Newsletter

Friends of the Truro Meeting House

Dedicated to the Preservation of this Historic Truro Landmark

THE TRURO MEETING HOUSE CELEBRATES ITS 200TH JUBILEE NEXT YEAR!

We will mark the anniversary with an array of special programs that feature creative talent, many of whom live and pursue their artistic calling on the Outer Cape. A highlight will be a fundraising event to honor the Meeting House's history and support its future, to be announced in early 2027. The Jubilee's theme is ***200 Years of Gathering – Celebrating the Past, Securing Our Future.***



Brief History

On a hilltop overlooking Pamet Harbor, the Federal-style landmark has preserved its historic character since it was built in 1827 as the new house of worship for the First Congregational Parish of Truro. It looked very different from the earlier Meeting Houses where services and town meetings had been held since 1711 on the Hill of Storms. It was most notable for its bell tower; a feature not often found in New England meeting houses of the 17th and 18th centuries. It houses a rare Revere Foundry bell and was known for many generations as the Bell Meeting House.

On the ground floor, its sanctuary is filled with the original box pews and has a U-shaped gallery above with narrow wooden benches on two sides, which are no longer in public use. A few years after the new church opened the vestry was expanded at the front and a striking wallpaper of bold geometric design was installed, transforming the traditionally austere Puritan interior.

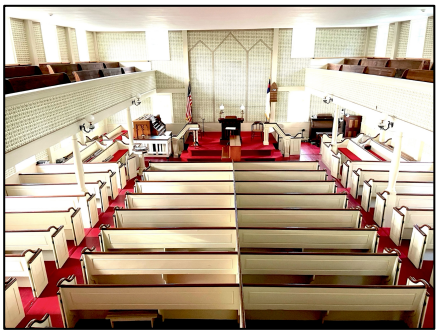
Truro had grown as an important seafaring community. The Pamet Harbor was alive with ships, shipbuilding, store houses, and maritime related trades. The town's population was now concentrated in this area, and church parishioners wanted a more convenient location. The 1827 move divided the congregation, and those left behind in the old meeting house decided to abandon it in 1840 when it was torn down. Two years later they built the Christian Union Church in Pond Village, which joined together the Methodist and Congregational religions.

For two centuries church and town government in Massachusetts were united under the state religion, and it was often difficult to separate ecclesiastical from town business. The United States Constitution, also echoed by the state's constitution, declared the separation of church and state. But change did not happen overnight, at least in Massachusetts, where until the constitution was amended in 1833, towns could levy tax dollars to support their churches. While the 1827 Meeting House was built by private subscription and the sale of church pews, town meetings continued there until 1848.

After the Civil War both the town and the Congregational Parish went into long, steady decline. By the 1950s worship was held only in summer and the building was badly in need of repair. An extensive renovation included electrical wiring, repainting, and window restoration and reproduction of the original screen-printed wallpaper. However, not until 1996 was the ancient outdoor privy replaced with indoor plumbing in a discrete addition to the west façade.

Friends Preservation & Programs

In 2012 when it was discovered that major structural repairs to the Meeting House were needed, Community Preservation Act funding was sought, and a new, non-profit organization called the Friends of the Truro Meeting House was created to initiate a multi-year phased preservation effort. As part of its mission, the Friends also began sponsoring a variety of educational and entertaining programs that have attracted thousands over the past 14 years. In a very real sense, the Meeting House has returned to its traditional role as both a spiritual home and a vibrant community gathering space.



SUMMER 2026 – SATURDAYS AT SEVEN

Our season was well-attended with enthusiastic, appreciative audiences.



Robert Kuttner – *"Notes for Next Time"*



Storyteller Andy Davis – "Reaching for the Moon" – Stories about bending the arc of the moral universe



Ice Cream Making for Kids – at the Truro Public Library



Jimmy Tingle – "Humor and Hope for Humanity"



Thornton Wilder "Our Town" – staged play reading



Cape Harmony – summer college student a capella concert



Celebrating Cole Porter – local singers with saxophonists Ken Field and Dave Wilson and ensemble



David Corn – "Mid-term elections in what has become an authoritarian country"





Charles Coe Poetry Tribute – local poets and performers led by Regie Gibson, Commonwealth of MA Poet Laureate



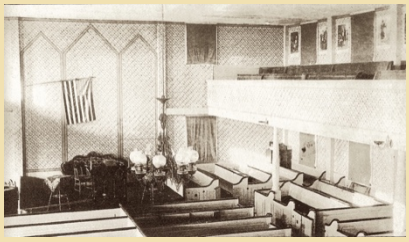
Lumos Experience – "The Beatles"

HISTORIANS CORNER

Paper on the Walls –
A History of Wallpaper in the Truro Meeting House

Built in 1827, one hundred parishioners subscribed $20 each and pews were sold toward construction, producing a building that cost $3,116.64, including its Paul Revere Foundry bell. Inside, however, we now find that the most unexpected feature was not the pulpit, gallery, or numbered pews. It was the **wallpaper**.



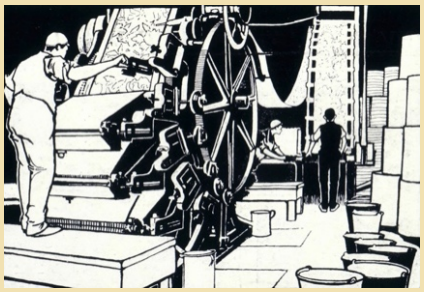


The auditorium followed the austere architectural tradition of the New England meetinghouse: a rectangular room, galleries on three sides, lime-and-hair plaster walls above wooden wainscot, and a centrally placed pulpit. In most meetinghouses of the period, walls were whitewashed, painted a plain color, or occasionally decorated with trompe-l'œil painting.

