

## Saving Gale School a priority after loss of Hathaway House

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By THOMAS P. CALDWELL, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — After seeing the Hathaway House torn down in Laconia, Mark Padula knew he had to step forward to help save Belmont's Gale School.

"That's what started it for me," he said. "I thought it was a terrible thing, and we can't bring it back now."

The Hathaway House, built on Union Avenue in 1870-71 by Samuel C. Clark, a prominent attorney and member of the New Hampshire Legislature, passed through several hands before being turned into a women's boutique by Richard St. Clair, who gave it the name of Hathaway House. It later operated as a restaurant and housed real estate offices before it was purchased by a company that planned to tear it down to make way for a new retail building.

A coalition of residents and the Lakeport Community Association worked to save the building, but the effort stalled and the building fell into such disrepair that no one wanted to take on its restoration, leaving it to be torn down.

The Save Our Gale School Committee wanted to prevent a similar fate for its historic 1894 building, built by Cyrus Norris and named after Napoleon B. Gale, who had bequeathed \$10,000 to the town of Belmont.

The Gale School served as an elementary school until 1924 when a ninth grade was added on the second floor, and more space for high school classes was added three years later.

After the town built a new high school in 1937, and a new school for grades 1-3 in 1955, the administrative offices, school nurse, and secondary art class moved to the upper level. The school closed and was used only for storage after the new Belmont Elementary School was built in 1985.

Concerned that the Shaker Regional School District wanted to raze the building, a committee formed in 2006 to preserve the building, leading to the establishment of an official Save Our Gale School Committee which now has official 501(c)(3) designation as a federally recognized charitable organization, which allows people to make donations they can write off on their taxes.

Padula joined the committee after the fate of the Hathaway House made him realize that he also could lose a building where he had memories of attending school.

"I'm a 1982 graduate, and had an art class there," Padula recalled.

After serving on the committee for a couple of years, and seeing it successfully bid to move the school to a new site, he decided it was time to make a bigger commitment in hopes of inspiring others to do the same.

The Shaker Regional School Board has agreed to let the committee move the Gale School to another property, as long as it fills in the existing lot after removing the building.

As the owner of Padula Excavating, Padula has offered to do the site work necessary on the new lot to be purchased for the school — work with an estimated value of "at least" \$35,000. The work includes putting in a driveway and parking area, digging a hole for the foundation, and bringing in water and sewer hookups or preparing for a septic system.

Local businesses Nutter Industries and Parent Brothers Sand and Gravel have offered to provide materials, and Padula said he is hoping other alumni who now own their own businesses, as well as others in the area with an appreciation of history, will also offer cash, materials, or in-kind services to help in relocating the building.

Where to?

Committee member Diane Marden said the committee does not yet have a new site for the school, but they have received inquiries from people who might be able to help out.

"We have several possible site locations in the surrounding area," Marden said. "We've contacted one on Concord Street, and there are several other potential sites, most of them in the area of Route 106 between the post office and the casino."

She said Padula has been a great asset to the board, bringing his expertise on construction and doing a lot of leg work to provide further information on their options.

"He gave us a whole new set of wings when he came on board," she said.

The committee is applying for grants to help with the move, and Marden said they are seeking designation as a state historical building to help in soliciting grant funding. Seeking federal designation as a historic building also is a goal, but it would come with restrictions on such things as the foundation, which likely would have to be of brick or have a brick facade, she said. "And it would have to be moved to a period-friendly lot," she added. "We have options, but we're trying to see what the best location would be." Moving the Gale School will not be easy. The building is about 2,800 square feet and weighs 250 tons. Still, Marden remains undaunted, and is asking for help in the form of donations and other contributions. "It's a big undertaking," she said, "and we are looking for donations of time, materials, volunteers, and committee members."

Monetary donations may be made to the Save Our Gale School Fund at Franklin Savings Bank.

"Diane has the strength of 10 women," Padula commented. "Every town needs the strength of a Diane Marden, and to have that desire to succeed."



The Gale School

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