

Hancock Church,
Lexington, Mass.



Celebrating 150 Years of
Hancock Church

1868-2018

Hancock United Church of Christ, Congregational
Lexington, Massachusetts



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RIGHT: First church building.
 Painting by M. Donald Plummer.
 D. Fisher photograph.

LEFT: Second church building.
 Painting by M. Donald Plummer.
 D. Fisher photograph.

COVER: Early 20th century postcard.
 Hancock Archives.



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In 1912, Charles Hudson, our first town historian, wrote about Hancock Church in his publication *History of Lexington Massachusetts*:

The experiment, which by many had been regarded as a doubtful one, justified itself and advanced in public esteem... The wisdom and devotion of the founders have found abundant justification in their church which during the 44 years of its existence has grown to a position of recognized strength and influence in this historic community.

Although Hancock's Congregational roots are in the first Meetinghouse on the Common at the dawn of Lexington, the Trinitarian tradition disappeared for a time when Unitarian beliefs took over the First Parish. This history therefore celebrates the rebirth of Congregationalism in Lexington, Massachusetts.

I. 1692-1868: CONGREGATIONALISM IN LEXINGTON

First Church in Lexington

In Massachusetts a town could only be established when it created a parish. The boundaries of the town were the boundaries of the parish, which at that time meant Congregationalism. All residents were taxed for the support of the church and had to be acceptable to it. Anyone not acceptable would be requested to move elsewhere.

Hancock's story begins with the landowners in Cambridge in the 1600s. The eldest son would inherit his father's land. Others had to find land elsewhere. They therefore moved on to West Cambridge (later called Menotomy and now Arlington) and to this area, which became known as Cambridge Farms. Until the 1600s Native Americans had used this land as hunting grounds.

Initially, the residents here paid taxes and had to travel to Cambridge for church services. Everyone's presence was demanded and absences were investigated by the local law enforcement agency. The early Cambridge Farms residents walked or rode to Cambridge every Sunday come mud or heat or twelve-foot drifts. The weekly pilgrimage was often extremely difficult and as the years went by, increasingly tedious.

By 1682 thirty families—180 souls—lived here. Their petition to the General Court to establish a new parish was opposed by the Cambridge church and in 1684 a new petition was also refused by the Cambridge parish.

Finally in 1691 a petition was granted:

For the advantage of themselves, their families and posterity, they may have this Court's favor and license in order to the calling of a fit minister for dispensing the gospel among them; as also that they may be a distinct village for the ends proposed in their said petition.



Rev. John Hancock
Courtesy of Lexington Historical Society.

The Reverend John Hancock

Who is the person for whom our church is named? Grandfather of the famous patriot, he was Lexington's second minister (the first, Benjamin Estabrook, having died nine months after his call to Lexington). The Rev. Mr. John Hancock was the son of Nathaniel Hancock of a portion of Cambridge that is now Newton. He was born in December of 1671, entered Harvard College and graduated in 1689. He commenced preaching in Cambridge Farms (now Lexington) in December of 1697 and was ordained in 1698. A committee was formed to "treatte" with Rev. Hancock and it was decided that he would receive "four score pounds in money towards his settlement: ye one half in ye year 1698 and ye other half in ye year 1699". He served for 54 years.

In September 1699 he purchased 25 acres of land northeast of the parish common (now the Hancock-Clarke House) and in 1707 he married Elizabeth Clark. They had three sons and two daughters.

Bishop Hancock, as he would have been called, was highly regarded as a clergyman, often called upon to preach in other parishes and to conduct ordinations. He had a reputation for being a peace-maker, was often called upon to settle disputes and he was much admired for his geniality and wit. It was said that he "was a man of piety, wisdom and wit whose happy talent for preventing discord and healing animosities among his people led to the growth of the church and sense of community in the town." Mr. Hancock "died suddenly" at the age of 81. His parishioners conducted an elaborate funeral service which cost the town over 200 pounds.

Unitarianism and Congregationalism

In 1819, the First Congregational Society of Lexington voted to become Unitarian. What did this mean? A growing movement over the past decades had come to reject the belief in a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). It also questioned some of the Calvinist beliefs in predestination and divine judgment. The Unitarian movement, as it came to be called, gained influence in the academic training grounds for ministers such as Harvard, which supplied

many of the parishes in the Boston area. In 1808, the Andover Theological Seminary was founded in reaction to this "liberal" trend, to form ministers grounded in the "orthodox" Congregational faith. Throughout New England churches split over these theological differences.

In Lexington, the 1819 vote left the small minority of "orthodox" Congregationalists without a home church. Some of them chose to worship with the Baptists, who shared their Trinitarian beliefs; but as only those baptized by immersion were allowed to take communion and to become full voting members, their participation was limited. Most scattered to Congregational churches in the surrounding area.

In the 50 years following the 1819 demise of traditional Congregationalism in Lexington, the town itself changed considerably. Its population nearly doubled. Irish and Italian immigrants began to settle in town, many working on farms or in domestic service. Most significantly, Lexington began to evolve from a primarily agricultural village. Small manufacturing enterprises developed, especially in East Lexington. The railroad, built in 1846, eventually made it possible for a growing number of white-collar workers, professionals,

and businessmen to work in Boston. Several new churches were founded in Lexington during this time, among them a Universalist church (the antecedent of Follen Church) and a Catholic church, St. Brigid's. By 1868, a small but determined group was ready to bring back Congregationalism to Lexington.

