

First Baptist Church of Lower Gilmanton

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May 23 ·

First Baptist Church of Lower Gilmanton, NH

Location: Route 107 Province Road in Lower Gilmanton. Church sits on a knoll overlooking Province Road and buildings south of it.

Construction: Described construction is "superb, well preserved, Greek Revival style exterior." The exterior of the First Baptist Church owes much of its architectural merit to its predecessor, the Northwood Congregational Church, erected in 1840. The Church is significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as one of the finest Greek revival style churches in Belknap County. The Church must be regarded as one of the architectural treasures of Belknap County. The Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on December 1, 1989.

History: Lower Gilmanton is the First Village in Gilmanton being settled in December 1761. The First Baptist Church in Lower Gilmanton was organized in November 1773, making this one of the First Churches in Gilmanton. A meetinghouse was erected in 1774 on the training field in Lower Gilmanton (now known as Frisky Hill, approximately one-half mile north of current location). However, by 1841 the sixty-seven year old meetinghouse was in poor shape. The wardens of the Society called a special meeting on November 17, 1841 and it was decided to take down the present Meetinghouse and build a new one. Antipas Gilman and John Meserve, Wardens of the Baptist Society, deeded the property where the current Church now sits on the Hill to the First Baptist Church. It was proposed to build a meetinghouse forty by fifty feet with a belfry after the model of the Northwood Meetinghouse. The First Baptist Church was erected and completed in November 1842 and was dedicated the next day, November 3, 1842. The cost of the building was less than \$1500 per the Gilmanton Town History published in 1845.

July 2019

The First Baptist Church on Province Road in Lower Gilmanton was founded in 1773. The present building was constructed in 1842. Although the church has not had a full-time pastorate in many years, it is a landmark in the community.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1989, the church continues to serve the Lower Gilmanton Community with monthly summer services, a Christmas celebration and other special occasions.

For nearly 180 years, the First Baptist Church on the brow of the hill on Route 107 in Lower Gilmanton has graced the community. As you know, maintenance of beloved old buildings is an ongoing task. To maintain this special landmark, members, friends and neighbors have undertaken a campaign to raise funds for extensive structural repairs. The scope of work being considered is leaking roof, leaking bell tower, structural issues pertaining to improper support of the bell tower, movement of the existing granite foundation and deteriorated chimneys along with inappropriate flashing.

Church members have applied for grants from local banks and the Land & Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). The Gilmanton Historical Society, acting as our nonprofit sponsor, has received generous donations from local families and longtime residents to help the church's cause.

In the interest of keeping this landmark viable for the future, we need \$180,000. If the LCHIP grant is approved, they will give us \$90,000, but we must match this amount of \$90,000. At this time, we thought you would like to be aware of these pressing needs and give a donation. Donations are tax deductible and mailed to Gilmanton Historical Society, PO Box 236, Gilmanton, NH 03237. Please write in memo line "for First Baptist Church". Gifts will be noted for posterity.

The First Baptist Society and Religious Association of Lower Gilmanton, thanks you for considering helping us reach its fund raising goal of \$90,000.

If you have questions, regarding this fundraising goal, please email: Paula Gilman @ pglmn@metrocast.net or Susan Kelley Leclerc @ rmlskl@metrocast.net.

July 15 ·

History and Significance of Church continued from March 2019

Changes over time: The exterior of the church has seen few changes since its construction in 1842. The chimneys or at least their tops have probably been replaced or rebuilt. The exterior retains its original appearance and its architectural integrity for the period of its construction.

The interior was more extensively remodeled in the late 19th century and early 20th century. During this period, the interiors acquired their present appearance. The vestry was originally a gallery for the choir that opened into the auditorium. The opening between the auditorium and the vestry is said to have been closed in the late 19th century,

before 1890. Pressed metal walls and ceilings were installed in the auditorium and the vestibule were apparently between 1900 and 1915 thus replacing the original plaster interior.

Originally, the pressed metal was unpainted exposed metal but was later painted and deteriorated portions of the auditorium ceiling replaced, probably in the 1920's or 1930's. The auditorium also received new pews, the present platform, a chandelier; interior shutters on the windows were in place by 1915.

The late 1920's saw the installation of the metal posts in the auditorium to support the overhang of the vestry, which had begun to sag under the weight of the belfry tower, and the installation of the kitchen, complete with wood burning cook stove in the vestry and counters, sink and shelves in a small room off the vestry.

Electric lights at the entries were installed after the December 1948 vote of the Society to wire the building for electricity. The window screens were installed since World War II. Carpets were inlaid in the auditorium in 1979. The interior therefore retains its architectural integrity for the early 20th century.

In 2004, the front landing and steps were replaced and augmented by railings and an ADA ramp as an Eagle Scout project. In 2006, fundraising allowed the windows to be restored and to have new storm windows installed that included screens to preserve the original windows. In addition, in 2006, the interior of the auditorium was painted a soft yellow/cream to replace the old blue-green paint.

In 2009, there were several panels of pressed metal in the ceiling by the vestry end that were replaced and painted. In 2012, the old wood burning cook stove in the kitchen area of vestry was removed due to its excessive weight contributing to the bowing of the vestry as seen from the auditorium, and the pews were repainted. In 2013, the ceiling was sheet rocked due to excessive loss of the original plaster. In 2014, the existing carpet was removed and the floors were repainted.

The belfry was empty for over six decades, as it was not until July 29, 1909 a bell was purchased and installed. The belfry was originally open, the present louvers not being placed in the belfry openings until the early 1930's.

The grounds of the church have not changed greatly although there has been growth of trees and shrubs in recent years. The street front of the lot changed when Route 107 was improved and slightly relocated in 1941 - 1942.

The only other building on the property are the horse sheds. At the annual meetings in December 1882 and December 1884, the Society voted to allow the erection of horse sheds on the church lot by private individuals for the housing of their horses and vehicles during church services. Most likely, in the 1883 - 1885 period, two horse sheds were erected in an L-shaped plan to the southeast of the church. One horse shed was torn down in 1969 after its roof collapsed under the snow. The remaining horse shed building seems apparently little changed since the 1880's except for the metal roof and possibly the privy, which might be a later addition. The horse sheds at the First Baptist Church, are in fact, the only horse sheds in Belknap County that retain their original appearance. While this horse shed is a relatively modest building, it is important as the best example of this now rare building type in the county.

On June 13, 1880, a Sunday afternoon at 7:15 pm, a tornado passed over Lower Gilmanton and moved the church with ribs of oak, two feet from its foundation with no damage except to stop the clock. In addition, it did much damage to a number of buildings in Lower Gilmanton.

A Place in the Community: This Church is vital to the residents of Lower Gilmanton many of whom have been here for several generations. The Church has been the meeting place for services, weddings, christenings, funerals, Christmas gatherings and suppers in the past. It is the Cornerstone of Lower Gilmanton - the First Village .

Summarized past maintenance, rehabilitation or preservation work undertaken for this building. There are annual one day 'work bees' in June where the church members and local volunteers work to maintain the Church, horse shed, privy and grounds. This includes, new roofs when needed, painting interior and exterior and putting metal roof on the horse shed. In addition, grounds keeping with trimming and mowing. Replacing the wooden posts for the guardrails and painting them. For generations this has been an annual event and everything has been donated - supplies and labor.

A portion of Condition Assessment photos





















