

Samuel I. Scrabble

The New England Meeting House
with a
History of the Congregational
Meeting Houses
in
Hollis, N.H.

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The New England Meeting House

— WITH A —

**History of the Congregational
Meeting Houses**

— IN —

Hollis, N. H.

By
Samuel L. Gorton

The New England Meeting House

WITH A

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18 SOMERSET STREET
BOSTON

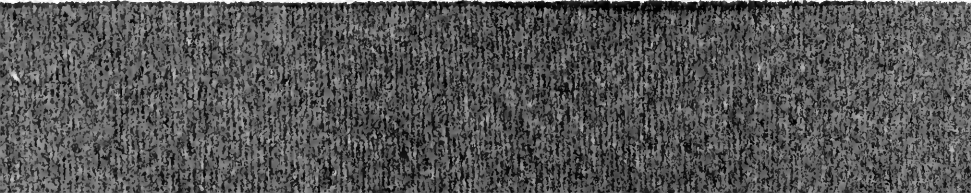
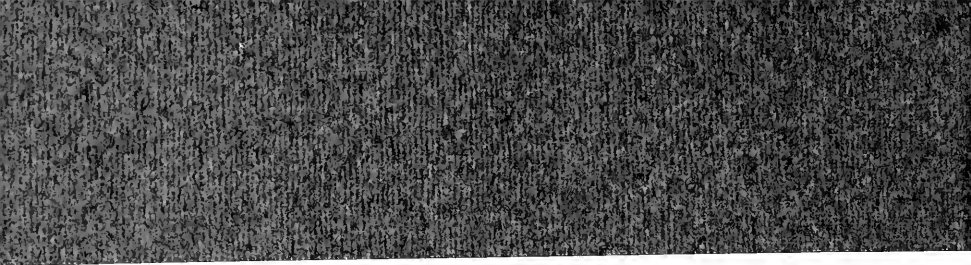
The New England Historical and Genealogical Register

We call your attention to the following, which appears in
the **Register** dated

JAN 1905

The New England Meeting House. With a History of the Congregational Meeting Houses in Hollis, N. H. A Discourse on the Centennial Anniversary of the Building of the Present Meeting House. By SAMUEL L. GEROULD, D.D. Given on Old Home Week Sunday, Aug. 21, 1904. Nashua, N. H.: Telegraph Pub. Co., Printers. 1904. 8vo. pp. 34. Ill.

This is exceedingly pleasant reading, in a style particularly suited to the matter.



The New England Meeting House

WITH A

HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL
MEETING HOUSES

IN

HOLLIS, N. H.

A DISCOURSE ON THE CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BUILDING OF THE PRESENT
MEETING HOUSE

BY

✓
SAMUEL L. GEROULD, D. D.,

Pastor of the Church.

Given on Old Home Week Sunday, August 21, 1904.

NASHUA, N. H.:
TELEGRAPH PUBLISHING COMPANY, PRINTERS.
1904.

EXPLANATORY.

The Old Home Week Association at its first meeting this year expressed a desire to observe the centennial anniversary of the erection of our meeting house in connection with its Old Home Week observances. A vote was passed requesting a discourse suitable to the occasion on Old Home Week Sunday, and a committee was appointed, consisting of Charles S. Spalding, Cyrus F. Burge and Daniel W. Hayden, to co-operate with a like committee appointed from the church, in furnishing facts for use on the occasion. The church subsequently appointed as its committee Dea. Enoch J. Colburn, Miss Emma L. VanDyke and Wilbert P. Farley.

Old Home Week Sunday brought together a congregation of nearly four hundred fifty people. The choir, George A. Ladd, chorister, occupying the old singers' seats or gallery, had made special preparation for the day, and was led in its singing by two violins, a cornet, and a double bass viol. At the conclusion of the morning service Silas M. Spalding asked the privilege of speaking, and then called for a vote expressive of a desire that the discourse be printed. The response was so hearty that arrangements were immediately made to put it in type.

The cut of the meeting house of 1804, which is given herein, was drawn from descriptions, and as these vary it is possible that in minor details it may not be accurate.

DISCOURSE.

I Kings 8: 18. *Whereas it was in thy heart to build a house for my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.*

Up to a certain period there had been no visible place of worship where the Israelitish people could gather and join in their religious ceremonials and exercises. But soon after the Exodus they were given the tabernacle, or tent of meeting, which was carried with them wherever they went. Here the priests ministered before the Lord and the sacrifices were offered, and here God manifested himself. But after the kingdom was established the time had come when it was desirable that there should be a place where larger numbers could meet, under a roof; where the people could go to pray and join in the services of worship. David had just builded for himself a house of large proportions; it was only natural that one of such strong religious proclivities, who himself had outgrown tents, should feel that the ark of the covenant should no longer dwell in curtains. Hence he commences to make preparations for one of the richest, most expensive, temples that ever was erected.

But he was not permitted to carry out his purpose; it was left to his son to carry it out, which he did with a lavish outlay. David was grievously disappointed that he could not do it, but God commended him because it was *in his heart* to do it. The honor of building the temple belonged as much to David as to Solomon. That a person should desire to build, and make preparations for building, so far as getting the materials together is concerned, is an act that is most commendable. As it was to the credit of David that it was in his heart to build a house for the wor-

ship of God, so it is to the credit of all who have since lived and wrought in the erection of buildings for that purpose.

