

# Old South Church

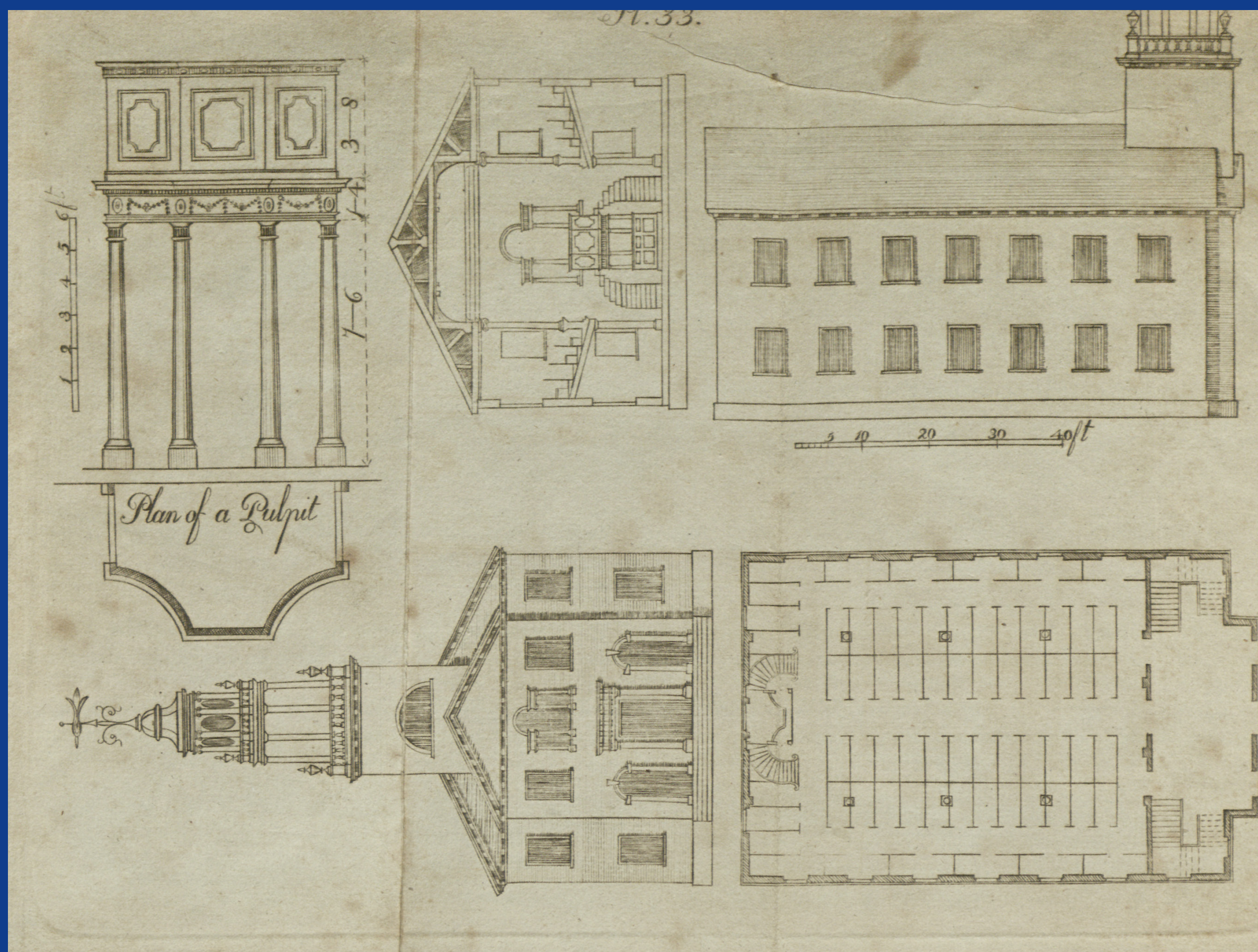
# WINDSOR VERMONT

Optimistic about the town's future, Windsor residents chose architect Asher Benjamin (1773-1845) to design a new church and meetinghouse in 1798. Benjamin's three-year residence in Windsor yielded at least three houses, all of them since lost, as well as this landmark Federal-style church. He designed fine buildings in several Connecticut River Valley towns before establishing a successful practice in Boston. He is best known as the author of the first American builder's guide. *The Country Builder's Assistant*, published in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in 1797, was the first of many influential guides he wrote. The books functioned as catalogs of the latest architectural styles and practices, enabling local builders to design residential and public buildings in popular fashions.



Old South Church, prior to the addition of a Colonial Revival portico in 1922

Courtesy Windsor Historical Society



The "Design for a Meeting House" from Asher Benjamin's first guide, *The Country Builder's Assistant*, inspired his design of Old South Church (Plate 33, 2nd edition, 1798).

Courtesy Dartmouth College Library/Rauner Special Collections

Windsor's first church, formally organized in 1766, included members from Cornish, New Hampshire. The minister, who was paid in money or "in grains, or pork, or beef or day's labor," forded the river weekly to preach to the Windsor members. The congregation formed its own church in 1774 and built a simple, frame meetinghouse for both town and church business. Delegates met there on July 2, 1777, to craft the Vermont Constitution but adjourned to Elijah West's tavern to complete their work. The meetinghouse was the site of the first Vermont legislative session and the inauguration of its first governor, Thomas Chittenden, on March 12, 1778. A granite marker commemorating the building stands to the south of the present church.

The classic "wedding cake" design of "Old South" – four distinct layers of architectural detail – comes almost directly from the pages of Benjamin's 1797 guide. The burial ground holds the graves of Windsor's earliest and most notable residents, including its first settler, Captain Steele Smith, Judge Stephen Jacob, Captain Joseph Pettes, and Vermont Governor Carlos Coolidge.