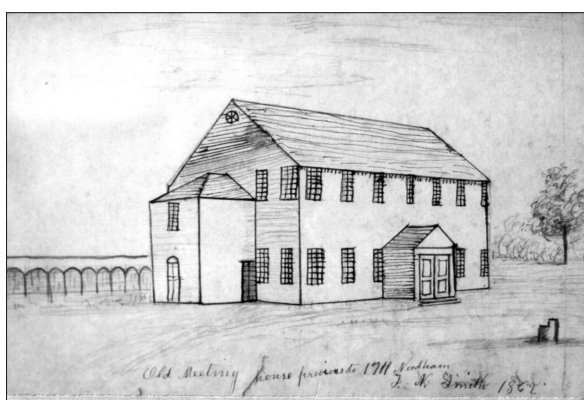


## 2. A SECOND MINISTER, A NEW BUILDING AND THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION

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THE REV. SAMUEL WEST, 26 YEARS OLD, UNMARRIED AND, LIKE TOWNSEND, A GRADUATE OF Harvard, became the second minister of the First Church. He had been one of several men to supply the pulpit after Townsend's death. West was ordained on April 25, 1764, in an outdoor ceremony to accommodate the large attendance. In 1769 he married Priscilla Plimpton of Medfield and soon purchased the house and land of his predecessor. He lived in the house as long as he stayed in Needham. His salary was some 73 pounds, with a settlement fee of a little over 133 pounds. To supplement his income, he taught boys who were preparing for college, boarding them at his home. He was in the habit of preaching without notes.



The Meeting House as it probably looked in 1774.

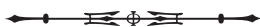
West wrote in his Memoirs that at first he thought the people of Needham “extremely rude and uncultivated.” Once settled, however, he found that he was “treated with great kindness by the people in general.”

In October of 1773, the first Meeting House burned. It was suspected that disgruntled parishioners from West Needham had caused the fire, hoping that the church would be rebuilt nearer to their settlement. On the very next day after the fire, however, plans were made for building the second edifice in the same place. So great was

the continuing rivalry of the two sections of town, however, that when two days of actual construction were begun on August 2, 1774, in the words of George Kuhn Clarke, Needham's historian, “The people of the East, after prayer, got to work at half past five in the morning, and the West Needham contingent, which had threatened to obstruct the raising, did not arrive till nine, and finding the work far advanced, peaceably but sullenly withdrew.” At first the building had no tower. Its main entrance was on the long side, as in the Old South Church in Boston. In the Revolutionary fervor that was stirring, the colonists desired architectural design as different as possible from the Anglican style.

In the gathering storm of the Revolution, munitions were moved from a town storage place on Great Plain Avenue to the basement of Mr. West's parsonage to confuse the British. On April 19, 1775, when word reached Needham of the battle of Concord and Lexington, forty Minute Men from East Needham under Captain Caleb Kingsbery left on foot from the parsonage to walk there. West wrote in his Memoirs, “We could easily trace the march of the troops from the smoke which arose over them, and could hear from my house the report of the cannon and the Platoons fired by the British.” On the way the Needham Minute Men met the British soldiers in retreat in what is now Arlington, then known as West Cambridge. Five Needham men who were shot by the British died immediately of their wounds. Four were buried there; one was brought back to Needham for burial. West's Memoirs record his sad duty to notify the five families, consisting of five widows and thirty-five children, of their losses. He wrote, “I visited these families immediately, and with a sympathetic sense of their affliction I gave to some the first intelligence they had of the dreadful event, the death of a Husband and a Parent. The very different manner in which the tidings were received, discovered the very different disposition of the sufferers. While some were almost frantic in their grief shedding tears or uttering sighs or groans.”

In 1778 West was called to serve the Hollis Street Church in Boston, where he was minister until his death in 1808. Mrs. West was blamed by the people of Needham for her husband's leaving town for a larger salary in Boston. ( In his 1911 History of Needham, Clarke wrote, “Although Mr. West's salary was raised to eighty pounds. . . , he ‘forgave’ his people at different times nearly 250 pounds, and in 1774 he had no salary at all.”) Also in 1778 the town was divided into two parishes, the West Parish building their own Meeting House and calling their own minister. When the West Parish became the Town of Wellesley in 1881, the West Church became the First Congregational Church of Wellesley.



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