



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

Bell Hill Meetinghouse Association

Vol 17, no 2

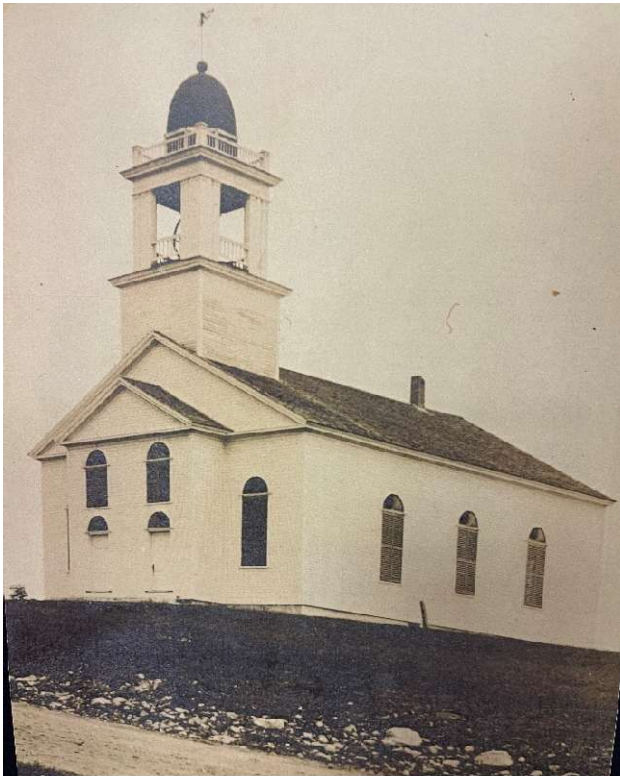
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Polly Bartow-editor
December 2025

From the President



As we close out 2025, it is refreshing to have no major building restoration project underway! The bell tower is completely restored and more sound than it has been in many a year. The plaster ceiling has been repaired. The reproduction carpet has been installed. The small loan needed to complete the critical repairs has been repaid. We solved our ownership problems. After taking a moment to savor the feeling of a job well done, we are ready to look to the future. At the annual meeting, we said goodbye to faithful board members who felt it was time to retire. Callie Zilinsky served as president for nearly 20 years and as vice president for the past two. Her leadership, vision, and energy brought the Association into a more vibrant presence in the community and she will be sorely missed. Ken Bartow served a vital role as head trustee overseeing major projects over the past 20 years including the bell tower restoration, repairs to the foundations, timber frame restoration, and complete restoration of the Schoolhouse. His expertise has been invaluable and he, too will be greatly missed. Connee Sasser's background in textile was put to good use in various ways and she was a constant source of valuable ideas including suggesting our logo and recommending the UV filtering window shades. And every year she washed all of those windows! We will miss her energy and advice. Ann Johnstone was our faithful recording secretary for many years, a job that is necessary and often underappreciated, but that Ann

fulfilled brilliantly. Ann was also our "schoolmarm" designing programs for the annual visit of the Otisfield School fourth grade that helped them experience what school was like in the 19th century. Thank you for everything, Ann! Taking over these positions are Seth Skolfield, who stepped up as Vice President, Mike Thorne taking on the job of Recording Secretary, and Mark Grover accepting the role of Head Trustee. Congratulations to all three of you and thank you for saying yes!

Time to Renew Your Membership

The support of our members and friends remains vital to our mission of restoring and maintaining two National Register-listed buildings in Otisfield and presenting interesting and fun summer programs. An outline of our next restoration project along with a sneak preview of our 2026 programs and events can be found in the following pages. We know that there are many choices for where to invest your charitable giving. We hope that you will consider making the Meetinghouse Association one of yours. Historic preservation matters! Thank you for your support.

What's Been Happening

What a fun afternoon we had at the Annual Program held on our customary last Sunday in July. Acclaimed actress and historic interpreter Laura Rockler presented a costumed performance as author Louisa May Alcott. Her performance delighted the audience. We were able to chat with Laura, still in character as Louisa, during our Tea on the Common.



On August 17 we welcomed the Saco River Jazz band who filled the Meetinghouse with jazz standards mostly from the 30s 40s and 50s.

Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts prevented the Otisfield fourth grade from making its annual visit to the Schoolhouse. Next year!



What's Coming Next



Is restoration and maintenance truly ever "done" on any historic building?! We think not! Our next project is

replacement of two character defining features of the Meetinghouse, the 12 exterior louvered fan shutters over the windows and doors and the window shutters. The fan shutters are original wood and they are so badly deteriorated that the best option for restoration is replacement. Some



elements are badly rotted and others are simply missing. We will replace with exact replicas made of mahogany with hand carved center elements. The photos show the locations of window fan

louvers and a close up showing the level of deterioration. The cost to replace the fan shutters is \$28,000.00



Also in desperate need of attention are the window shutters. The current shutters were hand made by a local craftsman in the 1970s and are similar in style to older shutters found in the attic. These shutters are now literally falling apart and can no longer be repaired. The shutters are important not only for appearance, but also because they serve a vital function. They are kept securely closed during the winter months in order to protect the original window glass found in all of our spectacular windows, most of which are 12 over 12 panes, from storm damage. Cost of new shutters fabricated to match

the older shutters found in the attic is \$32,000.00. We are pursuing grant funding for these important projects, but as always, we must provide matching funds from our generous supporters.

Programs for 2026

What an exciting year 2026 promises to be for history lovers as we celebrate our nation's 250th birthday! We plan to celebrate, but first, we have a wonderful open house planned for June.

Sunday, June 28 Open House 3pm-6pm We take a look back at weddings from the 20s to the 60s, some of which took place at the Meetinghouse. Photos and displays of vintage gowns and accessories will fill the Meetinghouse. Past President Callie Stone Zilinsky married Joe Zilinsky in the Meetinghouse and her gown will be on display. Complimenting the vintage weddings display indoors will be a gathering of vintage and antique autos on the Common. Admire the autos and chat with their owners. Refreshments will be available and the Schoolhouse will be open for inspection. Photo at right: Gwendolyn Allen weds Roger Tarbell, October 2, 1954 at the Harrison Village Church. Their wedding attire will be on display. Did you know that much of Harrison was originally part of Otisfield?



Sunday, July 26 3pm-6pm Join us as we observe our nation's semiquincentennial! Bust out your red, white, and blue for a fun celebration of our nation's 250th birthday. Plans are still being developed, but include Revolutionary War reenactors, our traditional Ice Cream Social glammed up with red, white and blue, a



genealogy information booth to help you determine if you might have a Revolutionary War ancestor, and more surprises! The Schoolhouse will be open staffed by a School Master or School Marm with old time "lessons" and games for children. Rounding out the afternoon will be a short, costumed skit in the Meetinghouse and we have heard that Nathan Nutting may attend! We invite you to wear your tricorne hat, put on your red, white, and blue and demonstrate your patriotic spirit! Donations gratefully accepted.



Sunday, August 16 6pm We finish the season with a concert by Bailey's Mistake. Bailey's Mistake is a Celtic inspired four-piece folk band from Maine that blends traditional music from Ireland, Scotland, and Newfoundland with original songs reflecting contemporary life in New England. They perform with skill and energy! You may have heard band spokesman Troy Bennet here at the Meetinghouse several years ago when he performed with Mike Rowe as the Squid Jiggers. This one will make you want to dance and sing along! Donations gratefully accepted.

New Website Is Live!

A website has been on our wish list for many years and now, thanks to the generous donation, that dream is a reality. Check it out at www.bellhillmeetinghouse.com. The website will be constantly updated with additional content, but you may now find information about upcoming programs and events, photos, history, information about how to rent the building, past issues of this newsletter, video content, and more.



Parting Thoughts and Shots

Why does historic preservation matter? There are many reasons why it is important to save our historic places. For you, that may mean preserving the beauty of the place, for others it might be because of the significance the place plays in the identity of a town or region. Historic places may drive economic growth as they attract visitors to an area or enhance the desirability of a town as a place to live. And saving old places preserves history for future generations. Reading about a place is valuable, but nothing can compare to actually stepping foot in a place where history happened. We believe that our visitors, such as the Otisfield fourth graders who visit annually, come away enriched and with a deeper understanding and respect for historic places. We appreciate your support of our mission to preserve two National Register-listed historic places and their history in Otisfield!

