

Belmont, New Hampshire Annual Town Report 2012

PROVINCE ROAD MEETING HOUSE PRESERVATION PROJECT

In the summer and fall of 2012, Belmont's historic Province Road Meeting House underwent extensive repair which included leveling and rebuilding the foundation, repairing and replacing sills, clapboards, and shingles, re-glazing windows, and painting the exterior. These repairs were funded in part by a \$50,000 grant from the **New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program** (LCHIP), with the balance of the total expenditure of \$117,000 coming from Belmont Historical Society fundraising, an appropriation from the Town of Belmont, and contributions from the Sargent Fund.

Written records of the meeting house's construction have long ago disappeared, but according to local tradition, the building was constructed in 1792 as a meeting place for the rapidly-growing population in the northern and western parts of the Town of Gilmanton. A deed to the property dated 20 June 1793 transferring the site to *The Committee, Owners and Proprietors* of the meeting house helps validate the 1792 construction date. In its early years, the meeting house served as a community meeting place and was not the sole property of any one religious group.

The building was originally built in the style of a typical meeting house of the period with a center entrance on the south side, a high pulpit and window on the north side and galleries on three sides. A few examples of these structures still exist in New Hampshire and other parts of New England. Most such structures underwent major renovations or were replaced by what were considered a more modern nineteenth century concept of what a church structure should look like. The Province Road Meeting House remained in its original configuration until 1835 when, because of its evolution into a community church serving a small population, the galleries were removed and the roof was lowered. A second major remodeling took place in 1854 when the building was turned so that the gable end faced the road, the entrances relocated and new windows installed. At this point the building took on the appearance it still has to this day, except for the addition of the belfry in 1910.

By 1981 the membership of the Third Free Baptist Meeting House Society, which had occupied the meeting house since the 1830s had dwindled to three remaining members. In the hope that the building could be preserved, the property was deeded to the Belmont Historical Society. This was both a blessing and a curse for the society which has been burdened with finding the resources to keep the building in repair. The 2012 exterior repairs are the culmination of over 30 years of fundraising and maintenance efforts.

The long-term goal of the Belmont Historical Society is to restore the building to its appearance after the 1850s remodeling. The Belmont Historical Society is presently looking to raise sufficient funds to renovate the interior. Once work is completed, the society plans to offer the meeting house for public and private functions. If you are interested in assisting with this project, please contact Belmont Historical Society members Wallace Rhodes or Christine Fogg.



After the east-end shingles were removed, original window locations were revealed at the Province Road Meeting House.

The 1792 Province Road Meeting House was the first regional place of worship and awaits interior renovation by the Belmont Historical Society with hopes of once again opening its doors to the community.