



*The  
First Baptist Church  
In America*

*Self Guided Tour*

**THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN AMERICA  
75 North Main Street**

**Providence, Rhode Island 02903**

Welcome to The First Baptist Church in America. This is the oldest Baptist church in America and was founded by Roger Williams over 375 years ago in 1638. The present meetinghouse, over 200 years old, was erected in 1774 and 1775 on the eve of the American Revolution. This church has a proud past, a vital present, and a hopeful future. We invite you to share this present time while you tour the Meeting House.

This self-guided tour will provide you with a brief history of the church and will indicate many of the interesting historical and architectural aspects of the Meeting House.

We will begin in the **MANNING ROOM**, named in honor of Dr. James Manning, who was the first President of Brown University and pastor of this church when the present meetinghouse was built.



The story of this church begins with **ROGER WILLIAMS**, one of the more than 15,000 Puritans who departed from England in the 1630s to escape religious and political persecution. Many of these people sailed to America to establish the colony of Massachusetts Bay. Roger Williams had joined in 1629 in planning the exodus; he was a friend of the leaders, including the first governor, John Winthrop. However, Williams was not among the first wave of Puritans who arrived in the summer of 1630 to establish Boston. He came in February 1631 and immediately revealed that his idea of the colony differed from the views of most of the others.

He refused to accept appointment as assistant minister of the Boston church unless the church completely repudiated its ties to the Church of England. Williams went off to Salem where he stayed briefly before moving to the Plymouth Colony. He lived in Plymouth for about 18 months before returning to Salem to become the minister of the church there. Now, he began to preach his doctrine of SOUL LIBERTY, which denied the right of the civil authorities to interfere in matters of religion and conscience. He demanded SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE, saying that the worship of God required religious freedom. His ideas threatened the religious and political foundations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In addition, Williams declared that it was a "SOLEMN PUBLIC LIE" to say that the King of England had the right to grant land to the settlers that had not first been purchased from the Indians. This idea challenged the legality of the land titles in the colony, thereby threatening its economic foundations.

By 1635, the authorities had had enough of Williams's radical ideas, and he was tried and convicted of sedition, heresy, and failure to take an oath of allegiance to the colony. Under order of banishment to England, Williams fled in February 1636, walking through the snow from Salem to Narragansett Bay, where he spent the rest of the winter with friendly Wampanoags. That spring, he and some companions from Salem crossed the Seekonk River and began a settlement on land that Williams purchased from the Narragansetts. He called it "Providence" because of God's Providence towards him. This colony was a place where everyone would have religious freedom. All those who were "DISTRESSED OF CONSCIENCE" could find SOUL LIBERTY in Providence.

Williams, an ordained minister, soon gathered the faithful for regular worship in his home, and, after about two years, this little congregation became the first Baptist church in America. Roger Williams, the ex-Anglican priest, ex-Puritan and Separatist, had become a BAPTIST. He now believed in BELIEVER'S BAPTISM, not infant baptism. Williams re-baptized his congregation, and he was the first pastor. However, his spiritual journey did not end here. Within months he came to doubt that any existing institution could call itself the church. He concluded that the church had died when the Roman Emperor Theodosius had made Christianity the state religion of the Empire back around 390 A.D. He believed that all of the rites and practices of the church had become invalid and corrupt. So, in the summer of 1639 he resigned, but he cherished to the end of his long life the belief that the church he planted was based on Scripture. He remained steadfast in his defense of religious freedom, and his influence caused Rhode Island to be a unique haven of religious liberty in the 17th century.

The tiny Baptist church lived on without Williams, but it had no meetinghouse until 1700. In that year the pastor, PARDON TILLINGHAST, erected a meetinghouse on a piece of his own property several blocks from this site on North Main Street. Then, in 1726, a second, larger meetinghouse was built to accommodate the growing congregation. Providence continued to grow in the mid-18th century, and the Great Awakening increased the number of Baptists all over New England. Finally, in 1774 and 1775, the present meetinghouse was built. Its size and beauty indicated that the direction of Baptist work in Providence had come under the dynamic leadership of James Manning.