Truro was unique The wallpaper is an unusual feature, differing from the more restrained interiors normally associated with Congregational worship.

The paper therefore deserves to be understood as more than decoration. In a building designed primarily for preaching, worship, town meetings, and communal gathering, a patterned wall surface softened the severity of the plaster interior and introduced color and visual rhythm into an otherwise disciplined space.

The paper also reflected a broader early-nineteenth-century change in American taste. The invention of the continuous paper roll and surface-printing machines in the 1830s made wallpaper easier to produce and thus more affordable. By the middle of the 19th century, wallpaper was becoming increasingly available and fashionable, allowing even relatively modest buildings to imitate the refined interiors associated with prosperous domestic architecture.



Exactly when the first paper was hung remains uncertain. Contemporary records state that the wallpaper had been on the walls for *more than a century* by the 1950s when it was replaced. That evidence strongly suggests a nineteenth-century origin, but it does not prove when it was installed. Perhaps it followed the 1845 improvements when part of the south end was enclosed to expand the vestry and the interior was painted.

By the 20th century, age had taken its toll. Among other things, lightning had struck the bell tower which needed repairs, and in 1955 a major restoration of the whole building was undertaken.

The restoration included installing electricity, repairs to the bell tower, rebuilding and replastering of ceilings, and restoration of the windows. Most remarkably, the old wallpaper was reproduced by a special screen processing method and rehung by Knight Bros. for a cost of $750.00.



Today's wallpaper represents two moments in the building's history: the lost historic paper and the mid-century effort to preserve its appearance. The 1955 reproduction is itself now historic – more than seventy years old – and forms part of the meetinghouse's layered story of preservation.

The wallpaper is consequently not merely a decorative survival. It is evidence of changing ideas about worship, taste, craftsmanship, and historic preservation. In a meeting house celebrated for its plain Cape Cod architecture, the patterned walls offer an unexpected reminder that early New England religious interiors were not always austere. Truro's paper transformed the auditorium into something warmer and more visually engaging – and its careful reproduction in 1955 ensured that this distinctive character would survive into the twenty-first century.

ChatGPT and Parish records

Friends of the Truro Meeting House, Inc.
A charitable non-profit 501(c)(3) organization
PO Box 149, 3 First Parish Lane
Truro, MA 02666
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Carlotta Dyer Zilliax
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November 2026

ANNUAL REPORT

Recap: Since our founding in 2012, a total of $1,309,925 has been raised: $910,925 through Community Preservation Act grants, $137,00 through a Parish HVAC grant, and $262,000 contributed by 360 members of the Friends.

2026 Treasurer's Summary Report: This year the south façade was restored with the support of Community Preservation Act funding of $39,657 plus an additional $9,055 for maintenance related work funded by Friends' contributions. CPA funding of $6,227 for driveway restoration also was completed, again with an additional $2,500 invested by the Friends to prevent future runoff. The past summer's events were a great success bringing in record audiences for the year and raising over $4,000. Member donations to date were $10,060, and another $10,000 is hopefully projected to be raised by the year-end appeal.

2027 Will Mark the 200th Jubilee Anniversary of the Truro Meeting House: It will be celebrated not only by special programs and events, but also with the creation of an illustrated history of the Meeting House based on its 2014 listing in the National Register of Historic Places; the recent history and future vision for the First Parish Truro; the preservation work and cultural programs presented over the past 14 years by the Friends; and acknowledgment of the many who have contributed to the success of the Meeting House in recent years.

In addition, sponsors will be sought who will be listed in the history book as well as programs produced during the bicentennial celebrations. They will be acknowledged for supporting the special Jubilee endeavors and the long-term preservation of this important cultural and historic landmark.

Friends of the Truro Meeting House
Treasurer's Report (October 31, 2026)

Operating Account	Actual 2025	Total Projected 2026	Proposed Budget 2027
Beginning Balance	$ 31,126.85	$ 39,961.39	$ 27,124.40
Additions			
Memberships & Donations	26,754.30	20,000.00	20,000.00
Program Service Revenue	8,126.00	4,128.49	4,000.00
Sponsorships			11,000.00
CPA Projects	24,259.15	17,229.85	-
Transfer from Savings	-	-	-
Interest	28.36	30.00	30.00
Total Receipts	**59,167.81**	**41,388.34**	**35,030.00**
Expenditures			
Events	5,229.44	1,353.68	13,350.00
Fees	1,241.56	935.00	1,065.00
Operations	7,085.00	7,524.50	9,720.00
Outreach	2,684.85	3,427.62	3,425.00
Preservation	29,339.37	30,984.53	5,312.50
Total Expenses	**45,580.22**	**44,225.33**	**32,872.50**
Transfers			
Transfer to Savings Account	4,753.05	10,000.00	-
Total Expenditures & Transfers	**50,333.27**	**54,225.33**	**32,872.50**
Ending Balance	$ 39,961.39	$ 27,124.40	$ 29,281.90

Reserve Account			
Beginning Balance	$ 43,998.09	$ 48,799.15	$ 59,113.48
Additions			
Transfers from checking	4,753.05	10,000.00	
Interest	48.01	314.33	1,241.38
Total Receipts & Transfers	4,801.06	10,314.33	1,241.38
Ending Balance	$ 48,799.15	$ 59,113.48	$ 60,354.86

Total Cash Position	$ 88,760.54	$ 86,237.88	$ 89,636.76

