

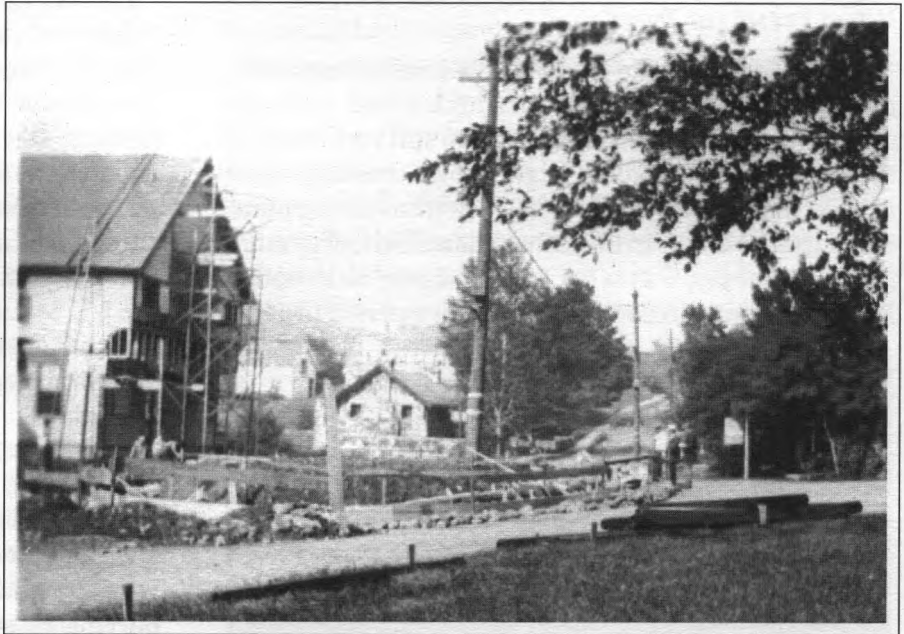
Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 • Founded 1920

Newsletter No. 70 – July 2007

HISTORY OF THE DUBLIN TOWN HALL

For the first fifty years after its incorporation Dublin managed without a town hall. Town meetings, more frequent then than now, were commonly held in the Meeting House (though often adjourned to a tavern). Town officers worked from their own homes, and presumably kept their records there. In 1811 the Town paid two dollars to storekeeper Samuel Hamilton for a round-topped box, 18 by 10 inches, "to hold the Selectmens papers". The box is now in the Society's museum, but where it was kept when in use is not known.



Putting a new front on the Town Hall, 1916. Note that the oval (then much larger) is being constructed simultaneously, but the telephone poles have not yet disappeared.

Dublin Historical Society, George W. Gleason photograph collection.

In 1822 a town house, which also housed the village school, was built across the Common from the second meetinghouse, on the site of the present Frothingham house, where the Wolpes live now. The building was square in plan, built of brick, with two stories under a hipped roof. It lasted only until 1860, when for reasons unrecorded it was sold at auction and taken down.

THE NEW TOWN HALL, 1882

The present Town Hall was built in 1882 to designs by Arthur Rotch, a young Boston architect just back from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, who had formed a partnership with another young architect, George Tilden, a native of Concord, N.H. The firm of Rotch & Tilden went on to become one of the leading architectural firms of its day.

"The firm was hardly known, however, when the summer colony of wealthy Bostonians in Dublin, New Hampshire, led by General Caspar C. Crowninshield, asked Rotch and Tilden to design the village's first [actually second] town hall. The design was a Victorian delight, from the stuttering lines of the churchlike steeple to the concave form sheltering the front entrance and the octagonal bays flanking the little wooden structure. The interior and exterior ornament, never pretentious, is carefree and, in the style emphasized at the École, expresses the multipurpose function of the building." (Harry L. Katz, *A Continental Eye / The Art and Architecture of Arthur Rotch*, The Boston Athenæum, 1986)