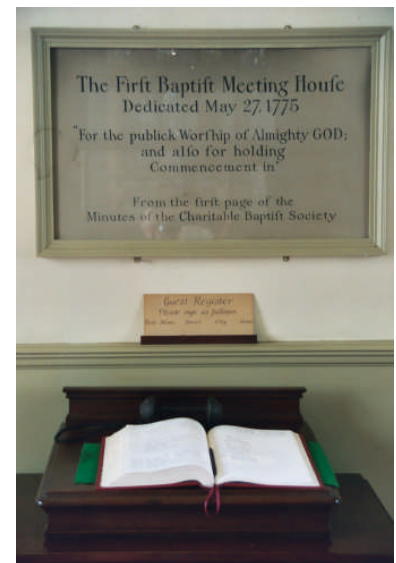
Dr. Manning had been dispatched by the Philadelphia Baptist Association to Rhode Island to start a Baptist college and to collect some of the Baptist churches in New England to a Regular Baptist association. As a result, Brown University was founded in 1764, and the Warren Baptist Association started. In 1770, the college moved to Providence, and the "College Edifice" (now called, "University Hall") was built. Dr. Manning became pastor of Providence's Baptist church, and one of the consequences of his pastorate was the building of the Meeting House.

Originally when the structure was built, there were no rooms on the ground floor except a rough cellar dug into the hillside. The town hearse was stored there and was rolled out the front doors of the meetinghouse when needed. Local businessmen sometimes rented the space for storage; for example, the town's undertaker stored barrels of rum there at one time. Finally, in 1819, a Sunday school was started, and the entire basement area was eventually excavated to make classrooms.

When the Meeting House was renovated and restored in 1957, this room was redecorated in its present fashion and named in honor of Dr. Manning. You may wish to view the various objects and memorabilia in the cases. Included are Roger Williams's tea kettle, a Bible which belonged to the Dexter family, a colonial carpenter's hammer, found under the eaves during the 1957 restoration, whale oil lamps used for light in the 1830s, and cannon balls used to counterweight the chandelier in the auditorium.

**PLEASE PROCEED TO THE AUDITORIUM LEVEL OF THE MEETING HOUSE:**

Stop at the Guest Book in the foyer.



As you sign the Guest Book, please notice that the plaque on the wall in front of you indicates another function of the Meeting House. It was dedicated May 27, 1775, "**FOR THE PUBLICK WORSHIP OF ALMIGHTY GOD, AND ALSO FOR HOLDING COMMENCEMENT IN.**" From the completion of the Meeting House until the present, Brown University has held its commencement exercises here. On graduation day, the seniors march down the hill and formally receive their degrees. Then they proceed up the hill to where the rest of the ceremonies take place. This is necessary because the classes are now so large that the students pack every seat, leaving no room for friends, family, or faculty in the building.

### **NOW ENTER THE AUDITORIUM, AND PROCEED TO THE FRONT OF THE ROOM.**

This auditorium reflects the architectural values of the 18th century and the Age of the Enlightenment: balance, reason, and symmetry. What you see here is one of the finest examples in Colonial America of what is called "Georgian Architecture," named because it became popular during the reigns of King George I and II in England. The space also reflects the New England plain meetinghouse style. This is seen in the fact that the room is square (80 by 80 feet), generally plain in its ornamentation (white walls, clear windows, no crosses, statues, or icons) and has a pulpit where an altar would stand in an unreformed church.

Most American builders in the Colonial Era had no formal architectural training but often used pattern and design books written by English and European architects. JOSEPH BROWN, architect of this meetinghouse, used the 1728 *Book of Architecture* of James Gibbs, a student of the great English architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Drawings of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields and Marylebone Chapel, both London churches designed by Gibbs, greatly influenced the appearance of the Meeting House. For example, the steeple is a copy of one designed by Gibbs.

Observe the classical details that mark the Georgian style: the fluted columns carved to look like classical pillars; the Palladian window above the pulpit; the broken triangular pediments over the doors; the urns with the flame; the "meander" -- that squiggly line that runs along the edge of the balcony; and, of course, the balance and symmetry of the pillars, windows and doors.



