



MEETINGHOUSE NEWS

Bell Hill Meetinghouse Association

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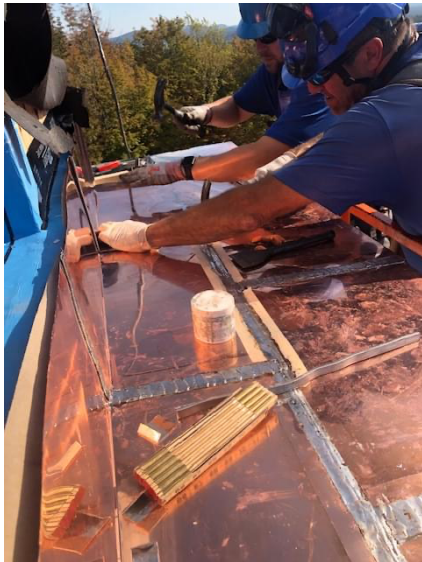
Polly Bartow, President
11 Jessie Lane
Biddeford, ME 04005
Phone: 207-653-0262
Email: pollytb55@gmail.com

Vice President-Carolyn Zilinsky
Secretary-Ann Johnstone
Treasurer-Christina Conde
Directors- Josh Gregoire Ken Bartow
Mark Grover Connie Sasser

Adam Bartow-editor
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What's Been Happening

Steeple Restoration Nearly Complete



After many months of planning, grant writing, problem solving, and restoration work, the complete restoration of the steeple and repair of the timber frame is nearly complete. Many people contributed to the success of this project. Huge thank you to: timber framer Lee Hoagland and his crew from Hoagland Restoration; carpenter Jeff Campbell and his crew from Campbell Construction; coppersmith Victor Wright and his crew from The Heritage Company; surveyor Matt Burke of Riverside Surveying; Hancock Lumber for loan of boom truck and operator; neighbor Glenn Pastore and our trustee/director Mark Grover for keeping the site plowed. Special thanks to our head trustee/director, Ken Bartow for his nearly 300 volunteer hours spent planning and managing the project from start to finish and to Association President Polly Bartow for tireless grant writing and fund raising.

Above, Vic Wright and crew.



Lee Hoagland and crew, above.

Jeff Campbell and crew at left.

More Folks to Thank



At left, Ken Bartow, right, meeting with Roger, Hancock boom truck driver on left, and Lee Hoagland in center.

At right, Ken works on bell level rail repair.



Matt Burke, below left, donated survey work.



What's Left To Do?

Because the bent two main tie beam, the primary support of the back wall of the bell tower, was still drying and curing when installed, our timber framer felt it was best to leave the structural staging in place for 12 months. With the

structural staging bearing the load of the bell tower, the beam can cure without risk of sagging under the weight of the tower. This summer you will see the staging in place in the rear of the sanctuary. Next spring the staging will be removed and the holes in the plaster ceiling repaired.

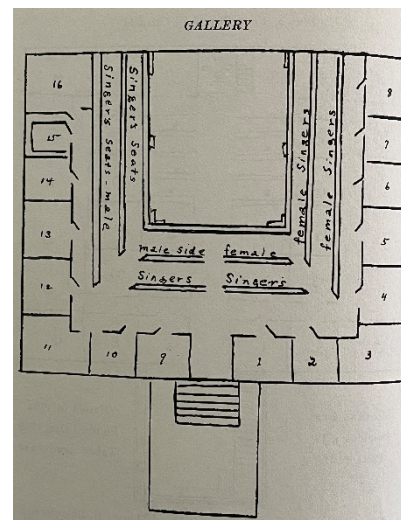
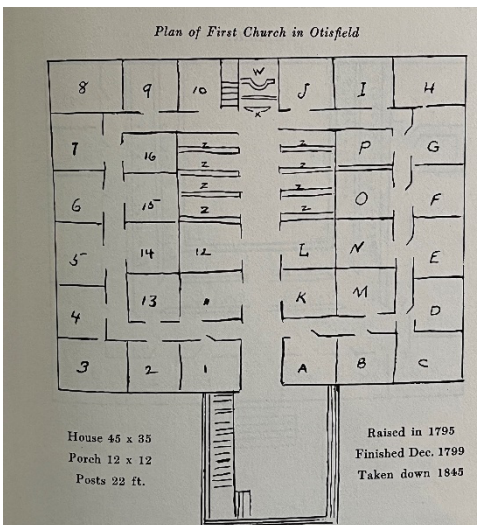


A Quick Look at the Books

The last 12 months has had a huge impact on our finances. The total cost of the final phase of the steeple restoration, combined with the urgent timber frame repairs was \$182,042.72. We received four grants totaling \$82,288.00 as follows: Maine Steeples Fund-\$17,038, Morton-Kelley Charitable Trust-\$10,000, Davis Family Foundation-\$25,000, Maine Historic Preservation-\$30,250. We thank them all! In addition, we received in-kind donations of labor totaling over \$20,000 and member donations of approximately \$40,000. We couldn't have done the project without our friends and member support. Thank you! If you were keeping track of the figures, you know that we were \$40,000 under our funding goal for a project that could not be delayed. To fund this shortfall, we took a small loan at Norway Savings Bank. Member support will help us retire this loan quickly-our goal is four years. We appreciate our many friends who continue to support Historic Preservation at the Meetinghouse.

A Look Back in History

The current Meetinghouse is not the original building on this site. In order to retain their land grant, within six years the original proprietors were to settle thirty families, build a meetinghouse, and settle a "Learned Protestant Minister" in town. The proprietors selected Bell Hill as the site for the meetinghouse they commissioned George Pierce to build. That meetinghouse was dedicated on November 7, 1797 (*A Short History of Otisfield, Maine* Hankins, David and Hankins, Jean 1998) It was a modest building in style, but attractive as seen in this color drawing of the building done by Grinfill Holden in 1798. The floorplan included a gallery or wrap-around balcony and numbered pew boxes deeded to individual families. Drawings from William Spurr's *A History of Otisfield, Maine*. 1944.



History is Made

In old building repair, as in genealogy, sometimes surprising things are uncovered. One such discovery during this project was that the Meetinghouse did not actually belong to the Association! It was generally assumed that it did, as the Association has handled its care, including its bills, for nearly 100 years. Alas, a careful search and a consult with a lawyer revealed that the Meetinghouse was the property of the Town of Otisfield. This situation was rectified at a special Town Meeting on February 1 when the Town voted unanimously to convey the building and its lot to the Association. Association President Bartow was pleased...and relieved...to accept the deed from Town Selectmen Lenny Adler, Hal Ferguson, and Rick Miclon.

