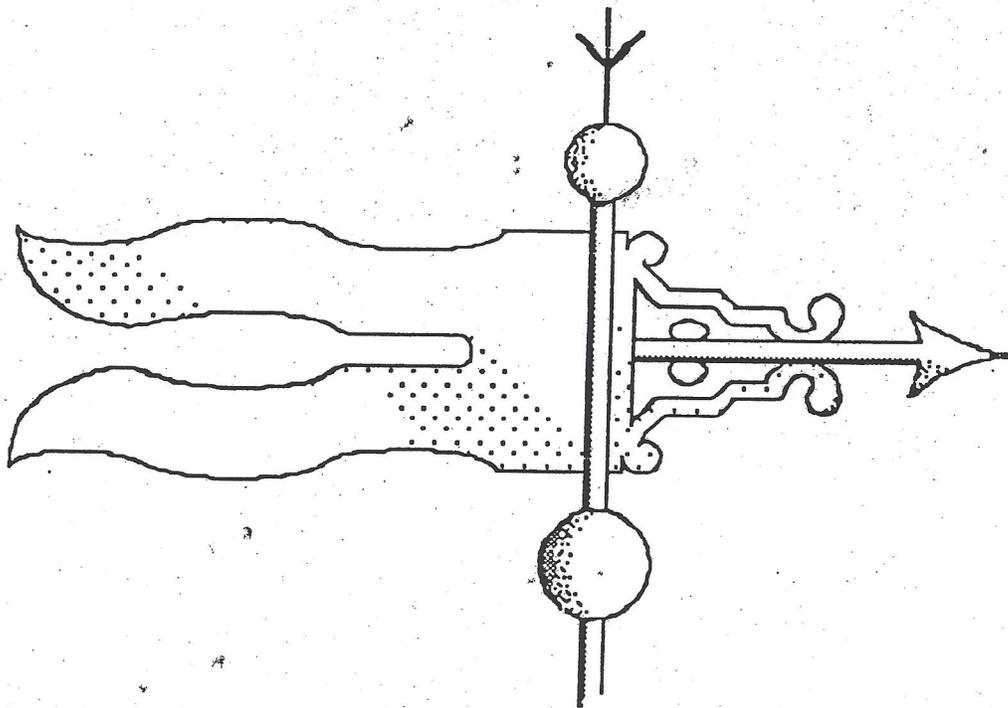


The Third Meeting-house



of
Fitzwilliam,
New Hampshire

The Meeting - house of 1817

The present meeting-house is Fitzwilliam's third such building. The first, constructed during the years 1770 through 1779, was undoubtedly a simple, utilitarian building. It was first used for the proprietors' meeting in 1779. As early as 1796, calls were made for a new meeting-house, as the first building was too small and "poorly fitted for the convenience and comfort of his (Reverend Sabins's) congregation."¹

Land acquired:

Although the town voted to build the new meeting-house in 1803, disagreements prevented its construction until 1816. In 1815, Phineas Reed sold a lot to the town for \$500.00. Solomon Alexander sold additional land near his blacksmith shop, and the Reverend John Sabin gave land for the horse sheds and stables.

Elias Carter:²

(The Fitzwilliam meeting-house is the influence in architecture of Elias Carter, who was the architect for the meeting-houses in Templeton, and Athol, Massachusetts.)

In Brimfield, Massachusetts, in the year 1804, Elias Carter, "a country carpenter," built a meeting-house which is described in the history of Brimfield as having "columns in front, a very respectable looking steeple and the trances all at one end now." Mr. Carter "went up on the gallery girth of the west side of the frame at the raising to prove his work" as was the custom. This new

building was so respected by the citizens that several votes were passed in the town meeting: "that no one be allowed to go into the pulpit during town meeting nor transact any private concerns in the place of meeting;" "that it be recommended to the proprietors of pews to procure sand-boxes for their pews;" "no person should get on top of the pews during town meeting or interrupt the moderator."

Mr. Carter was but twenty-four years of age when he planned and constructed the meeting-house in Brimfield. He was born in Auburn, Massachusetts on May 30, 1781, the son of Timothy and Sarah Walker Carter. His father and uncle, Benjamin Carter, were partners in a firm of contractors. When Elias was three years old, Timothy Carter was killed in a fall from a meeting-house that he was building in Leicester, Massachusetts. Benjamin removed to Vermont and the widowed mother with her six children went to live in the vicinity of Barre, Massachusetts.

Where Elias Carter received his preparation for his profession as an architect is a mystery. Doubtless, he inherited his father's plan books and it is known that he possessed his pattern book that was published in London in 1756 by Battey Langley, called "The City and Country Builder's and Workman's *Treasury of Designs*—according to Andrea Palladio—with rules for working all the varieties of designs" as quoted from the title page. For a brief period, Mr. Carter lived in Georgia where he acquired a southern style that influenced his subsequent designs. Porticoes appear in his plans for both meeting-houses in Templeton, and the creator of the design for its storied steeple which was copied repeatedly along the Connecticut Valley in New Hampshire. Simplicity marked all of his work. He omitted the fluted pillars which ornament the angles of the octagonal lanterns that were designed by Wren and Gibbs.

2nd Meeting-house dedicated in 1816:

The new meeting-house was dedicated on November 6, 1816, but on January 17, 1817, a storm of lightning, thunder, rain and snow came about 2:00 A. M. Lightning struck the building, and started a fire in shavings left by workmen. The building was a total loss.

