

Our First Meetinghouse

Meeting houses were located in the center of the community, near a crossroad and preferably on a hill. The site chosen, later called Old Meetinghouse Hill, was not at the corner of Center Road and Hartford Turnpike, but a half mile to the east near the corner of Bamforth Road. Recall that the **Old Burial Ground of North Bolton** was established on Bamforth Road in 1751, ten years before the church was planned. The cemetery would have been near the center of the community at the time.

The site for the church was at the top of the hill overlooking the Tankerhoosen and Connecticut River Valleys. From the hill parishioners could see the steeple of Thomas Hooker's Church in Hartford. A wooded half acre site was given by the heirs of Samuel Bartlett. Familiar names on the building committee were Allis, Dart, Strong, Thrall, King and Olcott.

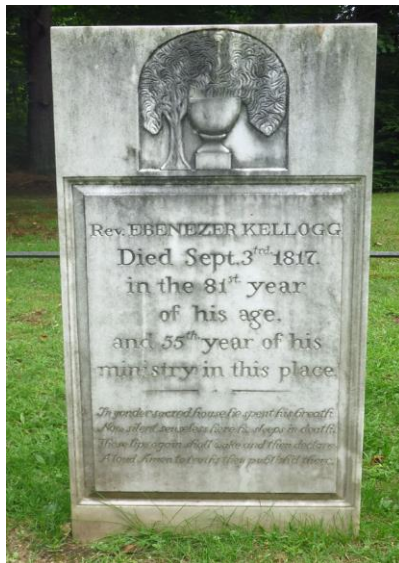


THE OLD MEETING HOUSE AT NORTH BOLTON

Pen and ink drawing based on description furnished by Allyn Stanley Kellogg.

The meeting house was raised on May 6, 1762 and the first worship was held there on June 20. Building the church was probably much like an old fashioned barn raising where the community came together for a weekend with whole families participating. The meeting house fronted the highway on the South with horse sheds and a school house located nearby. The church had 35 members who transferred from Bolton.

When first used it was little more than a shelter for the congregation. Slow progress was made in fitting the building owing to the slender means of the people. It remained without pews until 1770 and was not plastered until 1774.



Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg's Gravestone.

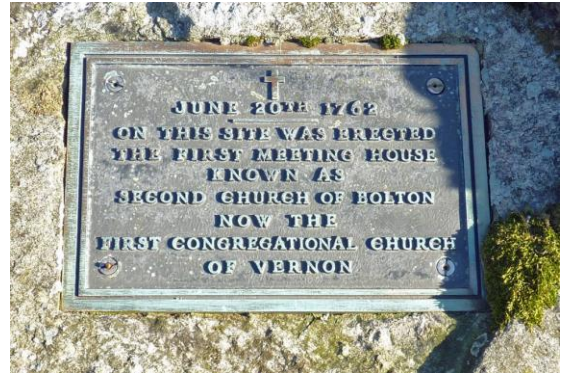
On March 29, 1762 they voted to call **Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg**, a 25 year-old Yale graduate, as their first minister. He read his lengthy sermons, which were serious discourses carefully setting forth the doctrines and duties of religion. The theology of the church was stern in theory and strict in practice. After serving 55 years he died in 1817 at the age of 80 and was buried in the Old Burying Ground on Bamforth Road. Many of his descendants remained in the area as successful farmers, landowners and mill operators.

The meeting house was far more than a place of worship. Other than schoolhouses, which were established early, this was the only public building in town. The church was the center of community life in rural New England. Government meetings and other important gatherings took place there. Each Sunday farmers would travel from their homesteads to the Meetinghouse to worship, meet their neighbors and 'tell the news.'

To reach the meeting house from the west worshipers climbed the field at Meetinghouse Hill. On the path a fieldstone bridge was built to cross a small brook and marshy area. Before church on Sundays the young women from the surrounding farms would bring their shoes and stockings, and sometimes their dresses to a nearby house where they would change into their good clothes before they started up the hill, changing again on their return from the afternoon service.

By the early 1820's the old meeting house was no longer adequate for the growing town, and in 1826 a new church was built on the West side of Hartford Turnpike at the corner of Center Road. The original meeting house was moved to Rockville in 1831 or 1832 and made the east wing of the old Frank Mill, later known as the Florence Mill.

In 1801 the [Hartford and Tolland Turnpike Company](#) was chartered to build and maintain the road from East Hartford to Tolland; a main route from Hartford to Boston. It may have been at this time the road was straightened bypassing Meetinghouse Hill. Vernon received its charter in 1808 allowing us to set our own priorities and we set about improving our roads, building new ones and abandoning others. Thus in 1829, three years after the new church opened, the road east of Tinker's store, leading by the old meeting house was closed.



Memorial Plaque on Sunnyview Drive.

The old path up Meetinghouse Hill was left much as it was in pioneer days.