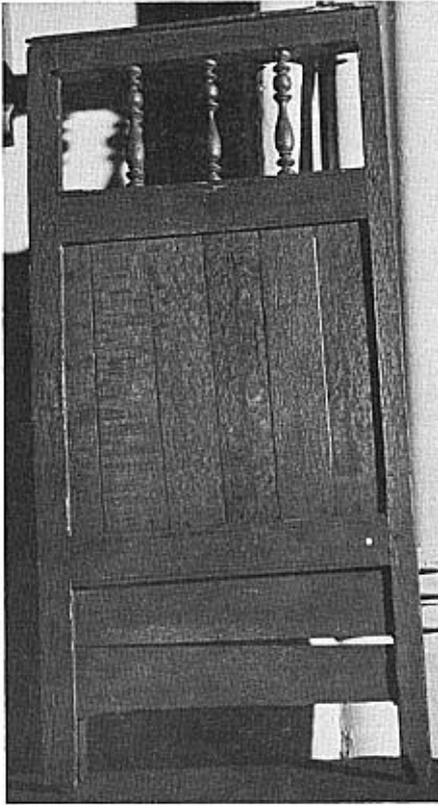


FIG. 3. BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND,
MEETINGHOUSE II, *c.* 1684.

PEW DOOR

(First Congregational Church,
Bristol.)

placed. This began even before 1640, and reached its peak in the two decades 1671 to 1690, when 40 congregations found it necessary to replace earlier buildings. Both natural population increase and the natural deterioration of the build-

ings contributed to the need for new construction. The coming of English settlers following the Restoration of 1660 may have also created a need for more space. From 1620 to 1700 new congregations numbered 119. Of these, 71 found it necessary to construct second meetinghouses by 1700, and 12 third or fourth meetinghouses, bringing the total number of buildings to 202.

The year 1700 has been used as the terminal year for this study. This date has been chosen for two reasons.

In the first place, documents and remains of domestic and public architecture indicate that the methods of construction established in New England during the seventeenth century proper were in general use for at least the first twenty years of the next century. The seventeenth-century meetinghouse plan with side pulpit was employed as late as 1789 (Alna, Maine). Nevertheless the years of development and domination of this type of building lay generally between 1629 and 1700. Eighteenth-century examples confirm knowledge of seventeenth-century meetinghouses but do not enlarge this knowledge.

Secondly, the town records furnish evidence that a new philosophy of meetinghouse planning was emerging in the decade 1691 to 1700. The stylistic change that was to turn New England architecture from "late medieval" to "Georgian" came about slowly during the early part of the eighteenth century. But in the 1690's some towns were realizing that the meetinghouse shape, whether square or rectangular, with central turret, might be replaced by a longer rectangular building with an end tower, similar to the English parish church. At Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1691, the

pulpit was moved to the west wall, making the main axis of the building lie the long rather than the short way.²⁴ An alternate method of building must have been in the minds of the voters at Fairfield, Connecticut, who in 1695 voted to build their third meetinghouse in the "usuall way."²⁵ In 1699 at Branford, Connecticut, the town debated whether to make their second meetinghouse square or "a long brick house with leantos."²⁶ In the same year the Brattle Street Church in Boston built a meetinghouse with full tower and spire at one end, visible in the Burgis View of 1722. This is the earliest Congregational meetinghouse known to have had this shape, which was more like the churches of England than the meetinghouses of New England. Even the records speak of it as the "Church."²⁷ Events at Wallingford, Fairfield, Branford and Brattle Street indicate at least some new thinking about religious architecture in New England at the turn of the century.

Thanks to the abundance of documentary material, some corrections in traditional views concerning the meetinghouses may be suggested. Historical and critical studies of seventeenth-century New England meetinghouses have often included two theories concerning them: first, that the meetinghouses were sometimes built of logs, and second, that the standard plan was the "four-square." Neither theory is supported by the town records.