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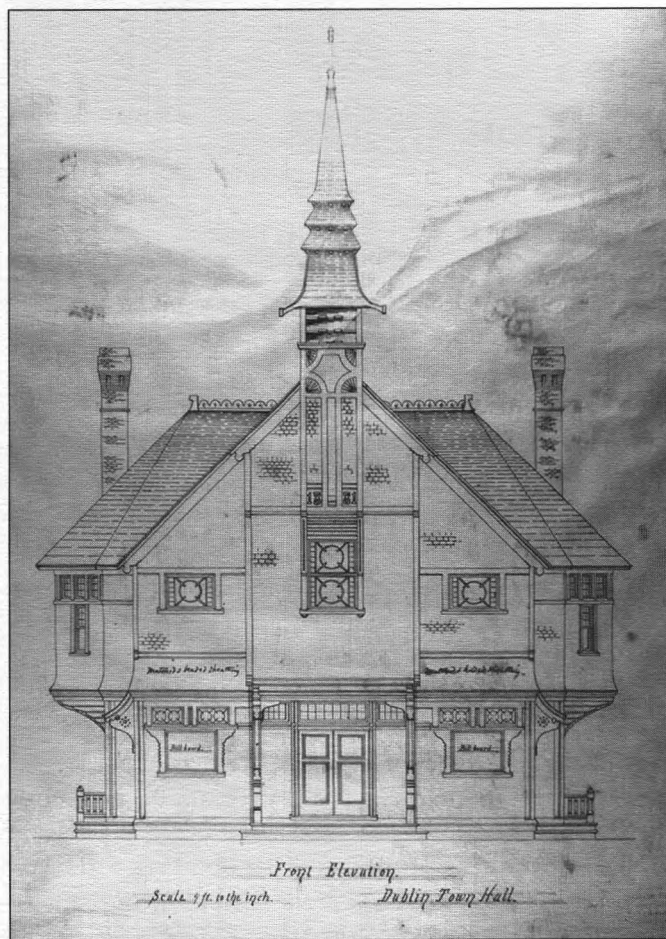
The “church-like steeple” was not just a bit of decoration. It was a duct to draw hot air from the third-floor meeting room in a time before air-conditioning. In those days, form really did follow function.

The original design of the Town Hall was much admired in its own day. It was featured on the cover of *American Architect and Building News* for November, 1881, and it is admired again a century later, as the above quotation shows.

The whole cost of the original building was \$5,263.76, of which nearly a third was privately contributed – \$1,000 by General Crowninshield and a further \$620.27 by other individuals, mainly summer residents. The balance was appropriated by the Town.

WHAT WENT ON THERE

Rotch’s drawings for the Town Hall indicate space for a school. This was probably for a high school, since the original one-room schoolhouses were still very much in use for grades one through eight. Town meetings were held on the third floor until 1973, when increasing numbers dictated a shift to the Consolidated School gymnasium. The Library was in the Town Hall from its inception in 1883 until its present building was opened in 1901,



Arthur Rotch’s design for the façade of the Town Hall, 1882.
Town of Dublin Archives.

and the fire trucks were garaged in the basement until 1963, when the first stage of the present firehouse was built.

Beyond its official functions, the third floor was used for all sorts of community events. Dances were held there (both round and square), including the annual servants’ ball. There were also singing and dancing schools, lectures, exhibits, minstrel shows put on by local talent and traveling vaudeville acts. Episcopal services were held there during several summers before the completion of Emmanuel Church in 1888. Many of us can remember when the Daffodil Show was held on the third floor.

TWENTIETH CENTURY TASTE

By 1916 the Beaux Arts style, along with all things “Victorian”, was considered old-fashioned and hideous. John Lawrence Mauran, an architect and summer resident from St. Louis, whose professional eminence is indicated by his presidency of the American Institute of Architects, took a strong dislike to the Town Hall, and set about to improve it. At the 1916 Town meeting it was “Resolved that the Town permit the proposed change to be made on the front of the Town House as proposed by Mr. J. L. Mauran, expense of the same to be born by Mr. Mauran and others, . . .”

