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N.H. COVID-19 update: More than 900 people in New Hampshire have now died from COVID-19 since the pandemic began; we passed that grim milestone on Friday. New cases are staying relatively stable while hospitalizations are declining slightly. For more numbers and news on the pandemic in New Hampshire, click through. (<https://www.concordmonitor.com/Special-Sections/Covid-19>)

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## Renewed push to preserve a one-room schoolhouse in Gilmanton



Susan Kelley Leclerc clears a path to the Kelley Corner School House in Lower Gilmanton on Dec. 22. Leclerc and Paula Gilman are leading the effort to restore the school. GEOFF FORESTER / Monitor staff [Buy this Image](#)

Paula Gilman looks over ol



By [KATHERINE LESSARD \(/byline?byline=By KATHERINE LESSARD\)](#)

For the Monitor

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Unassuming from the road, the little white schoolhouse sitting off of Route 129 in Gilmanton is filled with history and character that adds a touch of personality to the surrounding area.

A one room building with a small cast iron wood stove, and a rare two-stall privy, the Kelley Corner Schoolhouse captures the classic beauty that makes New England so unique and it should be saved, according to a local group of volunteers.

Walking inside, visitors are transported back in time. Wooden desks line the floor, complete with ink wells for students to practice their penmanship. An empty wall begs for a blackboard to hang on it once again. A small area once used for firewood – since converted into a kitchen – and now deserted, is tucked away on the right.



The structure is the last remaining one-room schoolhouse in town that is still in public ownership by the Gilmanton School District.

It recently received \$10,000 grant from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources funded through the sale of specialty moose conservation license plates. The money will be used toward restoring the interior of the schoolhouse, which includes repairing holes in the walls and ceiling, checking the wainscoting for rot and necessary repair and replacement; replacing flooring and counter tops in kitchen, and interior painting.

A previous Moose Plate Grant and funding from the Land and Community Heritage Investment program (LCHIP) helped pay for exterior renovations in 2018.

“It’s important for the younger generation to understand what life was like,” said Sue Kelley Leclerc, one of only four remaining members of the Lower Gilmanton Community Club, which is taking on the renovation project. “It’s not like it’s been that many years ago when students from Gilmanton were attending school here.”

The schoolhouse in Gilmanton, population 3,750 that sits sandwiched just north of Loudon and south of Gilford, is in remarkable shape for its age dating back to the 1800s. Until recently, it was used for civic gatherings.

“Most of the buildings around here were initially built with hemlock, bark, stuff like that, so they didn’t last very long,” said Paula Gilman, another remaining member of the Lower Gilmanton Community Club.

In 1761, the Lower Gilmanton area was settled by the Gilmans and the Mudgetts. On Dec. 26, 1761, Benjamin Mudgett and his wife trudged through a blizzard from Brentwood to arrive in town. The next day, John Mudgett and his wife arrived.

Slowly the town grew, gaining two blacksmiths, a doctor, a tavern, a lawyer, a boarding house, and even a stagecoach stop. As the town expanded, so did the need for an education system. Although in 1774 one schoolhouse had been voted to be built, by 1778 the town decided to create a school system.

Eventually, as the town expanded, so did the need for a permanent, well-organized school system.

“Initially, in 1778, there were 18 school houses,” Gilman said. “The Kelley Corner School was designated number one.”

No one is quite sure why the Kelley Corner School was school number one, but Gilman theorizes that it’s because of its location near the oldest part of town, Lower Gilmanton, the first place that the settlers built when they set up the town.

Once the school was open, it was in use for grades 1-8 all the way until 1940.

The schoolhouse has a deep connection to both Leclerc’s and Gilman’s families. Both of their families have been in Gilmanton for many generations, with the town name carrying Paula Gilman’s last name, and Sue Kelley Leclerc sharing her maiden name with the Kelley Corner Schoolhouse. It was difficult for Gilman’s family when the school had to shut down since it had been in that section of town for so long.

Gilman’s grandmother, who was one of three school board members, noted in her diary about the decision to shut down the school, “May 14th, 1940, the other two voted to close the school.”

Leclerc’s relatives had a long history of teaching at the school.

“Like Paula’s family, my family made education a high priority,” she said.

Although recently the school has been relatively quiet, it had many uses since its closing in 1940. Initially, it was used as a space for the Lower Gilmanton Community Club to meet, and the Gilmanton Rod and Gun Club met there as well.

It also was a place for community gathering and events throughout Gilman’s and Leclerc’s childhoods.

“In the past, before we started the restoration work, we used to have community suppers here. And that used to be fun. Everybody would do potluck dishes and you’d get to meet people that lived in different parts of the town,” said Leclerc. “And this place would be filled. Filled with people bringing whatever kind of dish, whether it be you know, a dinner dish, or a salad, or a dessert, or whatever. Just, you know, wanted to come in and have a fun evening.”

Gilman remembers those times fondly.

“We’d have strawberry festival in June. In August there’d be a blueberry festival ...And then the Harvest festival in the fall,” said Gilman. “After all the dinner was done, they’d move all the tables and benches out of the way, and a local band would play and we’d have singing and dancing, and great memories.”

However, town demographics began to change and with fewer younger people taking place in the events, the use of the Kelley Corner Schoolhouse dwindled. When a private buyer tried to purchase the building from the School District in 2016, Lower Gilmanton Community Club members started applying for grants. Currently, the club holds a 99 year lease on the building. The Kelley Corner School House was listed on the State Register of Historical Places in 2008.

More recently it been has used as a place for local fourth graders to tour as a part of their classes on New Hampshire history, and as part of the Gilmanton Historical Society tours, but little else. The life that once lit up this building has been extinguished for the time being.

Gilman and Leclerc want to see the building get a new life. One idea is that it could become an area for local clubs and organizations to hold meetings. Gilmanton is having trouble finding spaces for people to meet, and the old schoolhouse could be one of them.

Another idea is to use the building for fundraisers since the schoolhouse is located next to a popular snowmobile trail. Lower Gilmanton Community Club members could serve warm food and drink for snowmobilers passing by during the winter.

It could be “nice to have a ride-in,” Leclerc said. “People could come and have hotdogs or soup or homemade bread.”

More work needs to be done and more money needs to be raised before any of those ideas become a reality.

Any donation helps, and Gilman and Leclerc hopes that the community will understand the value of maintaining the town’s historic buildings for the future.

“Not every single building can be saved, but it’s nice to have a variety of different things like a one room schoolhouse,” said Leclerc.

Anyone interested can make a donation to the non-profit Lower Gilmanton Community Club. Check made can be made out to “Lower Gilmanton” and sent to Paula Gilman, 50 Hawkins Lane, Gilmanton, N.H., 03837.

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