

Phase One: Restoration of the North Wilmot Church

In 2021 the North Wilmot Union Meeting House Society (NWUMHS) embarked on Phase One of the restoration of the meeting house, also known as the North Wilmot Church. This work included removing a non-functioning furnace and asbestos-covered ducts, restoring the windows, pouring a partial foundation, and replacing rotted sills and joists.

NWUMHS secured grants from several sources including the NH Preservation Alliance/The 1772 Foundation, the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP), the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mary Butler Chapter; Bar Harbor Bank & Trust, and Mascoma Bank. The Wilmot Historical Society paid for the restoration of the Palladian window over the front door of the church. More than 175 individuals contributed to Phase One of the restoration project.

To facilitate the structural work, the meeting house society first hired a company to remove the non-functioning furnace and asbestos-covered ducts in the basement. EnviroVantage, a company licensed for asbestos removal, completed the work in early April 2021. Removing the asbestos-covered ducts ensured that contractors could safely work under the church to stabilize the foundation and replace rotted beams and joists.

In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, contractors were busy and materials were in short supply. In light of these issues, the meeting house society scheduled the window restoration and foundation work for 2022.

John Thompson, owner of JLT Painting of Alexandria, NH, started window restoration in February 2022. He removed windows and installed temporary windows in each opening. At his shop, Mr. Thompson removed the paint, glazing, and glass. He repaired the wood as needed, replaced the glass, glazed the windows, and primed and painted each window.

Originally, Mr. Thompson had planned to reinstall the windows as he finished them. However, he suggested that we should wait until the foundation work was complete. He wrapped each window with moving blankets and stored the windows in the meeting house. In all, Mr. Thompson restored fourteen 16-over-16 windows in the sanctuary, the Palladian window over the entry door, three windows on the lower level of the west side, a small window in the bell tower, and tall, narrow windows that flank the front door.

In early April 2022, meeting house society board members used a small excavator to remove the front steps and granite-edged gardens in front of the church. This allowed Mike Howard, owner of Howard Construction Building Movers, to see the rotted sill and order materials, including the replacement beam.

In late July, Howard Construction Building Movers started work. They built cribs to support the façade. During this process, they also raised the building about three inches - just enough to remove the sill. The section of the beam under the front door was almost completely rotted. During this process, the rubble foundation crumbled on July 28, 2022.

On July 29, Mike Howard contacted the meeting house society to recommend installation of concrete footings and foundation under the pavilion at the front of the church. Originally, we had thought the existing foundation would be stable. But this was not the case. The rubble foundation crumbled. Mr. Howard's estimate for pouring a concrete foundation, an unanticipated expense, was \$5,000. Because it was not included in the original proposal, we contacted George Born, LCHIP's historic resource specialist, for permission to proceed. He approved the change. To ensure solid support for the front pavilion, the contractor poured concrete footings and foundation under all three sides of the pavilion, the small entry room at the front of the church.

Once the sill was in place, the contractor's crew lowered the building and leveled it as much as was feasible and safe for the nearly 200-year-old structure. Mr. Howard said the building is now as square/level as it can tolerate.

On the west end of the building, the contractor poured concrete pads on which posts now sit. The crew also built a crib under the center aisle of the sanctuary. This eliminated the bouncy feeling that previously was evident whenever people walked around in the church.

The board decided not to replace the gardens that had flanked the front steps. This will ensure that no roots infiltrate the rubble foundation and that moisture will not be trapped between the top step and the front sill.

Prior to the start of the foundation restoration in 2022, four steps led to the front door. One was concrete and another was less than 8 feet long and required two short pieces on either side to make up the difference. To allow the installation of two steps instead of four, Howard Construction raised the grade in front of the meeting house by about 8 inches. This allowed them to use two long granite steps to provide access to the front door.

After the steps were installed, the contractor brought in several loads of top soil. They graded the area in front of the church so it slopes away from the building. They raked, seeded and mulched the new soil. By early November, the grass seed had sprouted.

Once the foundation work was complete in mid-September 2022, John Thompson returned to reinstall all the windows. He completed the project in early October 2022.

At the conclusion of the foundation work, the structure is more stable than it's been for decades. The bounce effect in the floor is gone. Previously, two corners were off by three to four inches from the other two. Now the building is almost level.

The North Wilmot Union Meeting House Society board had planned to complete this work in 2021, but the contractors we had selected were booked. But the outcome in early fall of 2022 was well worth the wait. The front of the church now closely resembles its original appearance. To date, the cost of Phase One of the restoration is \$60,750.

In August 2023, John Thompson will return to the North Wilmot Church to prime and paint its exterior.