Each of the columns is a solid oak tree. When the Meeting House was built, some people gave money, some gave their labor and others donated materials, such as these great trees. If you look at the pillar in the rear on the *far left*, you will see the effect of aging and drying on a solid piece of wood. The column split open, and the fluting was distorted. The building was unheated for its first fifty years so that the columns experienced the effects of hot and cold weather. Now, look at the pillar at the *rear* on the *aisle* on your *right*; it appears to be leaning. That is an optical illusion caused by the fluting of the column spiraling along the grain of the wood. All of the carving was done by hand.

The Meeting House benefited from political troubles in Massachusetts on the eve of the American Revolution. The Boston Tea Party took place in December 1773; and the British responded with the Coercive Acts in the Spring of 1774, which among other things closed the port of Boston. As a result, Boston's ship builders and carpenters were idled just as construction on this building was started. Many of those men came to Providence to work on what was the greatest building project in all of New England at the time.

The 185-foot steeple was put up in 3 1/2 days! It was constructed in sections on the ground and then pulled up, like a telescope being extended, one section through the other. It has withstood the winters and hurricanes since 1775, making it almost the only steeple in Providence that has not fallen to wind and lightning. In September 2002 the steeple was fully lighted for the first time, making it a beacon in the city at night.



This is one of the largest church structures built in Colonial America. It was built to seat 1,200 people, even though Providence, in 1775, was a town of only 4,321 and the Baptist church had less than 150 members. However, Baptists expected to continue to grow as a result of the revivals that had swept the colonies in the preceding decades. Also remember that the building was erected to be used for the graduation exercises of the new Baptist college (Brown University). In addition, some of the builders were leading figures in the town of Providence, and they wanted to erect a meetinghouse to match their expectations for Providence itself. This structure was one of several large buildings erected between 1760 and 1820 as Providence challenged and surpassed Newport to become the leading town in southern New England.

When the Meeting House was built, no musical instruments were used by the Baptists, so the organ that you see in the gallery is of a later date. A small second balcony existed in the



place where the organ was eventually installed. Dr. Manning had reintroduced congregational singing in the 1770s, and the first musical instrument used here was a chello in 1804. In 1834, an organ was installed by E. & G.G. Hook of Boston, and the present organ box is the original one. The organ itself was rebuilt and enlarged in 1884 (Hilborne T. Roosevelt), 1920s (Skinner & Co.) 1957 (Wicks Organ Co.), and finally 2000 by the Foley-Baker Organ Co.



Until the early 1930s the pews on the main floor were rented or owned by families or individuals. The pew rents paid the salaries of the pastor, organist and sexton and the general expenses of the building. The "high rent district" was in the middle, front section. Those who were unable to buy or rent a pew could sit free in the balcony. No one owns a pew today. The present "slip pews" were installed in 1832, replacing the original square, high-backed pews. The little drawers that you see under the seats in many pews were for personal items, such as glasses, gloves, Bible and hymnal, belonging to the pew owners.

**NOW WALK ALONG THE AISLE TO THE LEFT UNTIL YOU ARE OPPOSITE THE CHANDELIER IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM.**

This great treasure was given to the church in 1792 by Hope Brown in memory of her father, Nicholas Brown, who was one of the leading figures in the church when the Meeting House was built. It was probably created by the Waterford Glass Company in Ireland. The chandelier was lighted for the first time in the evening after Hope Brown's wedding to Thomas Poynton Ives. Originally lit by candles, it was piped for gas in 1884 and converted to electricity in 1914. In the 1850s a number of large gas chandeliers were hung from the ceiling, but these were removed in the 1880s.



If you look to the front of the auditorium at the high pulpit, you will see it as it was restored in 1957. In the course of the 19th century, the original high pulpit, the Palladian window and the sounding board -- that flat object hanging above the pulpit to keep the preacher's voice from bouncing off the ceiling -- were removed. In 1884, a small addition was added to the back of the building, and the area enclosed within the pilasters and arch was opened to reveal a large, Victorian-style baptistry and a stained glass window. The window was totally out of keeping with the plain meetinghouse style and was soon shuttered. You may still view it, but you will have to go outside to the back of the building to see it. The 1957 restoration put back the wall, the Palladian window, the high pulpit and the sounding board. Today, the baptistry is behind the window and the pulpit in an elevated position so that everyone can witness the baptisms.



