



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

Bell Hill Meetinghouse Association

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July 2025

What's Been Happening

Ceiling Repair



And the bell tower restoration is complete! The final phase wrapped up on April 15 with repair of the plaster ceiling. The timber frame restoration and main tie beam replacement work completed last fall necessitated cutting an opening in the beautiful plaster ceiling. The good news is that our expert timber framer, Lee Hoagland was able to devise a way to do the work with two small holes rather than the one 5' x 30' hole originally called for. Peter Lord of Peter Lord Plaster & Paint in Limington was able to repair the holes in just two days in April. The staging has been removed and trustee Ken Bartow did a little tidying up before our cleaning crew got to work.

At left, see the holes "before" with the structural staging, which stayed in place over the winter to support the new main tie beam while it continued to cure. "After" the repair in photo at right.

The plaster will continue to cure and as it does, the color will fade and blend in with the older plaster. Thank you, Peter Lord for a job well done!

This project was supported through a generous Historic Preservation Grant from the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Molly Ockett Chapter NSDAR, Bridgton sponsored the Meetinghouse Association for this grant. Thank you!



Thank You to All Our Grantors

The Bell Tower Restoration was made possible by generous gifts from the following:

Maine Steeples Fund-\$17,038.00
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Davis Family Foundation-\$25,000.00
Maine Historic Preservation-\$30,250
NSDAR Historic Preservation Grant-\$5,806.00

And members like you!

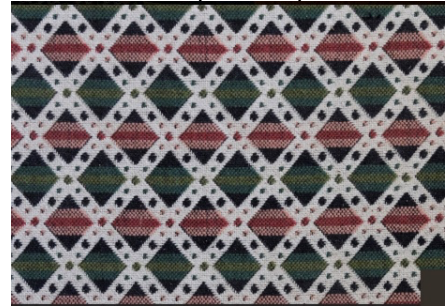
Thank you!

Carpet Tidbits

At last we can report that our new carpet has been installed! The process took much, much longer than anticipated, but the result is worth the wait. The carpet will be revealed at the Annual Program on Sunday, July 27 from 4pm-6pm. See page 3 for details. Please plan to join us!

Our carpet, believed to have been installed shortly after the Meetinghouse was completed, is ingrain. Ingrain is a flat woven reversible carpet made with sturdy wool yarn that is dyed before weaving. Originally, ingrain carpets were woven by hand on a loom resulting in a beautiful, but expensive product enjoyed by only the wealthy few.

The carpet industry in the United States began in 1791 when the first woven carpet mill was opened in Philadelphia. Small geometric patterns and limited colors were typical of these early carpets. Pictured at right is a section of reproduction ingrain carpet imported from Scotland in 1797 by George and Martha Washington for the Little Parlor at Mount Vernon.



In 1839, Erastus Bigelow revolutionized the industry with his invention of the power loom for weaving carpets. Carpet production soared and suddenly, colorful ingrain carpets became affordable by the middle class. Technological advances made more intricate patterns with larger repeat patterns such as our Meetinghouse carpet possible. Large scale florals and medallions, both of which are seen in the Meetinghouse carpet pictured at left, were prevalent in mid-19th century carpet. Our reproduction uses only one of the large motifs as costs were prohibitive to reproduce the entire repeat pattern.

Many qualities of ingrain carpet made them attractive to average homeowners. The weaving process produces a product that is reversible, greatly extending the life of the carpet and making it a more practical purchase. The power loom allowed a large variety of patterns and colors to appeal to all tastes. The carpets were made of durable wool and stood up well to heavy traffic. Ingrain carpets became a common feature in middle class homes in America in the mid to late 19th century, especially in rural areas.

By the late 1800s to about 1925, smaller patterns were back in style, but much more intricate than the earlier geometrics. Changing tastes combined with rapid advances in manufacturing processes meant that by about 1920, ingrain carpets were no longer being made in quantity in mills in the United States. A few smaller mills continued to make them, but by and large, consumers were now demanding products such as plush carpeting and reproduction Oriental styles.



