

# The Old Weather Cock

By Christine Comiskey

On several occasions, I have seen visitors to our church look up in our narthex and ask, “What’s with the rooster?” I will answer that question, but first, a little history about weather vanes:

In medieval times, banners were flown from the highest point of the castle towers to show archers the wind direction. The word “vane” comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word “fane” or “fana,” meaning flag.

According to legend, in the 9th century A.D., the Pope decreed that every church in Europe should have a cock on its highest point to represent Jesus’ prophecy that the cock would not crow until Peter had three times denied knowing Him. Eventually, someone came up with the idea of putting the cock on a pivoting rod so it could also indicate wind direction. Thus, the weather cock came into being. Many of the early American churches carried on the tradition of placing weather cocks on top of their church steeples.



In May of 1770, the members of the Old South Church (where our congregation then worshipped) voted “that there be a weather cock on ye top of the spindle of ye spire.” Later that same year, Deacon Richard Thurston (1710-1782) was reimbursed four pounds, sixteen shillings for supplying the weather cock.

Fast forward a little over one hundred years. Our present church building was completed and the Old South Church about to be torn down. A little girl named Florence M. Perkins (born 1872) wanted the rooster to play with, so her grandfather, Daniel E. Moulton (1821-1888), who had purchased the Old South Church property, gave it to her. She was disappointed when she received it, though, because it was much bigger than she expected. Yet she kept it, and many years later, donated it to the Haverhill Historical Society (Georgetown did not yet have its own historical society).

In the early 1920s, church member Allen Wilde (1874-1936) was touring Haverhill’s museum and was told about the old weather cock. The museum curator asked Mr. Wilde if he thought the church would like to have it back, and with his help, we acquired it shortly thereafter. It was on display in 1922 for the church’s 190th anniversary, but was put into storage for many years after that. In the 1970s, it was again put on display in a glass case in the narthex. Finally, in anticipation of our 250th anniversary celebration in 1982, it was moved to its final roost in our narthex for all to see and enjoy.

So the next time you look up at our ancient weather cock, think of its connection (as well as our own) to the earliest members of our congregation and the many winds of change it has faced.