A frequent statement in church or town histories is that the meetinghouses built by the first settlers were made of logs.²⁸ The belief that the settlers' dwellings were built of notched log construction was shown to be without foundation in 1939.²⁹ This "log cabin myth" had

been abandoned by most architectural historians, but it was accepted as late as 1948 by J. Frederick Kelly in an extensive general note on the history of the New England meetinghouse.³⁰ Shurt-

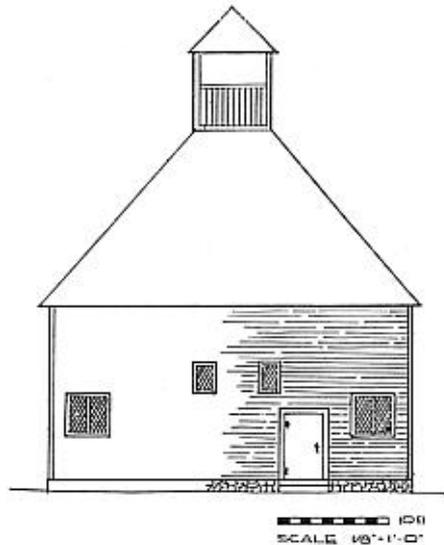


FIG. 4. MALDEN, MASSACHUSETTS, MEETINGHOUSE II, 1658

Conjectural elevation by the author, executed by Edwin H. Close.

leff's findings for domestic architecture are confirmed in that no evidence for the use of notched log construction has yet been discovered in documents relating to the meetinghouses.

The second theory usually takes one of two forms. Sometimes the statement is made that the meetinghouses were invariably square, while at other times it is proposed that the meetinghouse plan evolved from a rectangle in the early part of the century to a standard "four-square" plan in the latter part of the century.³¹ Neither version of this theory is

supported by the data available at present. Dimensions are known for 66 meetinghouses, that is, for about one third of the 202 known to have been constructed between 1629 and 1700. Of these 66, only 26 are known to have been actually square, i.e., 30' x 30', 40' x 40', etc. These square meetinghouses were built from 1640 (New Haven, Connecticut) to 1700 (Clinton, Connecticut), with a random scattering in time and place. It is true that the rectangular plans tended to be short and broad, 40' x 30' or 30' x 20', rather than long and narrow, a

tendency appropriate to the location of the pulpit in the middle of a long side. This location was necessary for the Congregational meeting, in which attention was focused upon the sermon and scripture reading. The pulpit had to be placed so that all might hear. But while the meetinghouse interior plan was pulpit-oriented, if not strictly centralized, available documents show that the square was not invariably chosen to accommodate this orientation nor was the choice of the square the result of an evolution in planning.

Part II: *The Meetinghouses as Protestant Buildings*

One further matter to consider is the relation of the New England meetinghouses to the history of Protestant architecture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The suggestion has been made that the colonists brought with them to New England a "full-fledged Protestant aesthetic," developed from the rise of Protestant architecture in France and Holland.³² Such churches as the Temple at Charenton, the church at Willemstad and the Westerkerk at Amsterdam have been cited as prototypes for the meetinghouses or as typifying the principles upon which they were built. This theory has already been questioned and an alternate suggestion made that the meetinghouses were more closely dependent upon medieval English sources.³³ A brief consideration of European Protestant architecture will indicate the main problems of building which arose from the new departure in Christian theology.

The need for a specifically Protestant architecture was established when Martin Luther nailed the papers containing his ninety-five theses against indulgences on the door of the Castle Chapel at Witten-

berg on October 31, 1517.³⁴ Luther's contention that salvation was dependent on the faith of the individual rather than on sacraments administered by a priesthood was echoed and developed by Jean Calvin in his *Institutes* of 1536 and also incorporated in the Genevan Confession of the same year.³⁵ This reaction against the alleged abuse of the sacraments was accompanied by a reaction against idolatrous dependence upon the church building and its furnishings. Calvin pointed out that "Isaiah and Stephen have sharply reprehended those who suppose that God dwells in any respect in temples made with hands."³⁶ In 1577 Martin Bucer said that "from the writings of the holy fathers, it is well known that among the ancients the position of the clergy was in the middle of the temples, which were usually round: and from that position divine service was so presented to the people that the things recited could be clearly heard and understood by all who were present."³⁷ As these ideas about Christian worship spread over Europe, churches of the reformed faith could not be constructed to focus attention on Masses said

or sung at altars. Churches must now be built primarily to accommodate congregations gathered to hear the Scripture, to

at Lyon, built in 1564 (Bibliothèque Publique, Geneva). (Figure 5.) As the inscription at the base of the painting in-

