

## **B. PROJECT NARRATIVE, FCCW, MAY 2019:**

The Parish of Amity (a theocracy) was incorporated in 1738, when it officially separated from the larger Milford Parish. The Town of Woodbridge, named for the first Amity Pastor, Benjamin Woodbridge, was incorporated by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1784. The original Meetinghouse, built in 1739, was replaced by the current Meetinghouse in 1832. The Greek Revival architecture reflected the colonial style that was popular at the time. Designed by a Society of Amity committee, the building was constructed of hand-hewn post and beam lumber by Amos Hine and John J. Perkins and local volunteers. The interior was upgraded and painted in the current trompe l'oeil/grisaille decor in 1860.

Now known as First Church of Christ, Woodbridge, the church Meetinghouse anchors the town center and is designated on the National Register of Historic Places. The church and seven other buildings comprise a National Historic District. The church Green, an oval of open space that fronts the church, is "leased" to the Town. Historically and currently, the church is a center for both faith-based and secular community activities. As an Open and Affirming community and with mission activities in Woodbridge, New Haven County and the larger world, it remains culturally relevant.

As with any historic building, periodic maintenance, restoration, and redecorating of the Meetinghouse has been required throughout its history. Major structural repairs and upgrades were conducted in the 1920's, 1950's, 2001, and 2017. A new roof was installed in 2014. The trompe l'oeil interior of the sanctuary was last repainted in 1986, the same year that repairs were made to the beams that supported the bell in the bell tower. In order to maintain the traditional historical integrity of the building, the FCCW has always involved experts to advise us and to undertake the work.

In late 2015, two large beams in the attic 'failed', the entire structure shifted, cornices and joints separated, and the plaster ceiling cracked. In order to gain the finest professional advice on how best to stabilize and repair the structure and the plasterwork, the church used a Connecticut Trust matching grant to hire qualified engineers and architects to conduct condition assessments of both structure (Jim Norden, GNCB) and plasterwork (David Riccio, John Canning Co., Cheshire). In addition, Mr. Norden provided us specific engineering design drawing documents. Further matching funds for the work was granted by the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) and, in accordance with their requisite bidding process, the stabilization of both ceiling and structure was successfully completed in 2017 and 2018 by John Canning Co. (Cheshire) and Kronenberger and Sons (Middletown).

The Parish Hall, that stands adjacent to the Meetinghouse, provides space for the church offices and board room, a community pre-school, weekly AA, Al-anon, Alateen, and AA meditation groups, the Neighborhood Music School, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, hosted Senior lunches for several months during the renovations at the Senior Center, and occasional Amity Historical Society and Woodbridge Garden Club events.

We are applying to the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Fund for pre-development matching funds in order to hire an expert fine arts conservator to advise us about the repair and repainting of the sanctuary, narthex, and three stairwells that comprise the main floor of Meetinghouse. We would expect the conservator to:

- Conduct a site visit
- Assess the current condition of the interior of the Meetinghouse
- Describe the scope of work needed
  - o The need (or not) to remove the latex paint
  - o The need for plaster repair
  - o To recommend the correct materials to be used to repair and repaint
  - o To advise on repainting design options that are consistent with the history of the building
  - o To advise on the choice of colors
- Provide either a visual electronic example or a mock-up of the proposed decor
- Provide a written report of their findings, recommendations, and an itemized estimate of projected costs for the various stages of the project (including scaffolding)
- Possibly give a presentation to the congregation

The FCCW operational budget for 2019 is \$359,955.00 and the capital budget is \$40,000.00. In addition, the church has a solid endowment fund (>\$1.3M) - although we do not plan to use the principal of the endowment for this project. Funds we might receive from the SHPO for pre-development will be matched from the FCCW capital budget.

The church congregation and the Boards that are elected by them, wish to restore the beauty and spiritual peace of the interior of the historic Meetinghouse. It is part of our church history. At this point in the process, the congregation is seeking advice and assistance of an expert conservator in order to determine what options are available and at what expense. Restoration of the FCCW sanctuary decor is a statement of our intent to endure into the future both as a faith community and in recognition of our almost 300 years of service to the wider community.

The stabilization process, however, has left the ceiling in poor shape with the trompe l'oeil decor severely compromised, many cracks, and extensive areas of shiny 'plugs' where product was injected to secure the ceiling. The repaired cornices have large areas of unpainted plaster. Moreover, the paint on the plaster walls is blistered and cracked - likely caused by moisture trapped behind latex paint that was used improperly in 1986. The damage throughout the Meetinghouse is evident.

The responsibility for the upkeep of buildings and grounds at the FCCW falls to the Board of Trustees (see list of names in appendix). The Chair of that board is Carl W. Lindskog. The point person for oversight of this pre-development study will be trustee B. Joyce Simpson.

The majority of respondents to a recent First Church of Christ, Woodbridge repainting survey indicate that they want to restore the unique beauty of the historic sanctuary and support maintaining the trompe l'oeil/grisaille decor. However, we want the conservator to give us options. No final decision regarding the repainting will be made until we have that expert advice and related costs.

In addition to regular church activities, weddings, funerals, and many community activities take place in the Meetinghouse. The building stands as a symbol of the origin, stability, and continuity of life in Woodbridge. The decor is admired and important to most people in town whether or not they are church members. Although the sanctuary is not used for secular education or tours, it is available for a wide spectrum of activities including an annual three-day Woodbridge Arts and Music Festival, the Elm City Girls' Choir, the Saecular Singers Winter Concert, the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service (every third year), Neighborhood Music School recitals, recognition days for our Boy Scout Troop 907, and the Woodbridge Volunteer Fire Department. We are fortunate to have as our church organist/pianist, Nenad Ivovic, who is currently a doctoral Fellow at the Yale School of Music. He performs alone and with colleagues each Sunday and holds three concerts each year in the sanctuary which are open, free of charge, to the general public. We also have a voice choir and a bell choir. Our visitors, concert-goers, passing hikers, and bikers frequently tell us how much they admire and appreciate the aesthetics of the setting. Community leaders at all levels enthusiastically support historical preservation at the First Church as, for them, the campus defines the character of life in Woodbridge