Mauran had already designed the Library (1901) and the first section of what is now the Consolidated School (1916), as well as a number of summer houses, including his own, “Homewood”, so sadly damaged in the recent fire. He was also responsible for the Village Oval and for eliminating the unsightly poles and wires in what was then the village center by burying the telephone and power lines. The



The front of the Town Hall during the
250th Anniversary in 2000.
Dublin Town Archives.

Town did not appropriate funds for either of these projects, and it appears that Mauran paid for them from his own pocket.

Mauran's changes to the Town Hall resulted in the façade we see today. The tower was removed, as was the upswept entrance roof. In their places were put a four-pillared portico and on the second floor a Palladian window. These were in keeping with the rather pedestrian taste of the period, when the Colonial Revival, so-called, was in full swing. "Colonial Revival" really meant some version of "Federal"; that is, the style of the 1820s and '30s, and its wooden buildings were always clad in white paint, a color scheme that would have surprised the style's early nineteenth century originators.

MISALLIANCE

The result was a sort of false front. Anyone passing under the Palladian window and through the new porch enters a vestibule with a wainscot of varnished match-boarding - an atmosphere anything but "Colonial".

Even Mr. Mauran was not entirely pleased with the result. In an anecdote about the late Clifton Clukay, passed down by his daughter-in-law, Isabel Clukay:

"Grampie Clukay was leaving the store on the north side of the street as Mr. Mauran arrived from St. Louis to view the completed work. He did not speak. He stood facing the town hall for a long time, walked to the west and stood looking, then walked to the east and studied the building further, walked to his original position. He nodded to Grampie Clukay and said, 'This just goes to prove that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'."



Decorated for the... is how it looks today. archives.

Nevertheless, in compliance with the vote of Town Meeting, the new façade of 1916 was entirely paid for by "Mr. Mauran and others".

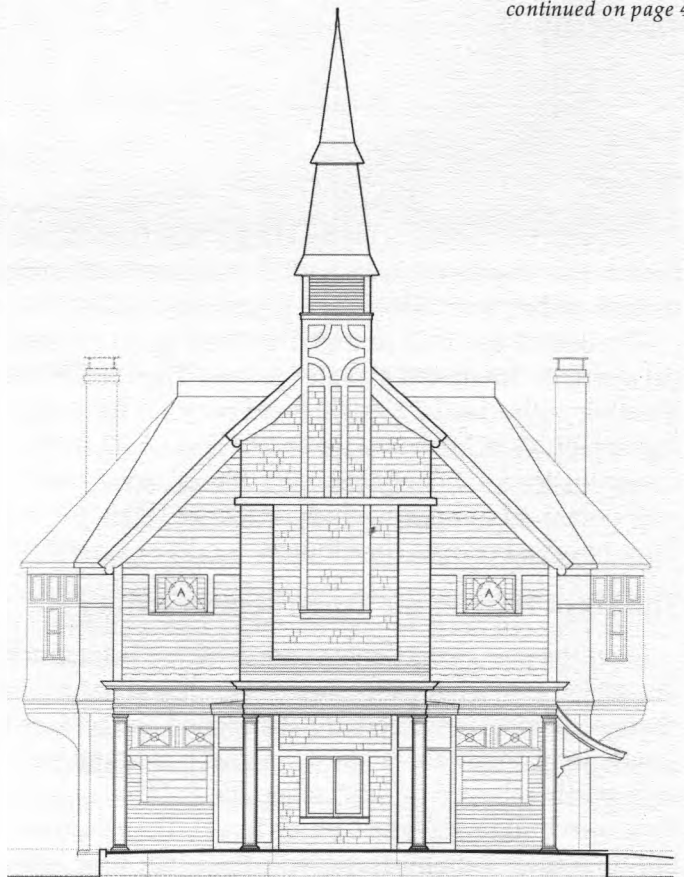
THE RENOVATIONS OF 1982

The cycle of taste had turned a little farther by 1960, when a local architect submitted alternative proposals for remodeling the Town Hall. One of these was to remove the top floor entirely and substitute a flat roof. Fortunately, that scheme was not adopted.