3rd Meeting-house completed in 1817:

Construction was started again on the present meeting-house, under the direction of the master builder, Samuel Kendall. The ridge-pole is 66 feet long, one foot square, and weighs 3,354 pounds. The cross-timbers are 58 feet long, with a weight of 3,150 pounds each.

The raising of the meeting-house was a great event. Young men competed in the honor of lifting the heaviest pieces of timber, or climbing to the ridge-pole to "wet it down with rum." The ladies provided dinners for the workmen of beans and corn bread, pies and pound cake. Large amounts of rum and cider were consumed for the raising, up to eight barrels have been said. On November 26, 1817, the third meeting-house was completed and dedicated.

The dedication was a time of solemn ceremony which was attended not only by the town's population, but by clergymen of other towns.

Cost:

The building cost \$6,064.00. The sale of pews brought the sum of \$7,699.94; more than enough to pay for the church, and also the debt on the building that was subsequently burned.

The Revere bell:

The Revere bell, placed in the meeting-house of 1816, fell unharmed in the fire. It was cracked in 1881 and had to be re-cast. 300 silver dollars were added to the metal to ensure a silvery tone. The bell weighs 1,534 pounds, and was re-cast by the Blake Company of Boston.

Altering the building:

In 1854, the subject of changing the meeting-house came before the town. In 1858 the town bought, at auction, the building for \$1,000.00, for use as a town hall. In 1860, alterations began at a cost of \$1,425.00. In 1868, more improvements were made. Electric lights were added in 1918.

In 1949, a general renovation took place, and today it remains much the same.

The chandelier & clock:

The chandelier of the 1817 meeting-house was taken down in 1860, and stored in the attic. In 1949, it was restored to the upper hall.

The clock was made by E. Howard & Company of Boston, and installed in 1861. It was bought with money raised by the private subscription of sixty people.

National Register:

In 1976, the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, by the United States' Department of the Interior.

¹ Whitmore, Joel, *History of Fitzwilliam, N. H.* (New York: Burr Printing Co., 1888), p 194.

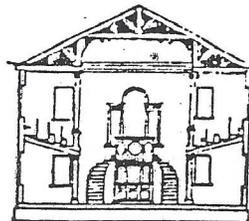
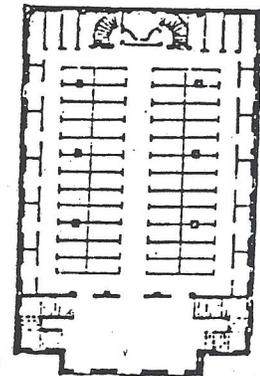
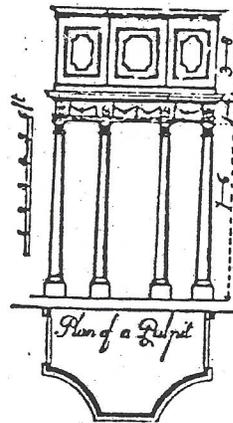
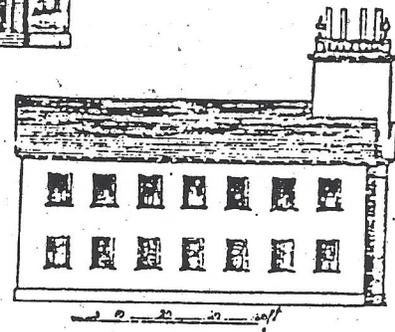
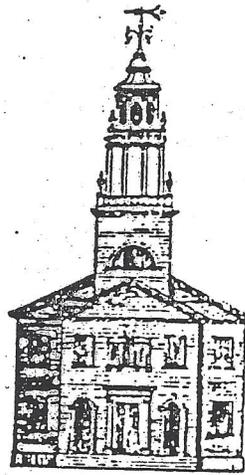
² Spear, Eva A., *Colonial Meeting-Houses of New Hampshire* (Littleton, N. H.: Courier Printing Co., 1938), "Elias Carter".

Instead, he employed an effect of pilasters whose capitals are incorporated in the mouldings beneath the decks of the several stories of his steeples. He introduced the Palladian window into the front wall of the second story beneath the ceiling of his portico and the oval window in the gable of the porch. By 1820 he had built twelve meeting-houses. In the church at Mendon, Massachusetts, stands a hand-carved pulpit which he executed at night after the other workmen had departed, probably dreaming its designs by candle light. His granddaughter states "He undoubtedly commenced his career as a master-builder, later leaving easier work to others and becoming himself the architect and wood-carver of the firm." He excelled in carving small wreaths of roses or an anthemium design for the ornamentation of his interiors. His grandson recalls "a large collection of special planes, twenty or thirty in number, by which he could make mouldings of different designs." On the front wall of the Templeton meeting-house are three panels, two ovals and a central rectangle, which are probably examples of his exquisite carvings. He preferred plain shafts for his pillars with carved volutes of the Ionic order in their capitals. He kept up with the times, however, and in later life adopted the prevailing classic style of the Greek revival. Elias Carter died in Chicopee Falls in 1864, leaving New Hampshire and the Connecticut Valley deeply indebted to his skill and creative genius.

Plans drawn:

Thomas Stratton, born in Athol, Massachusetts in 1758, and a soldier in the Revolutionary War, came to Fitzwilliam about 1813. Mr. Stratton was considered a fine penman and quite knowledgeable in designs. He was paid the sum of \$3.33 to draw up the plans for the meeting-house.

In 1818, Mr. Stratton was killed by a falling tree while cutting wood.



Pl. 33.

Plate 33 from Asher Benjamin's *Country Builder's Assistant*, displaying a plan for a meeting-house.