II. 1868: FOUNDING OF A NEW CHURCH



Legal Founding

In the 1800s, an organization known as the Woburn Council of Churches gathered together a number of Congregational churches in the area, including Bedford, Billerica, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Reading, Stoneham, and Winchester, among others.

As discussion about forming a new church in Lexington intensified, the Woburn Conference fully supported it. On April 24, 1866 it was voted:

That whenever the building and grounds for an orthodox church shall have been purchased in Lexington, then the churches of the Woburn Conference will give a sufficient sum to put the building in order and furnish it.

Various meetings were held, funds were pledged from each of the churches, other funds were raised “by friends in Boston and elsewhere”, permitting the building (now known as the Masonic Building) to be purchased and furnished. On May 20, 1868, 24 people met to adopt the creed and

covenant of the new Lexington church. The meeting began with:

We the undersigned members of Evangelical Churches in other places and now residents of Lexington, Mass., believing that the interests of religion require the establishment in this place of an Orthodox Congregational Church, do hereby propose with the blessing of God to enter into the requisite organization to effect this object—praying the Great Head of the Church so to order and direct all matters in relation thereto as may best promote his glory and the upbuilding of his Kingdom.

The records show that “After adopting the Creed and Covenant it was voted that this church be called the Evangelical Church of Lexington.” On July 23rd it was voted to change the name to Hancock Congregational Church. As was the custom, in addition to organizing the church, the Hancock Congregational Society became a corporation to handle administrative matters.

Davis Family stained glass window
D. Fisher photograph.

The Woburn Conference continued to support the church by providing funds for the new minister and to provide \$300 per annum towards expenses for the next several years.

Who Were the 24 Original Founders?

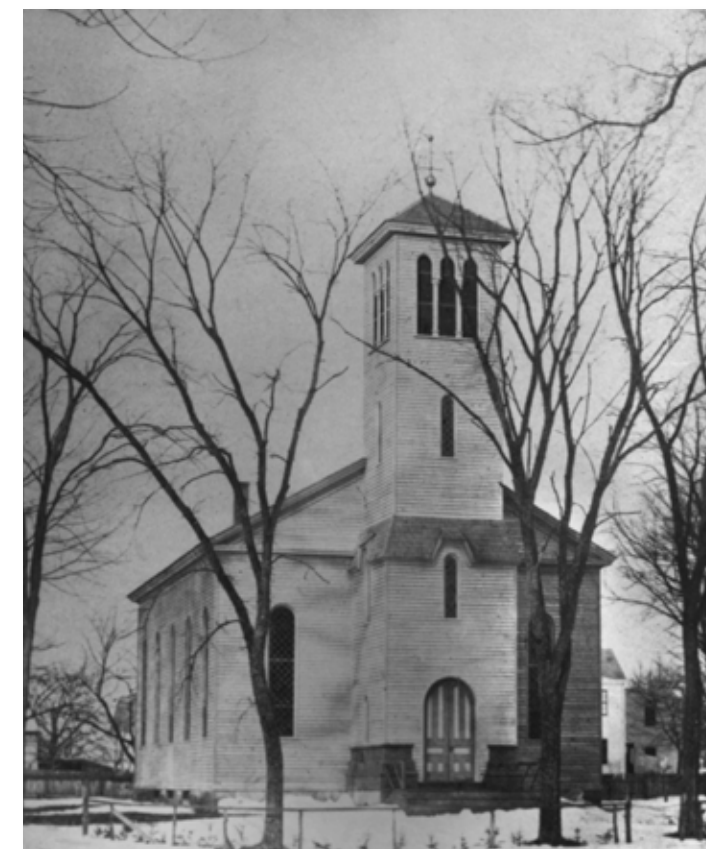
The 24 signers of the petition to form the new Orthodox Congregational Church were members of twelve extended families, ranging in age from 19 to 74. They had been attending Congregational churches in places as diverse as Bedford, Lincoln, Boston, Tewksbury, Medford, Somerville, South Hadley, and even Portland, Maine. John Davis had served as postmaster of Lexington for 25 years; the stained glass window on the east side of the Sanctuary is a memorial tribute to him and his wife, Mary Forbes Davis, another founding member along with their three adult daughters. The Patch and Goodwin families, related through marriage, are also honored

by stained glass windows in the Sanctuary. Two-thirds of the founders were women. Three who joined on their own were married to prominent Lexington men who entered the congregation in subsequent years. Alice Dodge Goodwin was active in town affairs, and was also one of the founders of the Monday Club for Women, an educational and social group. Two other women, Amanda Prosser and Margaret Wyman, were married to Lexington selectmen. Several of the younger founders in 1868 became active adult participants in the following years.

First Church Building

As noted earlier, before Hancock Church could be constituted, a home was needed. When the building at the intersection of Bedford and Hancock Streets became available, it was purchased with the substantial assistance of the Woburn Conference.

The building was erected in 1822 to house the Lexington Academy, a private school. Seventeen years later it became the home of the first state Normal (Teachers) School established by Horace Mann. The building became available when the school moved to Framingham. After the purchase as a church, much renovation was done to produce a conventional church building with long, narrow stained glass windows, a churchly door and a tower. The land also supported a few horse sheds. The interior featured a pulpit platform, slightly recessed and three steps up. The choir and pipe organ were in the front left-hand corner. Sunday school was held immediately following the service using the pews. Social gatherings were held at one of the larger homes of the parishioners.



ABOVE: First church building, 1868-1892.
Hancock Archives.

