

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
TEWKSBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Douglas W. Sears, M.Div., JD. President  
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1637 Wamesit Settled – 9 of 13 Colonies had Established Churches: all 6 New England states.

1650 Cambridge Platform approved Congregational Church form of self-government.

Government financial support of the state church: assessments to pay ministers and rents from glebe lands – i.e., “glebe,” a piece of land providing income as part of clergyman’s benefits.

Government control over the creeds, order of worship, polity, and clerical appointments of the state church.

Mandatory attendance at worship services in the state church, prohibitions on church services by others, and required licensure to open a meeting house for nonconformists.

Use of the state church to record births, marriages, and deaths; to perform all marriages and funerals; and to administer tax revenues for the care of the poor and widows.

Religious tests. Public office and voting rights confined to members of the state church or a broader test to include non-conformists.

1655 Billerica Incorporated – same day as Chelmsford, Groton.

1658 Savoy Declaration of Faith (GB) reconstructed parts of church govt; gave local autonomy.

1734 34 families petitioned Great & General Court to be incorporated as a town (2<sup>nd</sup> attempt).

1736 Petition granted: Rev. Sampson Spalding called; first Church building erected.

1776 Issues of day: mandatory taxation; religious oath for gov. officials; mandatory attendance.

1780 Mass. Constitution took effect – religion hot topic until 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Mass. Const.

1788 First attempt at making U.S. Constitution failed due to a lack of emphasis on religion.

1789 U.S. Constitution took effect; Art. VI prohibited oaths as condition for national office.

1791 Establishment Clause in Bill of Rights prohibits creation of national church.

“Established” meant government provided direct aid to the church.

Did not eliminate established churches where operating.

Congregational Church prevailed in New England States

- 1794 Mass. Legislature ordered each town to produce map.
- 1820 Mass. SJC distinguished “church” from “parish” Cong. Church in Dedham in Baker v. Fales
- 1821 Mass. Const. Amendment allowed denominations other than Cong. to be founded.
- Changed const. support of public worship & public teachers to include all denominations, not just Protestant.
- Provided that all church taxes raised in state may go to the denomination of one’s choosing, instead of only to the Congregational Church.
- 1824 2<sup>nd</sup> building of Tewksbury Congregational Church erected.
- 1830 1<sup>ST</sup> Congregational Church of Billerica split when 1<sup>st</sup> Parish Church became Unitarian.
- 1833 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Mass. Constitution made church membership and funding entirely voluntary; granted religious societies the right to hire their own clergy, to build their own churches, and to manage their membership rolls; promised equal protection under law to believers of all sects; and ensured that individual members could exist without liability for contracts subsequently made by other members of that sect.
- Mass. last state to disestablish; churches self-fund to support minister, building, mission.
- 1842 First Baptist Church founded in Tewksbury center, then moved to North Tewksbury..
- 1868 14<sup>TH</sup> Am. to US Cont. extended 1<sup>st</sup> Am. Prohibition of national established church to states.
- 1883 St. William of York began its church building.
- 1911 United Methodist Church founded.
- 1918 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational Church burned.
- 1922 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational Church rebuilt.
- 2022 Celebration of 100 years of Congregational Church building.