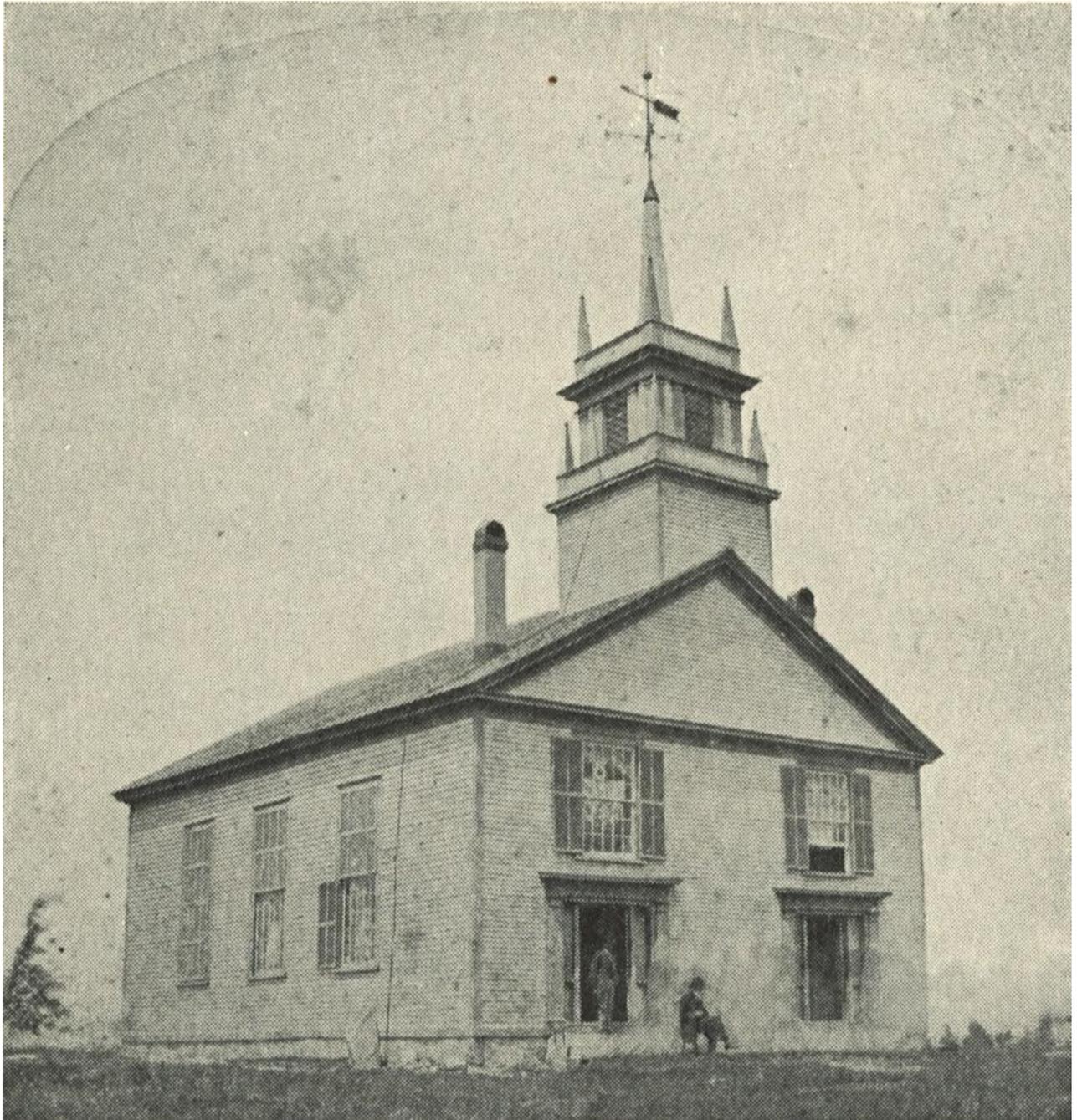




2016-05-07 / Local

Belmont Historical Society presents talk on Canterbury's Old Worsted Church



THE OLD WORSTED CHURCH in Canterbury as it appeared in the 19th century. The church burned down in 1958. Mark Stevens will present a talk about the history of the church at 7 p.m., Tuesday, May 17, at the

Corner Meeting House in Belmont. (PHOTO COURTESY OF BELMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

By JIM CLARK

jclark@citizen.com

BELMONT—Those with an interest in Belmont and Canterbury's history will want to attend a presentation on the "Legends, Mysteries and Memories of the Old Worsted Church."

The event takes place at 7 p.m., Tuesday, May 17 at the Corner Meeting House in Belmont, at the intersection of Fuller and Sargent Streets.

The speaker will be Mark C. Stevens, who has done a thorough investigation of the history of the old church. Stevens's talk is being sponsored by the Belmont Historical Society. It is open to the public at no charge. Light refreshments will be served.

The Old Worsted Church stood for almost 120 years before burning down in 1958. It stood quietly in the northeast corner of Canterbury at a tiny crossroads hamlet, then referred to as "Hill's Corner," or the "Canterbury Uplands."

The church was established for joint use by Congregationalists and Baptists.

The site is located in a remote section of Canterbury. Those traveling from Belmont can take Shaker Road south until the road becomes Fellows Hill Road in Northfield. Across Northfield and into the town of Canterbury, the road then turns back into Shaker Road and arrives at the intersection of Hills Corner Road to the left, and Baptist Hill Road on the right. The old church was located at a spot off Hills Corner Road. It is believed that the foundation of the old church remains.

Stevens is a licensed land surveyor, history buff and Canterbury native. As a surveyor, his profession often leads him to old burned out cellar holes and other interesting land discoveries. He has spent an extensive amount of time investigating old deeds, maps, wills and other historic documents.

Stevens stumbled upon the Old Worsted Church story, and then started conducting interviews with people who remembered the church. That led him to start collecting old photos, letters, newspaper clippings, journal entries and then documenting the interviews he conducted.

The Old Worsted Church has a colorful history that involved legends and a connection to events beyond Canterbury and what was going on in the country at the time.

Stevens will recount stories involving high ranking New Hampshire political officials, and how the Civil War impacted the church — including allegations of spying for both the Confederacy and Union, a tragic love affair interrupted by the war and the supposed owning of a slave in the town

during the period.

Stevens will also discuss his research, revealing other fascinating aspects of the church's history — a female preacher who presided at the church when women weren't allowed to preach, orphanages, con-man swindles, a destitute man living in the church and relying on the charity of neighboring Shaker residents and the somewhat bizarre or beautiful decorations that adorned the church.

There is also a story about how the church was somehow connected with the famed vaudeville dancer/stripper Gypsy Rose Lee.

Stevens will also present lost photographs of the fire found many years later in a family Bible, and what he described as the almost comic rescue of various artifacts saved from the church while it was engulfed in fire.

[Return to top](#)