ABOVE, TOP: First church interior.
Hancock Archives.



“ His labors have not been confined to his church alone; he has taken an active interest in whatever concerned the welfare and progress of the community. Being himself a man of ripe scholarship and broad culture, and deeply interested in whatever pertains to the social and intellectual growth of a people, and possessed also of an intensely active nature, he has impressed his own individuality upon the many progressive measures which he has helped to consummate here during the recent years.”

At his funeral it was said:

Mr. Porter possessed, without qualification or flaw, all the qualities which distinguish the New England gentleman.

Of Mr. Porter's influence on Hancock Church, the eulogist said:

The Church grew and prospered, and gained in position during the whole of his pastorate, and won a prestige that has been maintained.

First Minister:

The Reverend Edward Griffin Porter

Graduating from Andover Theological Seminary in 1864, Reverend Porter's first and only parish was Hancock. During the Civil War he was "physically unfit for a soldier's life", but he assisted sick and wounded soldiers in field hospitals and camps. He contracted a fever and on his doctor's advice traveled to Europe in 1866. He returned to America in 1868 and accepted the call to Hancock Church, extending until 1891 when he requested dismissal and was made pastor emeritus.

He was very involved in the life of the town, serving on the school board and centennial committee as well as teaming with the minister of First Parish to establish the Lexington Historical Society and working with others to found Cary Memorial Library.

He was also active in many other societies and organizations around the state and in fact around the world. During his ministry he took an extended journey around the world with Reverend Daniel March of Woburn. Their task was to visit and give "Christian salutations of the American churches to their brethren..."



OPPOSITE PAGE: Rev. E.G. Porter. Hancock Archives.

THIS PAGE: New church building, circa 1900. Hancock Archives.

Building a New Church

The small band of founding members was quickly joined by like-minded people. Two years after the congregation's founding the membership was nearly 50. Membership rose to 100 in 1880, and 160 in 1890. At that point the congregation decided to look for new and larger quarters.

Before Rev. Porter resigned, he had hoped to erect a new church building, since the membership had grown to one hundred forty-five in 1887. A lot of land across the Common became available and was purchased with the cornerstone laid in 1892. The original structure consisting of the sanctuary, vestry, supper room and kitchen, was built and occupied under the direction of Rev. Irving Meredith. The dedication ceremony was led by Rev. Charles Carter, with Rev. Porter returning to assist.

Exercises at the Laying of the Corner Stone were held on July 26, 1892. The scripture reading was Ephesians II: 20-22:

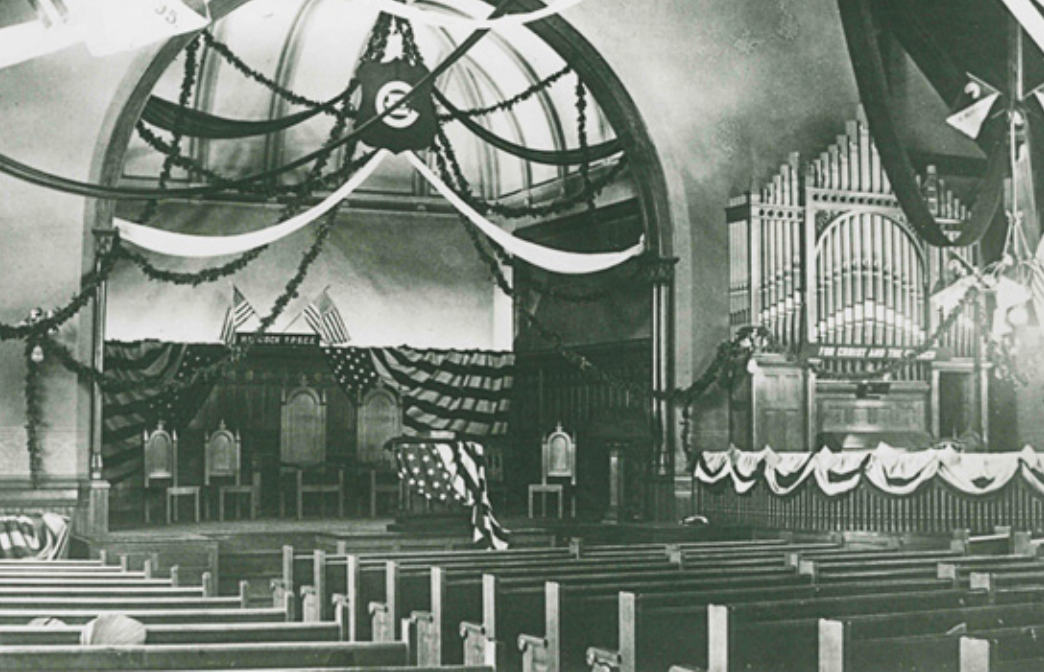
And ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

An original hymn was penned by Anna Woodbury Muzzey and began:

Great Master Builder come,
Bless thou our work begun,
Hear thou our prayer;
Grant that this church may rise,
Successful toward the skies,
Watched by thy guardian eyes,
Crowned by thy care.

On September 3, 1893, three initial services were held—morning, afternoon and evening and included an anthem entitled "I have surely built Thee a House." The bulletin notes on the front page that "The formal dedication of the church is postponed until the balance of the indebtedness is provided for."

Finally, on October 22, 1899, the official dedication of the new building was held, commencing with Beethoven's "Hallelujah Chorus," including the hymn "A mighty fortress is our God," and ending with the hymn "O Thou, whose own vast temple stands."