Mills making ingrain carpet were located throughout New England during the 19th century with major factories in Massachusetts and Connecticut. US Census data shows there were two mills making carpet in Maine in 1850. Although carpets were not their primary product, the York Manufacturing Company, Laconia Mills and Pepperell Mills in Biddeford and Saco and the Bates Manufacturing Company in Lewiston are thought to have produced carpet.

At left is a power loom from 1940 with carpet on the loom at Thistle Hill Weavers, Cherry Valley, NY where our new carpet was made.

Summer Programs

Sunday, July 6, 4pm-6pm Annual Strawberry Festival.



We welcome the Otisfield Historical Society for their Annual Strawberry Festival. Enjoy homemade strawberry shortcake under the tent on the Common, visit with friends old and new, while supporting our friends at the Historical Society. Shortcake just \$5. After you've enjoyed your treat, come into the Meetinghouse to view a **special exhibit** featuring photos, video, and objects that help tell our history. The Schoolhouse will be open for visits as well. Donations to support the mission of the Meetinghouse Association gratefully accepted.

Sunday, July 27, 4pm-6pm. Annual Program and Grand Reopening

On this special afternoon, we celebrate the completion of the bell tower restoration and the installation of the carpet aisle runners. We can't wait to show you! Special recognition and thanks are planned for the organizations and individuals who helped make these projects possible.



Our program is a visit from author, **Louisa May Alcott**! Laura Rocklyn is an actress, writer, and historical interpreter who will present a 20-minute costumed performance depicting Louisa May Alcott. Ms Rocklyn holds MFAs from both George Washington University and Emerson College and her projects have won critical acclaim. You will have the opportunity to chat with "Louisa" as we enjoy a special Tea on the Common following the program. Don't miss this one!

Sunday, August 17, 6pm-7pm



Its concert time! **Saco River Jazz big band** will fill the Meetinghouse with favorites mainly from the 30s, 40s, 50s for an evening of music, nostalgia and fun. This is our first visit from Saco River Jazz, but we already know one of the members well. Peter Lord, saxophone, is also the expert plasterer who installed our beautiful arched plaster ceiling and repaired the holes in the ceiling this spring following the timber frame restoration. SRJ is a non-profit "band with a mission" with members ranging in age from teens to seniors. Weather permitting, we'll have lemonade and cookies on the Common from 5:30-6:00 so why not come a little early and visit with your neighbors before the concert?!

Were You Married at the Meetinghouse?

If you or someone you know were married at the Meetinghouse, we'd love to hear from you! We are planning a wedding exhibit for next year and we're looking for photos, programs, or any other memorabilia from weddings held at the Meetinghouse that you might be willing to loan. Contact Polly at pollytb55@gmail.com or call or text 207-653-0262.

Website Coming!

A website of our own has long been on our wish list and that is about to become a reality. Many thanks to new volunteer Carolyn Hardy for offering to build the website. Keep a lookout on our facebook page where we will announce the launch of the website.



Is Our Bell A Paul Revere Bell?

April 18th marked the 250th anniversary of Paul Revere's famous ride warning that the British were coming and April 19th was the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Paul Revere was a silversmith who made many steeple bells throughout New England. Sadly, we cannot claim that our bell is a Revere bell. The first bell was put in place on September 26, 1839 "in the presence of quite an assemblage of the townspeople. The bell weight 740m pounds and cost \$185 and the yoke and wheel cost \$15 in Boston and was purchased by Giles Shurtleff." *History of Otisfield*. Spurr 1944 quoting from Dr Barrows diary. The story goes that this bell was cracked when Stephen Knight fired a rifle at it to make it ring. The current bell was purchased from the Universalist Church of Norway as a replacement. It was made in Troy, NY.

Members July 1, 2024-April 1, 2025

Benefactor \$1,000 plus

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Jon Ebacher & Jill Wannemacher
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Norway Savings Bank
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In Memoriam Bark / Vallee Family

Bell Hill \$100-\$249

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