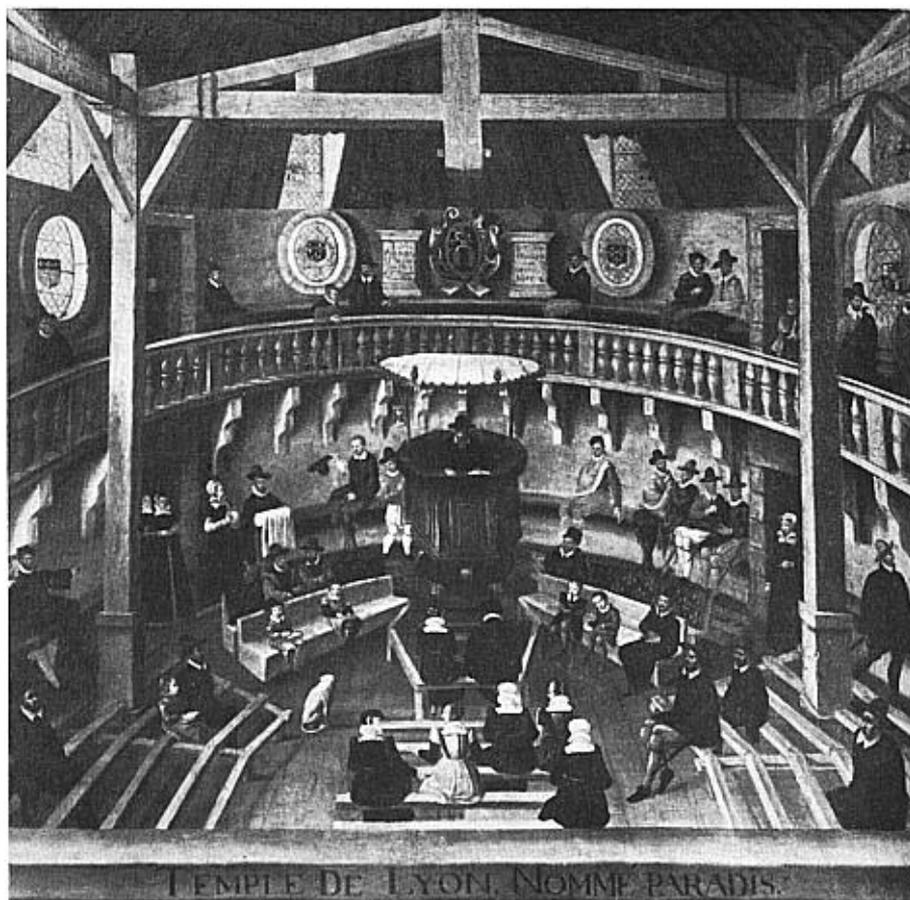


FIG. 5. LYON, TEMPLE, 1564

Painting of interior by unknown artist.

Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Publique, Geneva.

listen to sermons expounding Scripture and to meet together around the Lord's Table.

Perhaps the earliest surviving view of a Protestant church fulfilling these requirements is a painting of the Temple

at Lyon, which indicates, the Temple at Lyon was called "Paradis." The origin of this designation has not yet been determined, but perhaps it lay in the church's desire to compare the congregation assembled in the Temple to the ranks of the saints in the heavenly

Paradise. The round or nearly round building, the replacement of the altar with the axially located pulpit and space for the communion table and the absence of liturgical ornament are all features stipulated by the Protestant leaders and make the Temple clearly different from a Catholic church.

Little is known about other French Protestant buildings of the sixteenth century. The fortunes of the Huguenots varied, and it was not until the Edict of Nantes in 1598 that liberty of conscience and the right to worship in specified places were at all assured. The main period of French Protestant building came after this edict and continued until the Revocation in 1685, after which nearly all the Huguenot churches were destroyed.