**THIS CONCLUDES YOUR TOUR OF THE MEETING HOUSE.** You can take away a memento of your visit with us by purchasing one of the souvenir items that are available downstairs. In addition, there are contribution boxes located in the building. Donations for the preservation of this historic shrine are sincerely and gratefully received.

Please return this booklet to the office, and they will be pleased to assist you and to answer further questions. Thank you for visiting The First Baptist Church in America. We pray that you will return to worship with us.

# The Organ of The First Baptist Church in America Providence, RI

A history and analysis by Stephan J. Drexler, Voicer and Tonal Finisher

In 1834 Elias & George Greenleaf Hook built an organ, their Opus 11, for the Charitable Baptist Society of Providence, Rhode Island, and was a gift from Nicholas Brown. This case consisted of the central 5 sections of the present case and most of the side panels. Hilborne L. Roosevelt added the outer 2 flats of pipes in 1884 to accommodate an expanded pedal division.

This instrument had about 25 stops and typified organs built in New England during that period. This organ is described [in *The History of the Organ in the United States*, written by Orpha Ochse, Indiana University Press, 1975; ISBN 0-253-32830-6] as being "nearly similar" to the 1831 Thomas Appelon organ for The Bowdoin Street Church in Boston which was as follows:

Great - GGG -f358 notes

- 8' 1<sup>st</sup> Open Diapason
- 8' 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Diapason
- 8' 1<sup>st</sup> Stopped Flute (bass?)
- 8' 2<sup>nd</sup> Stopped Flute (treble)
- 4' Principal
- 2 2/3' Twelfth
- 2' Fifteenth
- 1 3/5' Tierce
- III Sesquialter
- 8' Trumpet
- 4' Clarion

Swell -f-f3 37 notes

- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Stopped Diapason
- 8' Dulciana
- 4' Principal
- III Cornet
- 8' Hautboy
- 8' Cremona

Choir -f-f3 37 notes

- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Stopped Diapason
- 8' Dulciana
- 4' Principal
- 4' Flute
- 8' Cremona

Pedal GGGG-E 21 notes

- 16' Open Diapason  
(the lowest GGGG would have been 21' long)

This organ survived basically intact for 50 years until 1884. In 1884 Hilborne L. Roosevelt of New York rebuilt the organ as his Opus 150, using only the case, the Swell 8' Stopped Diapason, and the 16' Pedal Open Diapason. This instrument had approximately the same number of stops as the E. & G.G. Hook organ. The most visible change was that the case was expanded at the sides nearly 4 feet to accept the pedal pipes as they were placed at the sides of the new manual chest. The Roosevelt was as follows (relying on inscriptions on existing pipes and some typical Roosevelt organs of the period):

Great -CC-a3, 58 notes

- 16' Open Diapason (tenor C?)
- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Doppel Flote

Swell -CC-a3, 58 notes

- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Stopped Diapason (Hook 8' Viola di Gamba rank)
- 8' Salicional



4' Octave  
 4' Hohl Flote  
 2 2/3' Octave Quint  
 2' Super Octave  
 8' Trumpet

8' Voix Celeste (tenor C)  
 4' Gemshorn  
 4' Harmonic Flute  
 2' Flautino  
 III Cornet  
 8' Cornopean  
 8' Oboe/ Bassoon

Choir –CC- a3, 58 notes

8' Violin Diapason  
 8' Concert Flute  
 4' Fugara  
 8' Clarinet

Pedal CCC-F, 30 notes

16' Open Diapason  
 (Hook rank; lowest GGGG cut to 16' from 21')  
 16' Bourdon  
 8' Violin Cello

This organ was altered and added to by Ernest M. Skinner twice in the 1920's. Some of the pipes were from his left-over bin and were not always complete as one style of pipe. The Swell 8' Voix Celeste was marked Aeoline and the bottom 12 pipes did not match the rest of the set. The 8' Erzähler had a cylindrical bass octave marked Aeoline. The 8' Flugel Horn was a smaller scale than usual. The 8' Flauto Dolce and the 8' Flute Celeste were both extremely thin walled and have unmatched bass octaves. Skinner never put this organ on his opus list since he never really changed the organ mechanism, and only changed one or two stops at a time. By 1958 the organ action had become unreliable and was no longer an intact style of instrument. Wicks Organ Co. of Highland, IL rebuilt the organ as their Opus 3801. Consisting of 3 manuals and 31 ranks, this organ was not satisfactory from the very beginning due to the pipework not being adjusted to the new style action and the tones were muted and dull for the next 40 years. The specification was as follows:

Great CC-c4, 61 notes

8' Open Diapason 1884  
 8' Principal Flute  
 8' Erzähler (Skinner)  
 8' Swell Stopped Diapason  
 8' Swell Aeoline Celeste  
 8' Swell Dolce Celeste  
 4' Prestant 1884  
 4' Geigen Principal 1958  
 4' Harmonic Flute 1884  
 2 2/3' Octave Quint 1884  
 2' Super Octave (from 4' Geigen Principal)  
 2 2/3' Nasard (from 16' Bourdon)  
 IV Mixture 2' 1958  
 8' Trumpet 1958  
 4' Clarion (from 8' Trumpet)

Swell CC-c461 notes

16' Bourdon 1958  
 1884 & 1834  
 8' Open Diapason 1884  
 8' Stopped Diapason  
 (extension of 16' Bourdon)  
 8' Salicional 1884  
 8' Aeoline Celeste  
 (Skinner)  
 8' Dolce (Skinner)  
 8' Dolce Celeste  
 (Skinner)  
 4' Gemshorn 1884  
 4' Hohl Flote 1884  
 2' Flageolet  
 (from 4' Hohl Flute)  
 1 1/3' Larigot  
 (from 16' Bourdon)  
 8' Flugel Horn (Skinner)  
 8' Cromorne 1958  
 4' Clarion 1958  
 Tremolo

Choir CC-c4, 61 notes

16' Dulciana 1958

8' Spitz Flute 1958  
8' Nason Flute 1958  
8' Dulciana (from 16' Dulciana)  
4' Rohr Flute 1958  
4' Dulciana (from 16' Dulciana)  
2 2/3' Dulciana (from 16' Dulciana)  
2' Piccolo (from 4' Rohr Flute)  
2' Dulciana (from 16' Dulciana)  
8' Cor di Amour 1958  
Tremolo

Pedal CCC-G, 32 notes

16' Open Diapason 1834  
16' Swell Lieblich Gedeckt  
8' Violin Cello 1884  
8' Swell Salicional  
4' Swell Gemshorn  
4' Choir Spitz Flute  
8' Great Trumpet

16' Bourdon 1884  
16' Choir Dulciana  
8' Swell Gedeckt  
5 1/3' Quint  
(from Swell 16' Bourdon)  
2' Choir Piccolo  
8' Swell Cromorne

This organ remained mechanically sound into the 1980's, and by January of 1999 the church contracted with Foley-Baker Incorporated of Bolton, Connecticut to rebuild the organ. Nineteen new ranks were added, to complete the divisions, and gain maximum flexibility in the performance of music from as many styles and periods as possible. The organ was completely dismantled and removed from the case in January of 2000 and the work commenced.

The divisions were reconfigured to let the Great and Swell divisions speak directly into the body of the church and to place the Choir division nearest to the choir singers. The pedal was also placed for its clearest speech as an accompaniment to polyphonic music and as solo in cantus firmus style of writing, where the melodies are placed in the pedal department. The specification now contains 2843 pipes, 80 stops, and 49 ranks (not counting Vox Humana) and is as follows:

Great CC-c4, 61 notes; 5' W.P.  
16' Double Diapason (1-12-Choir Dulciana; 13-61 from Gt 8' Open Diapason)  
8' Open Diapason 1-12 1834 façade 4' W.P.; 13-61 1884; 61 pipes  
8' Harmonic Flute (1-12 Pr. Flute bass, 13-61 Gt 4' Harm. Flute; 1884; revoiced; 61 pipes)  
8' Choir Dulciana  
8' Choir Flute Celeste II  
4' Octave 1884; 61 pipes  
4' Rohr Flute 1958 (revoiced; 73 pipes)  
2 2/3' Twelfth 1884; 61 pipes  
2' Fifteenth 1958 (rescaled and revoiced; 61 pipes)  
2' Rohr Fife (from 4' Rohr Flute)  
IV-V 2' Mixture 2000; 274 pipes  
16' Trumpet 2000; 12 pipes  
8' Trumpet 1958; 73 pipes  
4' Clarion (from 8' Trumpet)

Chimes

M.I.D.I.