LEFT: 1895 church interior
Hancock Archives.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Church exterior, 1950s
Hancock Archives.

church building.” In addition, a weekly Friday evening discussion centered on selected scripture was designed to foster spiritual growth among adults.

Even as the congregation was building itself up, its members took up collections specifically for other

needy organizations, both within the Sunday services and through the Sunday school. Home Missions and the American Board of Foreign Missions were the first recipients of these “benevolences,” as they were called. Special collections for benevolences were held outside of the pew rentals and other donations collected for the running of the church. Within a decade, the congregation was also donating funds regularly to mission schools in Turkey and Japan, and domestically to institutions such as the Night Schools for Freedmen, the Home for Little Wanderers, and Orphans of Consumptive Homes. In some years these charitable donations equaled a quarter to a third of the amount the congregation collected separately for its own budget needs.

The church encouraged social interaction through monthly parish tea parties. Teenagers and young adults were encouraged to join the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor, formed in the late 1880s. These societies existed throughout the country. At Hancock the group met on Sunday evenings, with a prayer meeting or lecture followed by a social gathering. Members also supported missionary activities and distributed Christian Endeavor literature.

Building a Congregation

From the very beginning, the new Hancock congregation emphasized the importance of music, education, charitable activity, and social groups.

The original bylaws of 1868 called for the appointment of a committee to “regulate the matter of singing of church music,” which was duly formed two years later. In the 1880s a group of about 20 members agreed to fund a new pipe organ for the not inconsiderable sum of \$358. By the 1890s the choir consisted of a director, 5 sopranos, 4 altos, 3 tenors, and 3 basses. The music budget (primarily for paying the organists) represented a major expense for the church, ranging from 13% to 30% of its annual expenses, an indication of its importance to the congregation. Sunday morning services included anthems sung by the choir as well as hymns, as did the monthly Sunday afternoon communion service. Sunday School concerts were held monthly.

Education in the form of Sunday School for adults and children followed the morning service. Within six years of the congregation’s founding the Sunday School consisted of 11 classes with 67 students. In 1893 when the new church building was constructed, the Superintendent reported that 168 adults and children participated in 18 classes, with an average weekly attendance of 120; he expressed his appreciation for the “superior accommodations in our new

IV: 1900-1970: GROWTH AND CHALLENGES



Membership

Hancock Church membership grew fairly steadily in the first half of the 20th century, from around 200 in 1900 to about 650 in 1940. After the end of World War II, however, the numbers escalated dramatically, reaching 1,315 in 1950, 1,848 in 1955, and around 2,000 in 1960. This paralleled the growth of Lexington itself: between 1940 and 1960 the town’s population doubled, from 13,110 to 27,690. New housing, new schools, and new roads transformed the once small town. The mid-1950s were also the period when formal church membership in the U.S. reached its highest level. At that point, Hancock was bursting at the

seams, even with two services on Sunday mornings, and plans for a physical expansion moved into high gear.

Additions to Church Building

In 1917 expansion was considered necessary and plans drawn up for a two-story structure at the rear of the church. There was much discussion and consideration of the plans and funds were raised. In 1920 the land next door (the Hudson property) was purchased and in 1922 a seven-member Parish House Committee was formed; by 1924 the new addition was built consisting of a dining room, assembly

hall and Sunday school rooms and a kitchen. In 1940 the Chancel was rebuilt and refurnished, with a new organ and console, a conventional altar and new reredos, new pulpit, lectern and choir stalls. Over the years, the vestry became the current narthex and chapel, while the original supper room and kitchen became the current balcony.

1951 brought the completion of a substantial re-modeling including 1) alterations in the basement to create 11 Sunday school rooms, 2) the construction of the balcony, 3) the remodeling of the “Green Chapel” to become a memorial chapel honoring our servicemen and 4) an addition to the Parish House to provide additional rooms

for Sunday school, “a church parlor worthy of our ladies”, suitable church offices, adequate coat rooms and toilet facilities and improved entrance to the Parish House. This addition was known as the “Preston Building.”

In 1960, after a very long and painful lawsuit against Lexington’s Historic Districts Commission, the Education and Administration Wing was erected providing more Sunday school rooms on the second floor and administrative offices on the first floor. The second floor section is now known as the “Peter Hunt Meek Educational Wing” to honor Rev. Dr. Meek’s 27 years as Hancock’s Senior Minister.

Missionary Support and City Mission Society

From the earliest days Hancock supported missionary activity in the U.S. and abroad. In the first half of the 20th century Hancock maintained on-going support for Indian Missions in South Dakota. For nearly 30 years the church supported a missionary in what is now Angola, who founded and directed a school for girls. Later the church “adopted” missionaries in Japan and the Philippines. The last of these personal connections, organized through the UCC World Service, was with Laurence and Carol Gilley, who served in Swaziland and Mozambique from 1978 to the late 1990s.

Hancock has had a special relationship with the Boston-based City Mission Society (which

changed its name to City Mission Society in the 1980s) since the church’s inception. CMS, founded in 1816, has focused on social issues such as education, elder services, housing, and incarceration, for over 200 years. Manger Services, where Hancock members contribute Christmas gifts for families served by CMS, started in the first years of the church’s existence. Starting in the 1950s, church members actively participated in CMS’s outreach programs in schools and prisons. Individual church members, such as Horace Besecker, held leadership positions within CMS. Today, Hancock as an institution, and church members as individuals, continue their active support of CMS.