Of the seventeenth-century buildings the second Temple at Charenton, built by Salomon de Brosse in 1623, was probably the most famous. This was a long rectangular building with galleries and a high pulpit near one end, rows of seats and benches facing the pulpit from all sides. De Brosse may have derived his plan in part from the Basilica at Fano as described by Vitruvius, Book V, Chapter 1. Since the Temple, 104 feet long and 66 feet wide, could according to one estimate, accommodate 11,754 persons if necessary, it is no wonder that the French press of 1686 considered that Louis XIV had covered himself with glory in ordering its destruction: "la gloire immortelle dont le roy se vient de couronner en le detruisant."³⁸ Except for the Tables of the Law high on the end wall, the Temple at Charenton, like that at Lyon, had no liturgical ornament. This Temple had served the Paris Huguenots and was probably unusually large among the French churches. More study of the few other known Huguenot churches is

needed before many general conclusions about them may be safely drawn.

In the Netherlands the struggle for liberty of conscience was linked with the struggle for independence from Spain. Violence against the Catholic Church broke out in 1566, with resistance to Spain continuing until some freedom was granted in the Truce of 1609. The synod of Dort in 1618 established Calvinism in Holland, and the northern provinces won their independence in the Treaty of Münster in 1648.³⁹ The change to Protestantism was not, however, completely accomplished overnight, nor were the new architectural problems immediately solved.⁴⁰

The first Dutch Protestant church was built at Willemstad in 1596 under the direction of Maurice of Nassau. Prince Maurice had had a humanistic education at the University of Leiden, and in his library were the works of Vitruvius as well as of Cataneo and other Italian theorists.⁴¹ The octagonal church at Willemstad might well have been inspired by the octagonal temple published by Serlio, Book V. Renaissance motifs are applied on both exterior and interior, and the pulpit is the focus of attention on the main axis. Several other churches of central plan were built in Holland during the seventeenth century, notably the Oostkerk at Middelburg (1647-1667), where the rich decorations of applied orders, garlands and urns suggest that the Dutch Protestants did not hesitate to ornament their churches as far as funds permitted.

The basilical type of church was also constructed in Holland. The Westerkerk at Amsterdam, built by Hendrik de Keyser (a Catholic) from 1620 to 1631, is basilical in plan with cross-arms articulated beginning at the clearstory level.⁴²

Again there is the use of applied orders. The pulpit is set against the middle pier on the north side, with seats and pews arranged in the nave and aisles to face it. The Calvinist requirement that all might hear the preacher is met in this building. Yet a strong discrepancy is present between the centralization on the ground level and the longitudinal flight of space with the breaking-out of the cross-arms on the clearstory level. To the observer in the building, it is impossible to comprehend these two levels as parts of a single spatial unity. The building is a compromise between Gothic plan and elevation, Renaissance ornament, and Protestant liturgical requirements.

Reformation in England took a somewhat different course. Under Henry VIII and later under Elizabeth I the offensive was waged not so much against the sacraments and liturgy but against the authority of the Pope.⁴³ By the Act of Supremacy in 1534 the King was declared "the supreme head of the Church in England." In the reign of Edward VI the influence of Continental Protestantism was felt in the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* (i.e., an *English* liturgy) in 1552, the removal of the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist in the substitution of "Holy Communion" for "Mass," and the substitution in word and fact of "table" for "altar." A brief return to Roman Catholicism was effected under Mary I. By the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in 1559 Elizabeth I was declared "supreme governor" of the Church, and the *Prayer Book of 1552* became the only authorized liturgy. Although the reforms begun under Edward VI were in part continued, the general pattern of the traditional Christian liturgy was retained, as was the episcopal system of church government. The only

major change in the interior arrangement of the churches was to bring the minister's desk from behind the choir screen out into the nave in order that the congre-



FIG. 6. AMERSHAM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, MARKET HALL, 1682

Photograph by the author.

gation might hear the service.⁴⁴ The official Church in England had been in some measure "reformed," but it still considered itself Catholic and did not require a new building program.