Swell CC-c4; 61 notes; 4' W.P. (Enclosed)  
16' Bourdon 1958; 12 pipes  
8' Open Diapason 1884; 61 pipes  
8' Stopped Diapason 1834; 61 pipes  
8' Salicional 1884; 61 pipes  
8' Voix Celeste (Skinner) 61 pipes  
4' Principal 1884; Swell Gemshorn revoiced; 73 pipes  
4' Hohl Flute 1884; 73 pipes  
2 2/3' Nazard (Skinner Erzahler) 61 pipes  
2' Octave (from 4' Principal)  
2' Flageolet (from 4' Hohl Flute)  
1 3/5' Tierce 2000; 61 pipes  
IV 2' Mixture 1958 & 2000 (recomposed and revoiced Wicks Gt Mixture) 244 pipes  
16' Bassoon 2000; 12 pipes  
8' Trumpet 1958 (Cor di Amour from Wicks Choir revoiced and opened up) 73 pipes  
8' Flugel Horn (Skinner) 61 pipes  
8' Vox Humana (not installed as of May 2001)  
4' Clarion (from 8' Trumpet)

Tremulant

Swell to Swell 16'

M.I.D.I.

Choir CC-c4, 61 notes 4" W.P. (Enclosed)  
16' Dulciana 1958; 73 pipes  
8' Spitz Principal 1958 (8' Spitz Flute revoiced) 61 pipes  
8' Gedeckt 1958 (8' Nason Flute revoiced) 61 pipes  
8' Dulciana (from 16' Dulciana)  
8' Flauto Dolce (Skinner) regulated as found; 73 pipes  
8' Flute Celeste (Skinner) voiced to matched 8' Fl. Dolce; 73 pipes  
4' Principal 2000; 61 pipes  
4' Wald Flute 1884; Gt Principal Flute Tenor octave up; 73 pipes  
4' II Flauto Dolce Celeste  
2 2/3' Nasat 2000; 73 pipes  
2' Piccolo (from 4' Wald Flute)  
1 3/5' Terz 2000; 61 pipes  
1 1/3' Quint (from 2 2/3' Nasat)  
III Scharff 1 1/3' 2000; 183 pipes  
16' Basset Horn 2000; 12 pipes  
8' Cromorne 1958; 61 pipes  
4' Rohr Schalmei 2000; 61 pipes  
8' Trompette Harmonique 2000; (5' W.P.) 61 pipes

Choir Continued

Tremulant

Choir to Choir 16'

M.I.D.I.

Pedal CCC-G, 32 notes; 4' W.P.  
32' Contra Bourdon 2000 Digital Electronic voice  
32' Lieblich Bourdon 2000 Digital Electronic voice

16' Open Diapason 1834; rescaled smaller with Haskel Tube inserts 28 pipes  
     16' Bourdon 1884; 32 pipes  
     16' Swell Lieblich Gedeckt  
     16' Choir Dulciana  
 8' Octave 1-12-1958 & 13-32-2000; 32 pipes  
     8' Bass Flute 2000; 12 pipes  
     8' Swell Gedeckt  
     8' Violin Cello 1884; 32 pipes  
     8' Choir Dulciana  
     4' Choral Bass 2000; 32 pipes  
     4' Choir Wald Flute  
     4' Swell Salicional  
 III-IV Mixture 2000 (draws 4' C.B. too) 71 pipes  
 32' Contra Bombard 2000; Digital Electronic voice  
 16' Trombone 2000; to typical Roosevelt scale; 32 pipes  
     16' Swell Bassoon  
     8' Great Trumpet  
     8' Choir Cromorne  
     4' Swell Clarion  
     4' Choir Rohr Schalmei  
         M.I.D.I.  
         Couplers  
         Great to Pedal  
         Swell to Pedal  
         Choir to Pedal  
         Swell to Great 16'  
         Swell to Great  
         Choir to Great 16  
         Choir to Great  
         Swell to Swell 16'  
         Choir to Choir 16  
 Manual Transfer (Reverses Great and Choir Keyboards)  
     Pedal to Great  
     Accessories  
     New Manual and Pedal Keyboards  
     Multi Level Combination Action  
     Programmable Crescendos and Tuttis  
     M.I.D.I. on all Keyboards  
     Electrically Driven Zimbelstern (on Toe Stud Reversible Only)  
     Adjustable Bench with Back Rest  
 Sequencer with Record (3 ½" floppy disc)& Playback by Viscount

