



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Contact: Brian McNiff
Telephone: 617-727-9180

October 8, 2014

**FIRST PARISH CHURCH OF PLYMOUTH APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the First Parish Church of Plymouth for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its September 10, 2014, meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of the First Parish Church in the National Register will bring further recognition to a well-preserved historic church that also functions as a memorial to the Pilgrim settlers.”

The First Parish Church of Plymouth is a Unitarian Universalist church located at the western end of Town Square in Plymouth Center. Town Square served as the center of religious and civic life in Plymouth from the mid-17th through the 20th centuries, and still contains Old Burial Hill, the town’s primary burial ground for some 300 years, as well as three extant buildings that contributed to the community’s history: the 1899 First Parish Church; The Church of the Pilgrimage, built in 1840 by the Congregational Parish that had separated from First Parish; and the Town House, built in 1749.

-more-

The prominent Boston architectural firm of Hartwell & Richardson designed the First Parish Church—the fifth meetinghouse built for the congregation, and the fourth located at this site—in the Romanesque Revival style. The only known example of this architectural style in Plymouth, the church is of Quincy granite with Ohio sandstone trim, and retains its exterior character-defining features. The building’s interior also retains important features, including heavy oak hammer-beam roof trusses and memorial stained-glass windows, some of which were designed by Edward Speck Perry and made by Tiffany Studios. The church’s belfry houses a ten-bell carillon, installed in 1920, as well as a bell recast from fragments of a Paul Revere bell that was damaged when the earlier meetinghouse was destroyed by fire.

The First Parish Church is associated with the Separatists, or Pilgrims, who sailed to Plymouth aboard the *Mayflower*, landing in late December, 1620. When its fourth meetinghouse was destroyed by fire in 1892, the congregation agreed that the new meetinghouse should also be a memorial to the Pilgrims’ spirit of religious liberty and tolerance. The church’s arched front entrance is an architectural reference to the Norman churches of the Pilgrims, and is said to be modeled on the entrance to St. Helen’s Church in Austerfield, England, where prominent Separatist William Bradford was baptized in 1590.

The vestibule contains several tablets memorializing the congregation’s history: one proclaims the 1676 covenant of the congregation; another lists parishes established as the colony grew, including Duxbury, Marshfield, Eastham, and Plympton; and two additional tablets list ministers and Elders who served First Parish throughout its history. Many of the building’s stained-glass windows depict notable moments in the story of the Pilgrims, such as the signing of the Mayflower Compact below deck aboard the *Mayflower*. The church remains open to tours, which highlight the architecture, commemorative tablets and windows, and other decorative elements illustrating the First Parish’s role in the settlement of the Plymouth colony.

The First Parish Church of Plymouth is one of 8 historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

-more-

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation's official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

-End-