



THE SOUTH CHURCH

This Greek Revival-style church was dedicated on February 15, 1826. Its architect and construction supervisor was Jonathan Folsom, a skilled master builder. The exterior granite was quarried in Rockport, Massachusetts, transported to Portsmouth by water, and then brought to the construction site by ox-drawn sleds. The austere design was intended to echo the democratic ideals of ancient Greece.



CHURCH INTERIOR

A noteworthy feature of the interior is the barrel-vaulted ceiling. It is hung from scissor-trusses in the attic, each fashioned from wood timbers 15" by 60 feet in dimension. The 6 x 19-foot arched windows each contain 87 panes of glass and are flanked by Corinthian plaster capitals on the inner walls.

Photograph of present day view of the interior of South Church.



PORTSMOUTH SKYLINE WITH SOUTH MEETING HOUSE AND SPIRE OF NORTH CHURCH

A gradual shift in Portsmouth's population away from the south end of town resulted in a desire on the part of many of the congregation to establish a new meetinghouse to the north, closer to what had become the center of town. In 1714 a new church was erected on the site of the current North Church in Market Square.

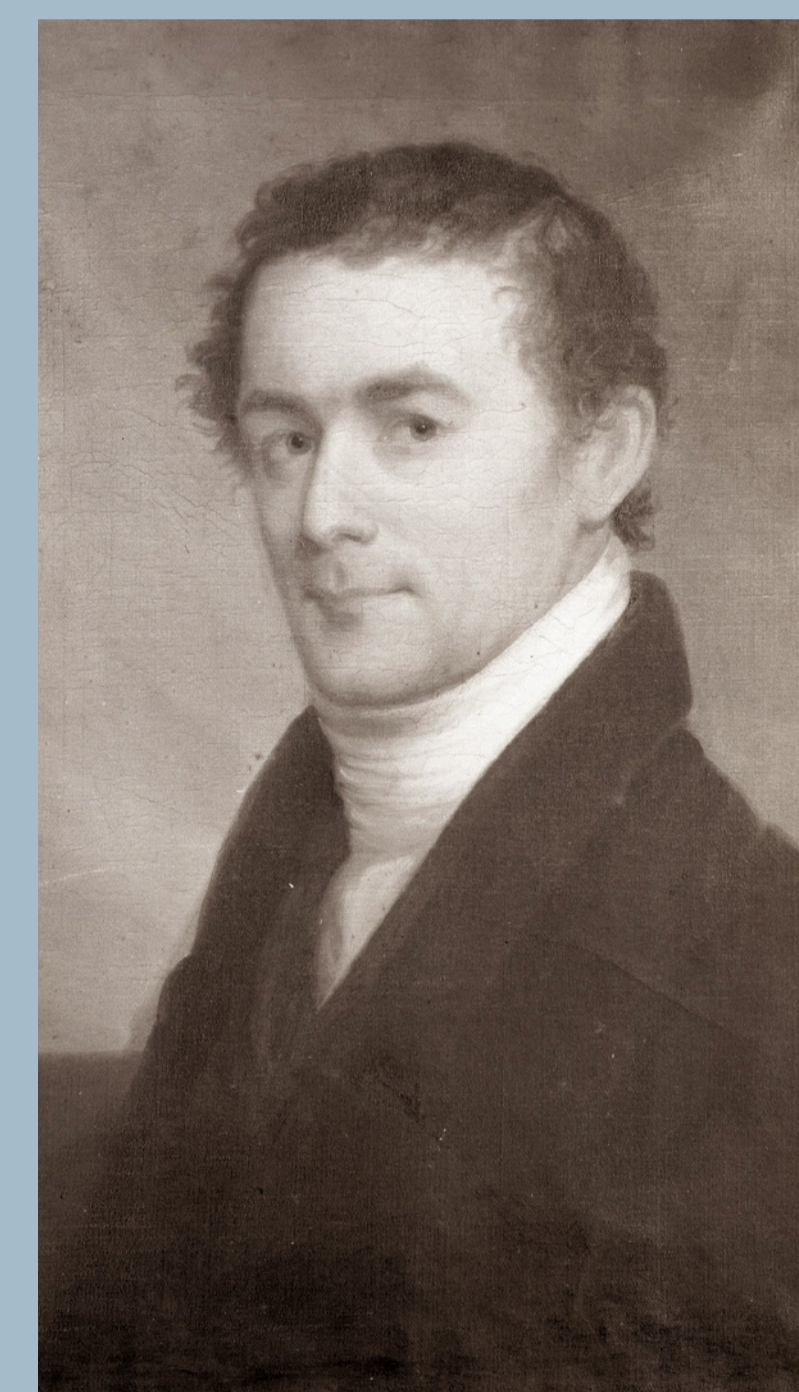
Despite this separation, the two congregations remained relatively close for another century. The old South Church, predecessor of this edifice, stood on what was and still is called Meetinghouse Hill, not far from the cupolaed building *above on the left*, while the new Congregational church was built on the site of the spired church *above on the right*.