By 1980 some practical interior changes were felt to be necessary. Office space on the middle floor for the Selectmen, the Town Clerk and the Police Department was poorly organized and cramped. The basement was being used for nothing but storage, the fire trucks having been moved across the street to the new firehouse in 1963.

Plans for the renovation were drawn by architect Richard Monahan, advised by a Town Hall Planning Committee. Most of the changes were on the main floor, where the partitions were modified to provide better working space for the Selectmen, the Town Clerk / Tax Collector and the Police Department, as well as meeting space and record storage for the various Town boards. The ground floor was cleared out to provide a large meeting room and kitchen.

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Dan Scully's design for the new façade, 2007. Courtesy of Daniel V. Scully Architects.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

After a long wet spring we are planning for painting of the 1841 Schoolhouse and its outbuilding to begin July 1. Thanks to Dublin Consolidated School we have a steady water supply for the project, enabling the painters to pursue their work more quickly than otherwise. Let's hope the weather holds!

—P.R.B.

SUMMER EVENTS

The **Summer Fundraiser** will be at 7:30 p.m. on **Friday, July 27**, in the Robertson's barn at the end of Gerry Road. Prof. **Diana Wolfe Larkin** of Mt. Holyoke College (daughter of the late Abe and Bea Wolfe) will speak on the life and times of **Joseph Lindon Smith**.

Those who remember Dublin's much-loved "Uncle Joe" will want to be reminded of his multi-talented, as well as multi-faceted, life. Those who don't have all the more reason for coming.

Coffee and dessert will be served after the talk. Tickets are \$30.00 per person, of which \$15.00 will be tax-deductible.

Saturday, July 28, is **Dublin Day**. Historical bus tours will depart from Yankee Field at 11:00 a.m. and 1 p.m. These tours will take about an hour and will be guided by learned members of the Society. The **Schoolhouse Museum** will be open from 12 noon to 2 p.m.

In addition to Dublin Day, the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum will be open to visitors from 12 to 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays in July and August.



The **Annual Meeting** will be at 7:30 p.m. on **Friday, August 24**, at "Red Top", the home of Loring and Susie Catlin on West Lake Road. Following a brief business meeting, **Eddie Clark** will speak on her observations of Dublin life during her thirty years as a columnist for Yankee.

Admission is free. Members and their guests are cordially invited.

OLD TOWN HISTORIES

The Society has for sale three copies, all in first-class condition, of the 1920 Town History (Leonard & Seward, The History of Dublin, N.H.) This book, long out of print, contains 1,018 pages and is an essential source for anyone interested in the early history of the town. The price is \$125 per copy. First come, first served.

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Although the outside of the building was left untouched, the interior woodwork was made to conform to the style of 1882, rather than 1916.

The cost of the 1982 renovations was again divided between the Town and private sources. The 1983 Town Meeting authorized a \$30,000 bond issue. A fund-raising organization, Friends of the Dublin Town Hall, formed under the leadership of Miss Lucy Shonk, conducted a well-organized campaign which netted \$66,000 from over three hundred private contributors.

THE TOWN HALL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Over the past twenty-five years there has been much discussion as to whether the Town Hall should be further changed to meet new needs, or abandoned and replaced — perhaps in another location. Crowded conditions were only partly relieved in 2002, when the Police moved to their own building across Church Street. There is now a full-time Town Administrator, who has a part-time assistant of his own. The work of the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment has ballooned, as has their need for record storage.

All this time the top floor has, for a variety of reasons, remained essentially useless. Under modern fire codes there are not enough exits for more than fifty persons at a time. Lack of an elevator hampers use for public events under the laws governing handicapped access.

This year's Town Meeting voted to accept the surprising and munificent offer by an anonymous donor of \$700,000 to remedy some of these deficiencies. Dan Scully's design for the work includes a new façade which blends with the rest of the building. It is by no means a copy, but rather a sympathetic echo of the Rotch design, and will obliterate Mr. Mauran's "improvements" of 1916.

As Rotch's spire served as a ventilation duct, the new spire will form the enclosure for the elevator shaft. The cycle of taste has now come full circle, and form follows function once again.

—J.W.H.

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society
Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

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