

THE NEW HAMPTON GRANGE No.123

ALSO KNOWN AS THE CHAPEL, COMMERCIAL HALL, CHAPEL HALL AND THE WRITIN' ROOM



Grange Hall, Main Street (current location)
2 ½ stories, 31' x 58'

The Grange building is 191 yrs old and it is a significant piece of New Hampton's history. The building has been in three (3) different locations. First built and used as a Chapel (next to the Old Town House), then classrooms for the Institute in the Village, then to its present location on Main Street and was used for close to 85 years as the "Grange Hall". The New Hampton Community Church acquired the building in 1995 with the intention of utilizing the building and providing meeting space and a community center. For 15 years it was used for community gatherings, town board meetings, the Church's Sunday school and other events.

The Board of Selectmen was advised the fall of 2016 that the Church had determined they had no use for the building and planned to demolish it in November of 2016, to make room for more parking and/or possible additions to the Church building. The Board met with Church members and asked for a stay in their plans to allow the Town to explore the possible options to save the Grange. The Church membership and Pastor agreed to postpone until the Town votes.

Preliminary investigation was done on the condition of the building and the possibility of moving the building from the present site, but further evaluation is needed in order to present to the voters a final recommendation to move forward.

The Board of Selectmen is presenting these warrant articles to you for authorization to further investigate the possibility of moving the building back to its original location, explore and propose future uses for the building, evaluate the condition and need for repair or improvement. These findings will be presented to the voters at a Special Town Meeting in May/June of 2017.

ORIGINAL LOCATION - 1826

(West side of Old 1798 Town House, Meeting House Lane and Town House Road)

THE CHAPEL - Meeting House Lane

On July 27, 1826, it was voted at a town meeting to grant the right to erect the building on the town common (Town Meeting minutes Vol. VIII). Built in 1826 on the town land, just west of the Old New Hampton Town House (built 1798) on Meeting House Lane, it was called “The Chapel” of the New Hampton Academical and Theological Institution. The New Hampton Academical and Theological Institute moved to Fairfax, Vermont in 1852 where they operated for only a few years. In New Hampton, Col. Rufus G. Lewis and others were determined not to lose the chance of having an academy in town and organized a new corporation, the New Hampton Literary and Biblical Institute, purchased the old buildings and moved them to the New Hampton Village in 1853 onto what is now known as the New Hampton School Campus.



“Site of Chapel Erected 1826” Monument that was placed next to the Town House

FIRST RELOCATION – 1853 until 1911
(NHS Campus on the North side of Main Street)

COMMERCIAL HALL, (aka THE WRITIN’ ROOM & CHAPEL HALL)

This building was one of two purchased by the Trustees of the School and moved to the NHS Campus in the Village from the “Center or Old Institution” where the Old 1798 Town House stands. In the History of New Hampton, The Small Gore of Land”, it states that “it was probably moved down by oxen.” The first building was the “Commercial Hall” which was on the present site of Lane Hall. The second building was the brick building known as Randall Hall. Commercial Hall was used for classrooms and noted in the history was that J. H. Roberts, a New Hampton teacher, taught penmanship in the “Writin’ Room”.



Pictured in 1889 on a “glass plate” photograph (provided by Dave Roberts)
Commercial Hall (Grange) on right and Randall Hall on left. (Looking north from Main Street)