World War Involvement

Hancock has actively supported its servicemen and servicewomen through all of America’s wars, and

individual members have involved themselves in many local and national efforts to support those who serve our country.

There was much activity during World War I in particular. Rev. Christopher Collier not only sustained the men who went into service, but also requested and received two leaves of absence to serve in Europe as an ambulance driver “in order that he might enlist more actively in the course of human liberty”. His purpose was to wake people up to the need to be vigilant. Upon his return the following pledge was taken by the congregants:

With his return we all tonight pledge anew our allegiance to God and to the church of Christ—and furthermore we will do all we can to extend justice, democracy and brotherhood everywhere—we dedicate ourselves to a better Christian stewardship and a fuller Christian service.

Two Hancock men lost their lives in 1918; there is a plaque entitled “Faithful Unto Death” on the east wall of the Sanctuary to their memory—Stanley Hill a driver in the ambulance service and William F. Martin, medical detachment of the 18th Infantry. In 1919 two more Hancock men were lost: Frederick E. Gleason and John L. Norris. Hancock also sent funds to the Red Cross, to Armenian Relief and Belgian Relief. Particularly active with Armenian relief, a report describes “the horrible persecution of

OPPOSITE PAGE: Armed Services Memorial Plaque D. Fisher photograph.
RIGHT: Confirmation class, 1960s. Hancock Archives.



the Armenians” and how Hancock’s funds gave them some bit of relief. “The steadfastness with which the Armenians stand for Christ is beyond words to portray.”

Many Hancock men and women served on active duty during World War II. During those years, fresh flowers were placed every week on the altar of the Chapel in honor of all who served. After the war, on May 28, 1950, the Chapel became the Memorial Chapel and was dedicated to the memory of those who died in the war. The program for the dedication service includes the words “Because I live ye shall live also”. Today there is a plaque in the Chapel honoring all those who served from Hancock. Again, money was raised by various organizations within the church to aid such groups as the Red Cross.

Individuals within the church came forward to assist at the local Red Cross building (across Hancock Street from our original building) and to act as wardens.

Social Groups

Social groups have always been a large part of the Hancock community. Men’s, women’s and couples’ groups have flourished throughout the years. By 1958 there were approximately 25 such groups, plus ten Bible study groups and five youth groups.

Beginning immediately upon Hancock’s organization, there was the Hancock Sewing Circle, which produced handmade items for local needy organizations as well as missionary groups. This evolved into the Women’s Association. The

mission of the group remained consistent throughout the years—“The object shall be to train the members in Christian Work, to increase their mutual fellowship and to build up the spiritual, missionary and social work of the church.” This group met on the first Friday of each month for many years. There were also other women’s groups that met in the evenings to accommodate working women, and a couple for young mothers.

By far the largest of the men’s groups was the Men’s Club, which welcomed “men of all churches in Lexington.” In the early 1950s this group had a membership of 350 with a waiting list of over 100. There was also the Men’s Brotherhood for church members only.



For “married couples” there were three principal groups geared to couples of similar ages – the Tandem Club open to couples with a combined age of up to 65, the Pairamid Club for couples with a combined age of 65 to 95 and Collier Club for combined ages beginning at 95.

Each group generally provided a meal or snack, social time with an activity (typically creating items to sell for money to contribute to a church need or a mission), and some provided a guest speaker or program of some sort.

Children and Youth

In 1957-58 Hancock started the Hancock Weekday Kindergarten for 5-year olds, in response to the needs of young families. It was overseen by a church committee, and enrolled 33 children in its first year. In 1967 the town instituted public kindergarten, so the Hancock

school switched to a Nursery program for 4-year olds. This church-administered program incorporated into an independent body renting space from the church in 2002, and still thrives today as the Hancock Nursery School.

Rev. Henry Clark, who led the church from 1957 to 1979, was particularly concerned with providing support for teenage church members during “a time of confusion and chaos in society” as he described the 1960s. He took charge of the Pilgrim Fellowship, the high school group, and met with them regularly on Sunday evenings. In 1965 the part-time position of Youth Minister was expanded into a full-time one. The following year the church funded extensive repairs to the “Attic” (now the Upper Room) in order to open a drop-in center for teens after school and on the weekends. This was a joint effort with St. Brigid’s, and attracted hundreds of young

people. Counseling services were also provided. In 1970 the counseling function was incorporated as a non-profit entity called Replace; the church provided material support in the form of facilities but no longer assumed responsibility for its operation. This arrangement ceased in 1999.

Pilgrim Congregational Church

By the late 1950s, many members of the church felt that membership had increased so much that it was difficult to stay in contact and that the building resources were being strained. There was considerable debate regarding how to resolve these issues. In early 1958 the church embarked on two important courses: to create a large addition to the church and to consider the establishment of a Second Congregational Church in Lexington. At the February, 1958 Annual Meeting, Hancock agreed to help with and financially support the starting of such a church. A fund was created as well as a “Council of Fifteen” to consider the issue. The new congregation was organized in June of 1958 and began to meet, purchased a lot of land and prepared to build its church.

In early 1960, a congratulatory letter was sent to the newly established Pilgrim Church including a resolution adopted by Hancock:

That the Hancock Congregational Church, at this Annual Meeting,

held this 20th day of January, 1960, congratulates our new sister church and takes this opportunity to extend its best wishes to Pilgrim Congregational Church and its prayer that God’s blessing and every good gift may be given to it in the years which lie ahead.