Photograph of View of the South End of Portsmouth, NH, showing the South Meeting House and the spire of the North Church, Portsmouth Historical Society Photograph Collection. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum.

REV. NATHAN PARKER

In 1819 the preaching of Rev. Nathan Parker, a convert to the liberal tenets of Unitarianism, caused an irreversible split in what had been, at least nominally, two Congregational parishes. For his heresy Parker was called "an infidel" by the pastor of the North Church. Several decades elapsed before the breach was mended, mainly through the efforts of the charismatic, non-judgmental Rev. Charles Burroughs.

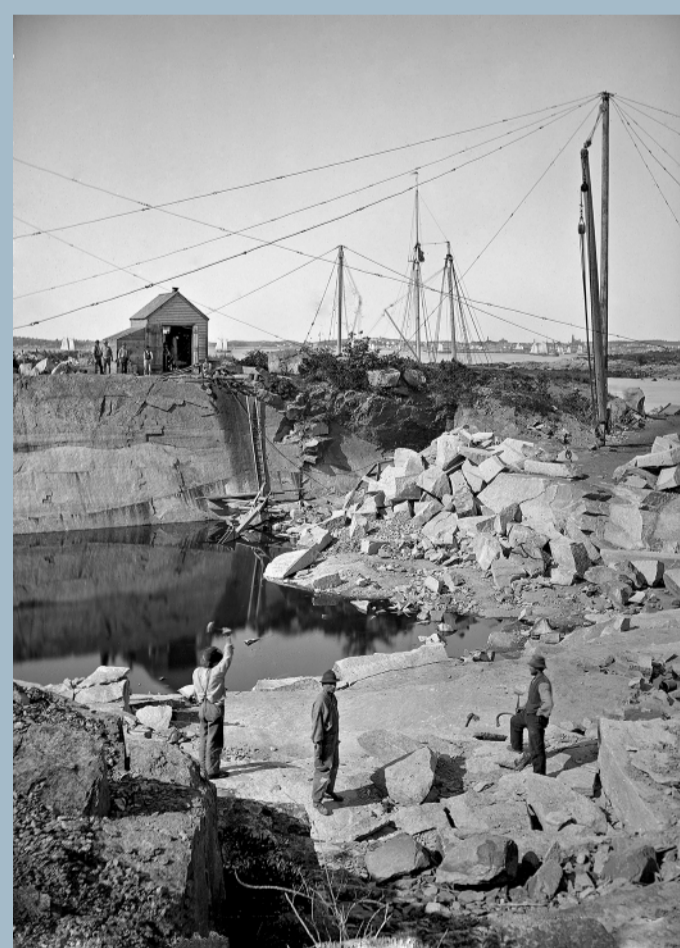
Portrait of Rev. Nathan Parker, photograph by Doug Armsden. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum.



GRANITE QUARRY

Granite was harvested from quarries dug on Cape Ann through the early twentieth century. The granite used to build the South Church could have been from a quarry like the one shown here in the photograph *at right*.

Photograph of Quarry on Eastern Point. Courtesy of the Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.



UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

The teachings of the Universalists were first introduced in Portsmouth in 1777. Differing in only minor ways from those of the Unitarians, both were liberal creeds that rejected such Calvinistic beliefs as eternal damnation. Nevertheless, they maintained separate churches until 1947, when the Universalist Church, which was opposite the John Langdon mansion on Pleasant Street, burned to the ground. Within two weeks the two faiths began merger proceedings, and today they worship together in the South Church, commonly known as "the U-U Church."

Photograph of Universalist Church, Pleasant Street, Portsmouth, Thomas C. Wilson Photograph Collection. Courtesy Portsmouth Athenæum.

Funding for this historic marker was provided by the City of Portsmouth, 2015.

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