This "Elizabethan settlement" was not enough for the more radical Protestants in England, who sought a stricter interpretation of Calvin's doctrine that no ceremony should be performed without Scriptural authority. Some of the believers emigrated to the New World. Those who remained in England were known as Independents or Congregationalists, and during the Commonwealth (1649-1660) their ministers displaced

those of the Established Church. The architectural manifestation of this period was the destruction of "popish" furnishings. The Restoration of 1660 extended to the Established Church as well as to the monarchy, and the Act of Uniformity of 1662 drove out the dissenting clergy. The Nonconformist movement was merely declared unofficial, however, not halted, and its protection from oppression was included in the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, which suspended penal laws against Nonconformists and permitted them to meet in duly licensed places. This declaration was almost immediately revoked, and it was not until the Toleration Act of 1689 that Nonconformists were able to build places of worship over a period of years. From 1689 to 1700 at least 1,000 meetinghouses were built, and many congregations obtained licenses for worship in private houses.⁴⁵ Thus the beginning of new Protestant building in England came a century after the first Dutch experiment at Willemstad and 125 years after the French Protestant Temple at Lyon.

Less than twenty Nonconformist meetinghouses built in England in the last decade of the seventeenth century have survived to the present day.⁴⁶ An unpretentious example is the Baptist Chapel at Winslow, Bucks, built in 1695. The chapel is a modest brick building 24 feet long and 16½ feet wide, entered at the east end. Inside there is a gallery on the entrance wall and the pulpit is opposite. Plain benches and a stocky seventeenth-century communion table complete the fittings.

A more elaborate meetinghouse had been erected two years earlier at Norwich, Norfolk. Here the large, two-story brick building is enriched by Corinthian pilasters between the windows and by a

modillioned cornice. The pulpit, heavily carved, is opposite the entrance wall, and galleries line three sides of the meetinghouse. Neither the French nor Dutch Protestant church traditions can, as far as is known, furnish a direct parallel to this kind of building. Except for the Renaissance ornament the Norwich meetinghouse is much like such New England meetinghouses as the one at Hingham, Massachusetts. Perhaps the New England meetinghouses inspired the builders of Nonconformist chapels late in the century in England.

Nonconformist congregations that were not able to build meetinghouses met for worship in licensed private houses or in the town moot or market hall. English market halls are usually found in the middle of the main road, as at Amersham, Bucks, (Figure 6) and New Buckenham, Norfolk. The chambers above the market stalls were convenient meeting places for congregations too large to meet in private houses.

By the time of the Great Migration of the 1630's, the French, Dutch and English developments outlined above can hardly be described as a "full-fledged Protestant aesthetic." Interior fittings of churches had been reorganized so that pulpits rather than altars were the centers of attention. Liturgical ornaments which might be construed as idolatrous were omitted, but in France and Holland and later in England Renaissance ornaments were used freely. The reaction seemed to be against "idolatrous" decoration rather than against decoration in itself. Traditional Gothic and Renaissance plans and elevations were adopted in Protestant construction, without apparent theological basis for their choice.

The Protestant builders in New England did not, therefore, have a fully de-

veloped building program to follow. They too were forced to experiment. If any kind of European building was consciously imitated for the New England meetinghouses, it was most probably the English market hall.⁴⁷ The two kinds of buildings had much in common. Both were built frequently in the middle of the main road. Both consisted of large chambers which could accommodate gatherings of people. Both might be square or broadly rectangular structures with hip roof and finial or turrets, as the meetinghouse at Malden, Massachusetts, and the market hall at New Buckenham, Norfolk, or the meetinghouse at Hingham, Massachusetts, and the market hall at Amersham, Bucks (Figures 1 and 6). At Charlestown, Massachusetts, if nowhere else in New England, market stalls were set up against the meetinghouse.⁴⁸

No New England writings have yet been found which support this suggestion that the meetinghouses were in any way based upon the market halls. Yet the methods of building and certain formal elements link the meetinghouses more closely to late medieval market halls than to the Renaissance Protestant churches of France and Holland. The interior plan, oriented toward the pulpit on the short axis, was not necessarily dependent on Continental models. The writings of the reformers were available in England, and the admonitions to place the pulpit so that all might hear were certainly read by English theologians.