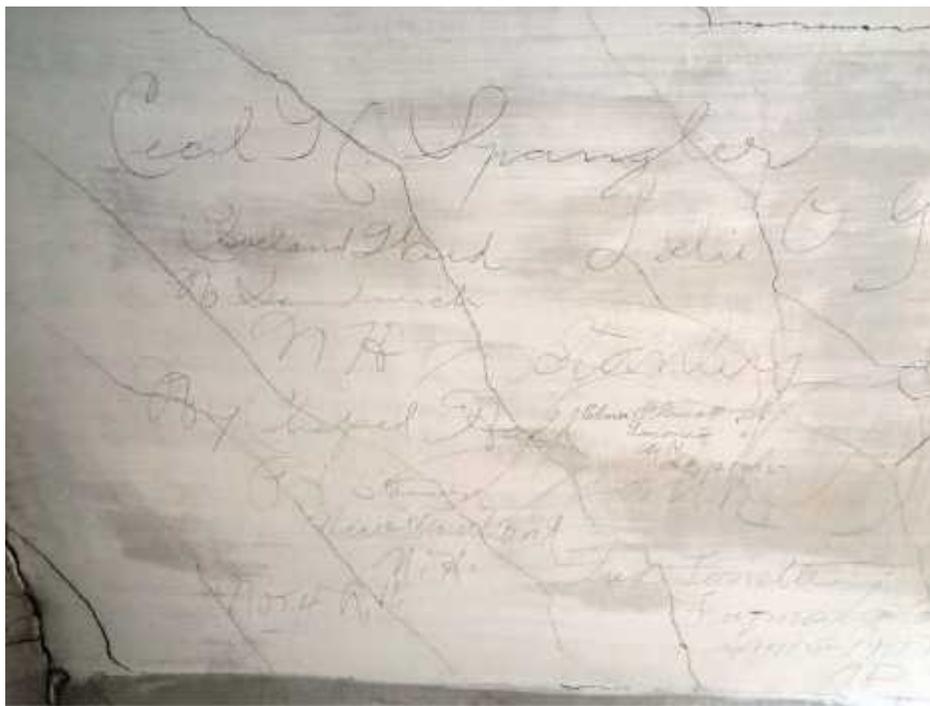


Grange shown to the far right where Lane Hall is now located. (c. early 1900’s)



Actual printed bills
New Hampton Institution Commercial Bank, NH

In 1868 one of the strong principals in New Hampton's history took over. Atwood Bond Meservey ran the school for the next twenty five years. He continued to see that the classics were taught to those entering college, but he helped develop a second set of courses with George C. Chase to teach commercial subjects. Professor Meservey took personal charge and wrote the textbook *Meservey's Bookkeeping*. In 1877 a separate department called the "Commercial College" was set up. It was headquartered in Meservey Hall where students conducted mercantile and bookkeeping transactions, ran a bank with paper money assets of a hundred thousand dollars, and balanced their accounts every night.



Signatures on the 3rd floor walls of NHS student's signatures in "Chapel Hall" indicating Time periods Oct 12, 1905 and Jan 15, 1911 are just a few examples of many signatures on the walls.

SECOND RELOCATION 1911

(Current Location of the Grange Hall, Southside of Main Street)

The Grange

Originally built as the Chapel for the New Hampton Academical and Theological Institute in 1826, it had been moved in 1853 from the west side of the Town House in the Center to the new school site in the Village, where it was known as Commercial Hall or the Writin' Room. The Trustees of the New Hampton School offered the New Hampton Grange what was then called "Commercial Hall", located where Lane Hall now stands. A committee of J. Clifton Tilton, Sam Clay, and David Atwood moved the building with rollers on to the present site on Main Street. In 1919 an addition was built on 22 feet in length, which is now the stage.

The Grange (or Patrons of Husbandry, as it was formally known), was a national organization which had been founded in the 1770's to serve the needs of rural Americans across the country. In addition to providing educational and recreational programs that perpetuated old ways and disseminated new ones about farm life, the Grange also worked to involve members in community affairs and represent their interest at the governmental level.

According to Edwin Huckins (our lifelong resident and local historian) "To move New Hampton's Grange they attached beams underneath and put iron boiler wheels on the beams (boiler wheels came from boilers hauled into the woods to process lumber). Oxen were used to run a winch attached to ropes that were affixed to trees or other objects and on the other end the boiler wheel beams and building. The oxen were hooked up to spokes that turned the wheel on the winch, but because the oxen could not jump over the rope they had two sets of oxen and when they reached the rope one pair was detached, the spoke harness brought to the other side of the rope and the next pair attached. They did this over and over for several days until the grange was in the right spot."



The Grange Hall (currently)

Grange Stage Curtain



A hundred years ago, grand drapes and painted backdrops were the primary artistic feature of the cultural life of almost every village and town in Northern New England and were found in town and grange halls, theaters and opera houses. In 2014 the Town was gifted the Grange Curtain from the New Hampton Historical Society at which time the Town applied for a Grant to restore both the Town House Curtain and the Grange Curtain. These historic and locally significant curtains were restored by a Vermont-based preservation group “Curtains Without Borders” and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance. Both curtains are currently hanging in the Old 1798 Town House.

Grange oven (GS Blodgett Co. made 1912-1915)



Donations were collected by private citizens to purchase the old wood fired oven that was located in the second floor of the Grange.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION!

Excerpts from:

A Small Gore of Land (The History of New Hampton) by Pauline Swain Merrill, John Gowan and others 1977
A Chronical, New Hampton, New Hampshire by Kathy Neustadt and Tom Curren 2003
The Historic Churches of Belknap County by David Ruell 1995
Inventory of the Town Archives of New Hampshire – No. 1 Vol. VIII Town of New Hampton.