An appreciative response from the new church stated:

It is the earnest hope and sincere prayer of the members of Pilgrim Congregational Church that God’s richest blessings shall continue to be granted to Hancock Congregational Church, and that together our two churches may serve our community to the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom.

Joining the UCC

In the aftermath of World War II there was growing interest among American Protestants in Christian unity. For over a decade Congregational church leaders debated the possibility of joining forces with other denominations to strengthen their message. In 1957 the governing bodies of the Congregational Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church voted to merge in a new entity, the United Church of Christ (UCC). According to historian Margaret Bendroth, these two

denominations showed “a mutual commitment to ecumenism and social action.” The UCC issued a jointly crafted Statement of Faith, emphasized the two traditional sacraments of baptism and communion, and urged member churches to go out and serve the world. Each congregation’s freedom to practice its own form of worship remained, as well as its ability to manage its own affairs. At the time of the merger, membership in the UCC was around 2 million.

It took three more years for a constitution for the UCC to be drawn up. In 1960 Rev. Henry Clark urged church members to vote in favor of the new constitution at a special church meeting: “Protestantism is watching this merger. It is imperative that as our churches enter the union they do so as informed, as well as enthusiastic members.” The Standing Committee voted unanimously in favor of the UCC constitution. After lengthy debate the church’s name was officially changed to Hancock United Church of Christ, Congregational.

Temple Isaiah

Until the late 1950s the Jewish community in Lexington was a part of the Arlington-Lexington-Bedford Jewish Community Center in East Lexington. Out of that organization grew Beth Temple Isaiah (now Temple Isaiah), a Reform temple, and Temple Emunah, a Conservative temple. Temple Isaiah’s congregation, having no place to meet as they awaited the purchase of land and construction

of the building on Lincoln Street, met at various churches in town, including in a major way Hancock Church. They met on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings in the Chapel, holding religious school classes in Hancock's Sunday school rooms, from 1959 until 1963.

The temple was very appreciative of the relationship, giving money that was used to purchase audio-visual equipment and leaving a wonderful scrapbook of thank you notes drawn and written by their children. The message from the temple members and children reads:

"Thanks to Hancock Church". This phrase has rung out many times during the congregational life of Temple Isaiah. We have all said it, meant it, and felt it deeply. Hancock Congregational Church has shown us what brotherhood is—every day of the year. Our children have been nourished by the generosity and warmth of your church. You have built for us a bulwark against bigotry and prejudice. In years ahead, our children, as they grow, will remember our early years as a congregation and will continue to give "Thanks to Hancock Church."

Civil Rights

In the early 1960s Hancock members joined in the push for Civil Rights. The Christian Social Action Committee, formed in 1962, worked with the Lexington



Civil Rights League to inform and mobilize town and church members. The committee urged church members to attend Rev. Martin Luther King's speech at Lexington High School in 1963. The newly formed UCC took a strong stance against segregation and urged member churches to take a stand. The Hancock Standing Committee that year voted to support the UCC General Synod's program "Racial Justice Now," declaring that Hancock "is a fellowship open to all without any restriction as to race, color, or ethnic background." The following year the Christian Social Action Committee collected signatures after church services in support of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, to be sent to the state's representatives. In 1965, Rev. Henry Clark declared the events of Bloody Sunday in Selma (where Rev. King and civil rights marchers were beaten by the police) "a week of shame and tragedy in American history," and reiterated that "the Christian Church proclaims its unequivocal

position in support of civil rights." The Social Action committee consolidated with other related committees into the Christian Service Committee, and focused much of its efforts in the later sixties and seventies on affordable housing programs in the Boston metropolitan area.

Hancock and the Lexington Community

Hancock Church as an organization, and its individual members, has always been deeply involved in all aspects of the community of Lexington. There are very few political positions or governmental committees, commissions and organizations in the Town that have not been peopled by Hancock members. Our ministers have always taken the lead in these efforts.

As noted earlier, our first minister helped found the Lexington Historical Society and the Cary Memorial Library. Since the Library is organized to require Lexington's



"settled ministers" to be on its board, it is not surprising that all of our ministers have served; but all have been extremely active in that service, often serving as Chair of the Board. The Lexington Interfaith Clergy Association and its forebears have always featured Hancock's ministers as leaders and driving forces. All interfaith activities have been fully supported by Hancock, most prominently the Thanksgiving Service and Choral Festival.

In 1900 the effort to create the Minuteman Statue on the Green was led by Hancock members, with

the reception for the dedication ceremony held at Hancock. In 2000 at the rededication of the Green Rev. Peter Meek led the prayer. There has been enthusiastic participation in various celebrations and memorial services held on the Green. A community forum "Making up our Minds on Social Problems" met for several weeks at Hancock in 1923-24. Hancock has supported projects to provide low and moderate-income housing in Lexington since 1969. These are but a few of the efforts of the church as a whole; members individually are motivated to serve the

OPPOSITE PAGE: UCC March for Wilmington Ten, 1971. Hancock Archives.
 ABOVE: Church, 1959. Hancock Archives.

Town in innumerable ways, from acting as Moderator or Selectmen to town meeting member or town committee member.

1968 Centennial Celebration

Hancock Church loves to celebrate anniversaries. The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Initial Service occurred on Sunday, October 3, 1943 and was patterned after that first service; it featured the dedication of a Bruce-Rogers edition of the pulpit Bible.

