

The following was taken from the Souvenir Edition of the The Middletown Tribune, dated 1896. It was lent to us for this reproduction by Mike Giuliano, a local resident. Excerpts include short articles regarding the churches that existed in Portland at the time, and some of their histories. The writing itself is classic late nineteenth century, and gives an extraordinary view of the time period.

First Congregational Church



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

This is the oldest of Portland's Church Societies. As far back as 1710 a meeting was held for the building of a meeting house for the preaching of the gospel and parish privileges were granted by the General Assembly in 1714.

After considerable strife as to location a house of worship was erected on "Hall Hill," and October 25, 1721, Rev. Daniel Newell, the first pastor, was ordained. He was a native of Bristol, a graduate of Yale College and died in 1731.

A new meeting house succeeded the first one in 1748 and in this, in addition to religious services, all town business was transacted from 1766 to 1799. Previous to 1843 the corporate name of the society had been the "First Ecclesiastical Society of Chatham," but that year it was changed to the "First Ecclesiastical Society of Portland." The present church edifice was erected in 1850 and was dedicated the 18th of December of that year. It is of Gothic architecture and the church tower is adorned by a handsome and valuable clock, the munificent gift of the late Sylvester

Gildersleeve in 1867. The commodious and handsome parsonage on Main Street opposite the church was erected in 1868 and in 1877 a fine pipe organ was purchased and placed in the church. The Sabbath School of the society was organized in 1820 and has been successfully continued.

The present pastor, Rev. Wesley W. Smith, is a Pennsylvanian. He attended the Wyoming Seminary, a preparatory School at Kingston, Pa., was graduated from Wesleyan University in 1881 and from Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J. in 1891. He was in the Methodist ministry from 1883 to 1894. He came to Portland, March 1, 1894, and was installed May 2, 1894, the Rev. I.C. Meserve presiding at the council of installation.