

For release, May 2010

A Space for Faith

The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England

By Paul Wainwright

Jetty House/Peter E. Randall Publisher

Enfield Publishing & Distribution

<http://www.aspaceforfaith.com>

Publication date – September 2010

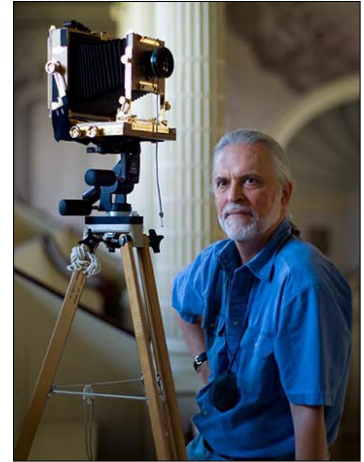
\$35.00, 128pgs, clothbound, 4/c jacket,

77 duotone photographs, 9" x 10.5"

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Q&A with Paul Wainwright, photographer & author

The Puritans of colonial New England did not distinguish between civic and religious life – the two were one in their society. In his new book, *A Space for Faith: The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England* (Jetty House 2010, an imprint of Peter E. Randall Publisher), photographer Paul Wainwright explores the architecture and ambience of America's earliest municipal buildings, spaces where townspeople prayed, conducted town business, and developed an early form of town-hall democracy that ultimately led to the one we know today.



Q: Who built the meetinghouses in your book?

A: Most were built by the Puritans, who had rebelled against the Church of England. Several present-day denominations can trace their roots to the Puritans, including the Congregational, UCC, and Unitarian Churches.

In Rhode Island, the situation was a little different, because that colony was founded by Baptists, people who themselves had rebelled against the Puritans' own religious intolerance. Rhode Island's meetinghouses were built with donations, not taxes, and were primarily used for worship.

Q: How did you select your subjects?

A: My criteria were primarily artistic. There are presently about 500 buildings in New England that were built originally as meetinghouses during the Colonial period, but the vast majority have been substantially altered, many having been converted into churches with a purely religious function. Only about 30 are essentially unchanged, and it was these I chose to photograph.

Q: What is a typical colonial meetinghouse like?

A: It's important to understand that they were not churches; they served all the social needs of their communities: cultural, municipal, and religious. Most had no steeple. They had separate entrances for men and women on the two shorter ends. In the middle of one of the longer walls was another entrance, the "door of honor," used only by the minister and other dignitaries.

Inside, a pulpit was mounted high on the wall opposite the door of honor, and there was a window above and behind the pulpit. There was no altar. Families sat in box pews, while single people and slaves sat in a gallery that wrapped around three sides of the second level.

Q: How did you become interested in colonial meetinghouses?

A: I have always been drawn to photograph old buildings, and some of my best photographs are of interiors of them. I attended a public showing of the colonial meetinghouse in Freemont, New Hampshire, and began to learn about the history and function of meetinghouses. I found the building to be gorgeous – the space, the workmanship, the play of the light on the old wood – and I made several very nice photographs of the Fremont meetinghouse. Later the same day I drove past another meetinghouse and I recognized the type immediately. I looked up the caretaker and got permission to make additional photographs. Without any definite plan, I began looking for more meetinghouses and photographing them over a span of several years. After I posted a few of those photographs on my website, I noticed that they were getting more hits than anything else, and I realized that there were a lot of people interested in colonial meetinghouses.

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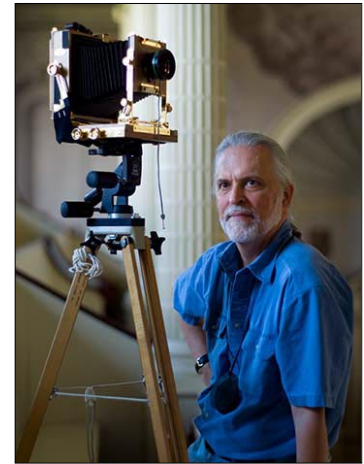
Q&A with Paul Wainwright, photographer & author

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Q: What is your artistic objective for this project?

A: I'm not attempting to document the buildings architecturally, although these are factual photographs of the interiors and exteriors. What I'm really trying to document is how I feel about the meetinghouses: the sense of wonder that fills me when I experience the space, the solitude, the natural light, the worn wood that people walked on or touched.

Some of the photographs are rather abstract due to the way they're framed – it takes a while to understand what you're looking at – but this is how I express the sense of mystery that the buildings evoke, of how these people were the same and how they differed from us today.



Q: Why do you use a view camera and black and white film?

A: If you show someone a photograph of a tree and ask them what it is, they are likely to say "a tree." But it's not. Every photograph is an abstraction of reality, so that photograph is actually an *artistic interpretation* of a tree. For me, when the photograph is in color, it tends to cloud this fact because it mirrors reality to a greater extent. Black and white photography emphasizes the abstract, the artistic element.

In working with a view camera, placing myself under the dark cloth helps isolate me from everything but the image I'm working on. The fact that the image is upside down on the ground glass helps me to separate myself from the object – it's the first step in abstracting the image. It enables me to look very carefully at the elements I'm composing, so that I can see the borders, lines, shapes, forms and textures rather than simply a pew, a door or a pulpit.

Q: How do you compose your images?

A: I want to show how the buildings looked when they were built in the 1600s and 1700s and I try to eliminate any hint of the 19th century or later. That often means framing exterior images to exclude electrical service, nearby buildings and roads.

For interior photographs, I concentrate on forms and textures: the quality of the wood, the architectural shapes of the structure and built-in furnishings. I make all of my exposures with just natural light, which allows me to control grayscale better. That may mean waiting for an overcast day to avoid harsh beams of sunlight and sharp shadows, and using long exposure times. Five minutes is common, and one photograph even took 35 minutes to expose.

About the Author

Paul Wainwright is a photographer based in Atkinson, New Hampshire, who works in a traditional manner utilizing sheet film, a large-format view camera, and silver gelatin printing. His work has appeared in numerous juried competitions and solo exhibitions, and is included in the permanent collections of both private and corporate collectors, including the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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