By far the most elaborate celebration was the 100th in 1968. The key elements of the 100th included the production of a hardcover history of the church spearheaded by Albert Pitt, Hancock's Historian (winning an award as best publication from the Congregational Christian Historical Society at the General Synod of the United Church of Christ), and fund-raising geared primarily to organ renovation and mortgage reduction.

The two public events were the celebration roast beef banquet on Saturday, October 19, 1968 and the Centennial Service on Sunday October 20, 1968. The banquet program included introduction of fifty-year members (12), special music by the Chancel Choir and the introduction of former Hancock Ministers (by Albert Wilson, Moderator). The ministers were Robert Putsch attending from Denver, Colorado, James Lenhart attending from Des Moines, Iowa and Roy Pearson from Newton, Massachusetts. Then current minister Henry Clark led the Centennial Service, which included a Litany of Rededication.

RIGHT:
Centennial
banquet, Oct.
1968
Hancock
Archives.



V. 1970-PRESENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES



LEFT: 1st HYG trip to Neon, KY, 2000. Hancock Archives.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bell ringers, early 1980s. Hancock Archives.

Membership

All over the U.S., the peak numbers of churchgoers attained in the late 1950s dropped in the last decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries. Mainline Protestant churches saw official membership plunge. The UCC's membership in 2016 (about 900,000) was somewhat less than half what it had been at the time of its formation in the early 1960s. Hancock did not escape this trend. From an official membership of

2000 in 1960, the 2016 official membership census was 700. A one-service Sunday morning with two ministers replaced the earlier model of three ministers and two Sunday morning services. Long-range planners at Hancock in the 1970s emphasized the need to develop better plans for attracting new members, in the context of overall declining interest in church-going on the one hand, and the growth of alternative experiences in evangelical churches on the other. Hancock has been

Capital Campaigns

In the first 100 years of its existence, Hancock successfully raised funds for new buildings as it expanded. With decreasing membership but a large and demanding physical structure, as well as an ongoing resolve to reach out to the wider world, Hancock has led several successful capital campaigns over the last 50 years. The Centennial Fund of 1968 was followed by the 1991-1994 "Promises Made—Promises Kept"

capital campaign which raised over \$1 million for improvements to the sanctuary, church buildings and the parsonages, as well as for outreach to non-profits in the Boston metropolitan area. The 2012-2015 "Growing for Good" campaign raised \$3.7 million for a long list of needed building improvements: an elevator, handicapped access, electrical and fire alarm systems, children's education wing, kitchen, church entrances, and sound and television systems.

reinventing itself over the past decades to meet these challenges.

Hancock Youth Group

The descendant of the Pilgrim Fellowship of the early and mid 20th century, the high-school Hancock Youth Group (HYG) began taking weeklong mission trips in the 1970s. These trips centered on building or rehabbing housing in depressed economic areas and provided unique opportunities for work and worship interaction with local residents. These communal

experiences provided some of the most enduring memories for high school students. The group traveled over the years to West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Rhode Island, and Maine. In 2000 HYG began its long-running relationship with the non-profit HOMES and the First Church of God in Neon, Kentucky.

Seminarian Program

In 1970 Hancock started an innovative seminarian-training program in partnership with Andover-Newton Theological Seminary. The goal was to provide field education for seminarians and to help them experience what it means to minister in a church community. Hancock ministers provided supervision for students and the church provided compensation for their time as they immersed themselves in many aspects of church work. Over the years Hancock hosted students from Harvard and Boston University divinity schools as well. Since the program's inception Hancock has benefited from the work of about 70 seminarians. Most of them have gone on to lead churches of their own in the Boston metropolitan area and throughout the country. In 2014 Hancock entered into partnership with Andover Newton Theological School to offer the Cooperative Master of Divinity degree. This pioneering program of contextual education immerses the seminarian fully into the ministries of Hancock Church as they study also at Andover Newton. The degree program is now drawing interest from additional UCC congregations, Boston University School of Theology, and others.



Music

Music has been a focus at Hancock since the very beginning. Choral and organ music have been an integral part of worship for 150 years. There has been a creative evolution of musical groups over the ages, their forms varying with music directors and the interests of church members. High school choirs, male quartets, Sacred Dance, all enjoyed significant periods of enthusiastic participation. In the 1980s and early 1990s the annual "Twelfth Night" production, a mixture of drama, music, and dance, was a major item on the church calendar, with all age groups taking part. A bell choir for junior high and high school students started in the 1970s. In 1978 adults joined the group and then in 1980 formed the Hancock Grand Baroque ensemble. Now, with three large bell groups practicing weekly the bell program is a major element of the church's musical and community life. The mixed instrumental and choral performances of the annual cantatas are over 50 years old. The River Rock Band, formed in 2008, provides music for progressive worship from a broad range of musical genres. In addition, the church building provides rehearsal space for many musical and arts groups.

Television Ministry

In the early 1980s there was only one cable company in town and its contract provided for a religious access channel. Then Minister of Education Thomas Clough inquired about it and ended up with the modulator (controller) for that channel, found a company that provided grant money to start a religious television studio, cleared out space in the basement and Hancock was in the television business.

In the early years Hancock ran the studio under the direction of the Lexington Clergy Association (now the Lexington Interfaith Clergy Association), cablecasting not only our Sunday service but also other Hancock productions and tapes from other congregations. Volunteers, only one of whom, Edward Dooks, was a professional television technician, ran the entire operation.

By 2005 there were three television providers in Lexington and a local cable operator, LexMedia, was formed to provide local access programming to all three providers. Hancock no longer controls a religious access channel but has an excellent working relationship with LexMedia that allows Hancock to cablecast our Sunday service live as well as other special events.



