



## PROVENANCE- OLD MEETING HOUSE

- 1791- On August 29, 1791 the First Parish (Congregational) voted to build a meeting house on Charles Brewer's land located on what is now the corner of Mountain Road and Main Street, Wilbraham. However, three weeks later the vote was rescinded.
- 1792- This action of the Parish in voting **not** to build the meeting house on his land was so upsetting to Mr. Brewer that in December of 1792 he and twelve others withdrew from the First Parish and commenced the formation of the Methodist Society. The Society soon began building the Methodist Meeting House on the same spot where it stands today.
- 1793- The ground under the Meeting House was leased to the Society for one peppercorn annually. The building is 30' x 40' and has a ridge pole hand-hewn from a **single** tree that extends the full length of the building. This ridge pole is still visible from the attic.
- 1797- The first Methodist-Episcopal Conference in the New England area was held in the meeting house. There two other conferences held here- one in 1824 and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference held in 1897.
- 1814- The procurement of a wood burning stove was an innovation of the times and greatly helped in keeping the building warm. Other local churches finally followed suit about 15 years later. It took that long to convince the various congregations that the fire danger from a stove was minimal.
- 1824- Under the Rev. Dr. Wilbur Fiske, Headmaster of the Wesleyan Academy, the first theology school was organized, there being none available elsewhere. This theology school was the predecessor of today's theology schools.
- 1835- As the Methodist Society increased in size, the need for a larger facility arose. The original meeting house was sold for a private dwelling and was altered to make it into a two story home. The addition of the second floor divided the interior into a two separate spaces which necessitated the division of the original windows- one section of which is believed to have been raised to the second floor. Note that the triple-sash windows on the first story and the windows on the second story are an extension with the arched window shutters on the third story or attic of the building. The rest of the house was basically unchanged. The original vaulted ceiling is still visible on the third floor. The Meeting House has been a private dwelling for 142 years.
- 1977- The last owner died in 1977 and the building was offered to the Town for purchase. At a Special Town Meeting in September, 1977 it was voted by the townspeople to purchase the building and keep it available for future generations to enjoy. The Wilbraham Historical Commission was given jurisdiction of the premises and will lease the space to the Atheneum Society of Wilbraham for one peppercorn per annum. The Society will use the space as a museum to preserve historical records, traditions and artifacts relating to the history of Wilbraham, its culture and its people.
- Today- The building will be maintained by the Trustees though citizen participation by donations, grants, bequests, volunteer hours, and local expertise. Membership in the Atheneum Society is open to anyone and the dues are kept at a nominal sum. Trustees are citizens who have volunteered their services and any person interested in Wilbraham history may apply.

Revised and updated by Pete Ablondi- 2008