

More funds needed to finish historic Belmont house's interior renovation



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

The Province Road Meeting House, long unused and in disrepair, has been restored - on the outside.

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BELMONT - The Province Road Meeting House, long unused and in disrepair, has been restored - on the outside.

The exterior renovations were completed at the end of November with the help of a \$50,000 grant from the New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program.

In total, the Belmont Historical Society raised and spent \$115,000 fixing up the outside of the building, but needs to raise \$50,000 more in the weeks and months ahead to renovate the interior, said the

society's Wallace Rhodes.

Once that is done, the society plans to offer the meeting house to the town, businesses or organizations.

"The goal is to restore the building to its appearance after the 1850s remodeling," Rhodes said. "The interior work should be much easier than repairing major structural problems, but when and if that work is accomplished will depend primarily on (the society's) ability to raise funds."

The Meeting House dates to the 1700s. Written records of the details of the meeting house's construction, if they once existed, long ago disappeared, Rhodes said.

Local historians say it was constructed in 1792 as a meeting place for the rapidly expanding northern and western parts of the town of Gilmanton at the time. In its early years the meeting house served as a community meeting place, and at least one and possibly more town meetings were held there, Rhodes said.

The building was 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. It 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, and 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 belfry, which was added in 1910.

In 1981 the membership of the Third Free Baptist Meeting House Society, which had occupied the meeting house since the 1830s but had dwindled to three members, deeded the building and property to the Belmont Historical Society.

"This of course turned out to be both a blessing and a curse for the society, as we have been burdened with finding the resources to keep the building in repair," Rhodes said.

The 2012 exterior repairs "can be looked upon as the culmination of over 30 years of fundraising, and in some cases physical labor," Rhodes said. "Unfortunately there is still a lot of interior work left to be done, and at this point the money pot is empty."

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