ABOVE: TV studio, 1980s.
Hancock Archives.



RIGHT: TV studio, 2017.
D. Fisher photograph.

Covenant of Welcome

Although Hancock Church has always been known as a welcoming church, it was seminarian Daniel Smith in 1997 who asked the church to formally consider the issue of "Homosexuality: A Faith Perspective". After a series of discussions a group was formed in 1998 with the name "Open Hearts, Open Minds". This group organized a series of further panel discussions followed by conversations with the goal of creating a Statement for the church. In 1999 the committee presented to the Deacons a draft of what would become the Covenant of Welcome. The Deacons voted "to affirm the Covenant of Welcome as an accurate reflection and statement of beliefs of the Board of Deacons, and we believe, of Hancock Church." In May 1999 the Deacons presented it to the Standing Committee and in June the Standing Committee approved it with a vote of 14 for, none against, one abstention. The Covenant was then circulated to the entire congregation and committees were solicited for ideas for implementation. In September of 2000 a special Covenant of Welcome worship service was held.

The key portion of the Covenant reads:

We welcome, respect, support and lovingly encourage people of every race, ethnicity, creed, class, gender, sexual orientation, age and physical and mental ability to join us on our journey of faith.

Although Hancock Church already met the Massachusetts Conference UCC requirements as an "Open and Affirming" church, the Covenant was submitted formally to the Massachusetts Conference in 2003 so that Hancock could be listed as such on its rolls. The Standing Committee approved the adoption of the UCC language of Open and Affirming with a vote of 16 "yes" and 2 "no."

VI. THE ONCE AND FUTURE HANCOCK

“Let us then in deep gratitude to God, for the health and work of the church, face forward confidently, knowing that as each member and parishioner is in his place on Sunday morning, and every person generous and loyal and solicitous of the well-being of the church in all its work in the whole community and world, the future of this church is secure and good.”

-Rev. Robert Putsch
Hancock minister, 1919

“That this church, more than ever, may be a place of rest for the weary, a place of comfort for the sorrowing, a place where the wandering shall find God and where the faithful soul shall find the longed-for renewal of strength.”

-Rev. Christopher Collier
Hancock minister, 1918

When our predecessors wrote these confident words a century ago, Hancock Church was barely fifty years old, enjoying our then new, now venerable, sanctuary. Lexington was then a sleepy, country town on the edge of old Boston. But they wrote with confidence of the future of the church because they knew that the foundations were strong:

- ▶ A community of generous, grateful and caring people, committed to providing rest and comfort and strength for human living, all drawn from the worship of God

- ▶ The presence of God who had not, did not, and would not fail them.

They could not have foreseen the changes that would come to the church and this community. But their confidence was rooted in faith, and was unshakeable. With foundations such as these, how could the future of Hancock be anything but bright?

Today we write with the same unshakeable confidence in the future of Hancock Church. For the foundations are still solid: God is still present, still speaking, still good, and the congregation that gathers for worship remains generous, grateful and caring. We retain our faith in God's call to us to be:

- ▶ A community that welcomes all, without exception
- ▶ A community of compassion and caring and comfort for any who are in need
- ▶ A fellowship committed to looking to Jesus as the pioneer of our faith, our great teacher of how we ought to live

What will Hancock Church look like a half-century from now? No one can say with certainty. But what we do know is this: relying on God's never-failing grace, and trusting in the power of community gathered to be disciples of Jesus, Hancock will be a community of grateful, generous, inclusive people, celebrating life, working for justice, praising God without ceasing, and caring for all people and all of the beloved creation of God's hands.

With utter faith in the goodness of God,

Paul Shupe
Barbara Callaghan

Ministers of Hancock Church
September 2017



SENIOR MINISTERS OF HANCOCK CHURCH AND YEARS SERVED		
Rev. Edward Griffin Porter		1868/1891
Rev. Irving Meredith		1891/1894
Rev. Charles Carter		1896/1910
Rev. Y. A. Martin		1910/1914
Rev. Christopher Collier		1916/1934
Rev. Robert Putsch		1934/1941
Rev. James Lenhart		1941/1947
Rev. Roy Pearson		1947/1957
Rev. Henry Clark		1957/1979
Rev. Verne Henderson	Interim	1979/1980
Rev. Dr. Peter Hunt Meek		1980/2007
Rev. Ellis Johnson	Interim	2007/2009
Rev. Dr. Paul Shupe		2009/

ADDITIONAL IMAGE CREDITS:
PREVIOUS PAGE: Rev. Dr. Paul Shupe and Rev. Barbara Callaghan.
 P.Topalian photograph.
BACK COVER: Renovated entry, 2017.
 D. Fisher photograph.

“ We must welcome the future remembering that soon it will be the past, and we must respect the past remembering that at one time it was all that was humanly possible.”

- Santayana

Many elements came together to produce this publication. The story of Hancock Church is a varied and honorable one which we are proud to present.

The authors thank our predecessor historian/archivists who so lovingly and effectively preserved our records for those of us who follow.

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Barbara Callaghan, Julie Duncan, Yvette Kirby (clerk), Candy McLaughlin (co-chair), Andy McClaine, Carmen Ramos-Kalsow, Julia Potter, Sue Rockwell (co-chair), Joan Rutila (co-chair), Lisa Sandeen, Paul Shafer, and Paul Shupe.

-Yvette Kirby and Sue Rockwell
 Authors