In addition, the function of the market

halls as scenes of courts and civic meetings was shared by the meetinghouses. Francis Johnson, pastor of the English congregation at Amsterdam, wrote in 1617: "So as now therefore a place being a generall circumstance that perteyneth to all actions, it [the place of worship—should have] both in this case (as clothes also haue) a civill use, commodious and necessarie for people to meet in together, and to be kept from injurie and unseasonableness of the weather, &c."⁴⁹ This was the unique contribution of the meetinghouses to the history of Christian architecture.

Built not only for worship but also for town meetings, the meetinghouses were intended from the start to serve as both sacred and secular structures. According to present knowledge, the sacred character of the buildings was in no way apparent to the eye. The question may be raised whether, in spite of their obvious fitness for meetings, the New England meetinghouses were successful as specifically Christian buildings. Although the type persisted well beyond the limits of the seventeenth century, it was eventually replaced by a more "church-like" fashion. The "theocratic commonwealth" gave way to a state less dominated by the church,⁵⁰ and the two functions of the meetinghouse were met by town hall and church. Yet although the meetinghouse did not remain the dominant form of religious building in New England, it did meet the needs of those who worshipped in it in the seventeenth century.

"How amiable Lord of Hoasts
thy Tabernacles be!"

NOTES

¹ This article, portions of which were read at a meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in Detroit, Mich., on Jan. 24, 1957, was originally part of a dissertation entitled "New England Meeting Houses in the Seventeenth Century," submitted in May, 1956, to Yale University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree. Much valuable assistance has been given to this study by Professor Carroll L. V. Meeks of Yale University.

² Transcriptions of passages in town records relating to the construction and maintenance of meetinghouses are included in Volume II of the dissertation mentioned in Note 1, which is deposited in the Yale University Library. Passages from other 17th-century writings which describe meetinghouses are also included. The listing is alphabetically by town, and the first, second and third buildings of each congregation are designated by Roman numerals I, II and III.

³ The Burgis View of Boston, 1722, illustrates three Boston meetinghouses which were then standing: Third Church I, 1669, Second Church II, c. 1677, and Brattle Street I, 1699 (New York Public Library). The second meetinghouse at New Haven, Conn., 1669, is illustrated in Ezra Stiles "Itineraries," II, 414 (MS. in Yale University Library) and on the Wadsworth Map of 1748 (Yale University Map Collection). The second meetinghouse at Lynn, Mass., 1682, was not radically altered until 1827, and the drawing published by Alonso Lewis in his *History of Lynn* (Boston, 1844), was made from memory of the building itself. Two unsigned, probably 18th-century, sketches of the second meetinghouse at Plymouth, Mass., 1683, are in the possession of the Pilgrim Society, Plymouth. Sketches in the diary of Dudley Woodbridge in 1728 (Massachusetts Historical Society) show the third meetinghouse at Deerfield, Mass., 1694. An 18th-century painting of the second meetinghouse at Clinton, Conn., 1700, was published in the *250th Anniversary* book (Clinton, 1917), f.p. 22, but the painting itself has disappeared.

⁴ Town Records, Dec. 12, 1661. References to dates conform to 17th-century usage, in which the year began March 25, with April the first month.

⁵ A notable exception is New Haven, Conn., which seems to have been planned according to Vitruvian principles (Anthony N. B. Garvan, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial Connecticut* [New Haven, 1951], pp. 46-49).

⁶ Town Records, May 7, 1683.

⁷ The only exception known was the use of stone at Braintree, Mass., in 1696 (Town Records, March 2, 1746).

⁸ Knowledge of 17th-century carpentry based on surviving houses is supplemented by builders' guides such as *Architectonice* by Thomas Wilsford (London, 1659), *A Platform for Purchasers* by William Leybourn (London, 1668), and *The Description and Use of an Ordinary Joint-Rule* by John Browne (London, 1686).

⁹ Town Records, Dec. 18, 1682.

¹⁰ Braintree, Mass., II, 1696 (Town Records, Oct. 22, 1677).

¹¹ Town Records, Feb. 5, 1651.