## **Historical Notes**

- 1638 Roger Williams and his companions founded the First Baptist Church in America. "Soul liberty" was and continues to be its watchword.
- 1692 First Baptist Church helped to organize the General Six Principle Baptist Association, the first Baptist association in America.
- 1700 Pardon Tillinghast, then pastor, constructed at his own expense a meeting- house on a lot he owned on North Main Street.
- 1726 A new meetinghouse, forty by forty feet, was erected at the corner of North Main and Smith Streets next to the first church building.
- 1774-75 The Charitable Baptist Society secured a charter from the colonial legislature, allowing it to own property and to use the same for the support of pastors. It immediately began to build the present Meeting House, which was completed in May 1775 and dedicated: "For the publick Worship of Almighty GOD, and also for holding Commencement in." The auditorium is eighty by eighty feet, and seats about 1200 persons. The steeple is 185 feet in height.
- 1782 The First Baptist Church joined the Warren Association, the first Regular Baptist association in New England, and soon assumed its leadership. The fifteenth pastor, Stephen Gano, served as Moderator from 1805 to 1824.
- 1792 The large crystal chandelier was brought from Ireland and installed.
- 1805 First Baptist Church helped to establish the Second Baptist Church of Providence. From then until 1919, it helped to found twelve churches in the Providence area.
- 1806 Jonathan Going, whose work led to the founding of Newton Theological Institution and to the American Baptist Home Mission Society, was baptized here in 1806 and licensed to the ministry by First Baptist in 1809.
- 1807 Women of First Baptist Church founded the Female Mite Society, the first missionary society in Rhode Island. The idea spread to other Rhode Island churches, and their home mission work led in 1825 to the establishment of the Rhode Island Baptist State Convention.
- 1814 Stephen Gano was one of the four delegates from New England to the gathering in Philadelphia, which formed the first national convention of Baptists in America. The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination was established to support the foreign mission work of Adoniram and Ann Judson.
- 1819 Young women and men established a Sunday school in the vestry of the Meeting House, leading to the ground floor being excavated and finished for Sunday School use.

- 1825 The Rhode Island Baptist State Convention was begun in the Meeting House and Stephen Gano was its first President.
- 1830s Changes in the auditorium saw the high pulpit and square box pews replaced by a low pulpit and slip pews (1832), the organ installed (1834), and an interior baptistry placed beneath the floor of the pulpit (1838).
- 1884 An addition was made to the east end of the building in which were installed a new baptistry and stained glass window. The organ was rebuilt and enlarged, and the ceilings were painted several colors.
- 1938 In its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the church officially adopted the name "First Baptist Church in America."
- 1957-58 With a grant from John D. Rockefeller Jr. the entire building was renovated and strengthened, paint returned to its 18<sup>th</sup> century colors, the organ enlarged with a third manual added, and the high pulpit rebuilt.
- 1980s The steeple, exterior and sanctuary were restored again.
- 1988 America's first Baptist church celebrated its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- 2000 The organ is rebuilt by the Foley-Baker Company.
- 2001 The steeple was fully lighted for the first time.
- 2006 Dan Ivins is called as the 36<sup>th</sup> Minister of the Church.

## Ministry Staff

**Pastor**  
**Associate Pastor**  
**Minister of Music**  
**Administrative Assistant**  
**Bookkeeper**  
**Sexton**  
**Assistant Sexton**  
**Child Care Worker**

Rev. Dr. Dan Ivins  
Dr. Linda Bausserman  
Stephen T. Martorella  
Holly B. Edwards  
Anne H. Gagan  
W. Peter Forsstrom  
Frank Nicholson  
Ivy Bermudez

### The First Baptist Church in America

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