¹² *Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1870), V, 493n., 512.

¹³ The drawings for Figures 1 and 4 were made under the direction of the author by Edwin H. Close, student at the Yale School of Architecture.

¹⁴ Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (New York, 1952), p. 34. An entry in the Dedham, Mass., Town Records for 19:4:1672 instructs Henry Wight "to take down so much of the glasse in the meeting house windowes as he shall see cause in the sumer time. and carefully lay it vp safely. and in due time set it vp againe when the hott season is past for this year."

¹⁵ Town Records, Nov. 14, 1651.

¹⁶ Beverly, Mass., II, 1682 (Town Records, May 6, 1693).

¹⁷ "Pyramids" are known to have been constructed on the meetinghouses at Dedham, Mass., 1651, Sudbury, Mass., 1652, Boston, Mass. (Third Church), 1669, Haddam, Conn., c. 1674, New London, Conn., 1682, Simsbury, Conn., 1683, and Norwich, Conn., mended 1704.

¹⁸ Town Records, Feb. 6, 1682.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Joshua Scottow (attr.), "A Narrative of the Planting of the Massachusetts Colony," *Coll. Mass. Hist. Soc.*, Series 4, IV (Boston, 1858), 307-308.

- ²¹ Wethersfield, Conn., II, c. 1647 (Town Records, April, 1647).
- ²² *Bi-Centennial Book of Malden* (Boston, 1850), p. 123.
- ²³ Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- ²⁴ Town Records, June 22, 1691.
- ²⁵ Town Records, Aug. 27, 1695.
- ²⁶ Town Records, Nov. 30, 1699.
- ²⁷ *Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston* (Boston, 1902), pp. 4 and 9.
- ²⁸ David D. Field, *Centennial Address* (Middletown, Conn., 1853), illus. f.p. 38.
- ²⁹ Harold R. Shurtleff, *The Log Cabin Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939).
- ³⁰ J. Frederick Kelly, *Early Connecticut Meetinghouses* (New York, 1948), I, xxix-xxx.
- ³¹ For example, Morrison, *op. cit.*, p. 79, and Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy* (New York, 1947), p. 110.
- ³² Garvan, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
- ³³ Sumner C. Powell, "Seventeenth-Century Sudbury, Massachusetts," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XI, No. 1 (March, 1952), 13.
- ³⁴ V. H. H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation* (London, 1952), p. 122. This work provides a useful outline of the Reformation in France and Holland.
- ³⁵ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, 1936), and "Genevan Confession," *Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 27-28.
- ³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 140-141.
- ³⁷ Martin Bucer, *Scripta Anglicana* (Basel, 1577), p. 457, quoted in G. W. O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells, *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship* (London, 1943), pp. 245-246, trans. by the Rev. Canon E. Evans.
- ³⁸ *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, V (Paris, 1857), 169, 172 and 179n.
- ³⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-258.
- ⁴⁰ For a recent discussion of Calvinism in Dutch painting, see Seymour Slive, "Notes on the Relationship of Protestantism to Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting," *Art Quarterly*, XIX, No. 1 (Detroit, 1956), 3-15.
- ⁴¹ F. A. J. Vermeulen, *Handboek tot der Geschiednis der Nederlandsche Bouwkunst* (The Hague, 1931), III, 363-364.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ S. T. Bindoff, *Tudor England* (Harmondsworth, 1952), is a useful guide to the Reformation in England.
- ⁴⁴ Addleshaw and Etchells, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- ⁴⁵ Victor Bonham-Carter, *The English Village* (Harmondsworth, 1952), pp. 184-185.
- ⁴⁶ Martin S. Briggs, *Puritan Architecture* (London, 1946), p. 23.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Powell, *op. cit.*, for comparison of the moot hall at Sudbury, Suffolk, with the meeting-house at Sudbury, Mass., 1653.
- ⁴⁸ Town Records, Jan. 11, 1651.
- ⁴⁹ Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea Conteyning Three Treatises* (n.p., 1617), p. 319.
- ⁵⁰ M. Louise Greene, *Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut* (Boston and New York, 1905), pp. 122-125.