From that time to this God has put it in the hearts of his friends to build temples as they were needed for his service; many of them beautiful in appearance, of great cost, and of such permanent materials that they have endured for centuries. In the old world there may be found some in constant present use which were erected before the discovery of America.

When our fathers came to this country, coming as they did from a religious motive, almost their first thought, and their first work, was to provide a place for the public worship of God. They were rude affairs in the beginning, constructed of logs, sometimes surrounded by palisades to protect them from the Indians, but they were as good as their own houses,—probably a little better. As time went on, as conveniences increased, as colonies pushed out into the wilderness, and as they became able, they erected better ones. But the meeting house must always be the first, or among the first, of the buildings to be put up, and always it must be of the best at their command at the time. If other people, of a later day, have thought and provided first for their own houses, and have lavished their wealth on their construction to the neglect of the meeting house, it was not so with our fathers. We of this day can hardly realize how much of love and sacrifice went into their places of worship. It is related of a family that went from New England into the wilds of Pennsylvania after the Revolution, carrying all their effects with them, and driving their only cow before them, that when they were joined by other families and the need of a meeting house began to be felt, the good wife and mother of three children was greatly troubled because they had no public worship, and no place for it save in their own log houses. When it was proposed to provide a place, she was in trouble because they were so poor they could help in its construction only by labor. It was then she asked her hus-

band to sell their cow, and use all the proceeds in helping secure their meeting house.

This illustrates the spirit and temper of the people who settled New England, and whose children afterwards went into the interior. But their hatred of the Established church of England, that had been the instrument of driving them into the wilderness, was so intense that they would have nothing in their worship, or places of worship, that reminded them of it. The Episcopalians called their buildings for worship churches; theirs should be called meeting houses. The churches of the old country were elaborate structures, in which there was a great display of art and architecture; theirs must be very plain and unpretentious, and they must have no steeples. The reading of the Scriptures in their religious assemblies was not tolerated at first, and when introduced by many was vigorously opposed. For awhile they would have no religious service at a funeral, and the marriage ceremony must be performed by a minister of state rather than of religion. The home churches had instruments of music, so they would have none. When the violin finally crept in as an aid to song, by many it was looked upon as an instrument of the devil. It is related of one minister who strongly opposed its introduction that, when he could no longer prevent it, in his pique he announced the singing in this manner,—“we will now fiddle and sing” the eighty-fourth psalm.

We have a good illustration of the meeting houses near at hand, in the building standing on the hill in the west part of the village of Brookline, which was erected, little by little, between 1787 and 1798. This was the prevailing style during the eighteenth century, soon giving to the buildings the name of “barn meeting houses,” because of their form and extreme plainness. The front door opened directly into the audience room; there were usually porches on the right and left sides of the house, in which there were stairs leading into galleries, one of these being used by the men and the other by the women. The pulpit was opposite

the front door, and was reached by a winding stairway. Over it hung the sounding board, which caused more than one youngster to sit through the services in a quiver of fear lest it should fall upon the preacher's head. Directly in front of the pulpit and against it, sat the deacons, facing the congregation. Many of the first meeting houses had pews around the walls of the building only, while there were long benches within, often without backs, facing the aisle from the front door to the pulpit. On these sat the common people, the men on one side and the women on the other, while the wall pews were occupied by the dignitaries of the town. At the town meetings it was a common act to appoint a person to "dignify the pews," that is, to seat the family of the man paying the largest taxes in the most desirable pew, and the others according to taxes paid. In time, however, the center of the house was filled with pews, and the "dignifying" process was dropped. Steeples were a long time in coming, and when they did they were mostly small affairs, little cupolas, just large enough to hold a bell. Previous to this the drum had called the people to worship.

Not all the meeting houses were as plain and barn-like as has been described, for there were some communities or parishes that were not afraid to break away from the conventional type. The meeting house of the first church in Keene, still in use, was erected in 1786, and is a fine specimen of early architecture, with elaborate and expensive carvings, and a steeple much resembling the Park street church in Boston, which was not built till 1810,—the famous Old South meeting house having been built in 1729. The oldest meeting house in Boston is Christ's church, Salem street, built in 1723.

We have in this state today, in present use, at least seventeen meeting houses that were erected previous to 1800, the earliest being that at Newington, built between 1710 and 1713. The first church in Derry, the spire of which can be seen on a clear day from the Pepperell road,

a little beyond the South cemetery, was erected in 1769, and the one at Greenland in 1756. Of course these houses have all been modernized, and have but small resemblance in their interior to their appearance when first erected. In Sandown there is a meeting house, belonging to no particular denomination, in use only a few Sundays each summer, the expense for which and for keeping the house in good repair being met by a fund, which is a good sample of one of the old "barn meeting houses" of the better sort. Here may be seen the square pews, with seats on four sides facing in, hung on hinges, the seats narrow and without inclination, the backs perpendicular, with a row of capped spindles surmounting the top, and inviting the inattentive boy to see how far, or how many of them, could be turned without making them squeak. It has the high pulpit, reached by winding stairs, galleries on three sides, porches at the side entrances, all being in the style of a century ago, minus any steeple. In many places there were "noon houses," so called, where the people could repair during the intermission, talk over their affairs, and where the women could replenish their foot stoves from the fire here kept burning, and it is probable there was such a house here,—perhaps more than one. It is related that Deacons Ephraim Burge and Stephen Jewett, after the present house was built, dug a shallow cellar somewhere near where the present east horse sheds now stand, over which they erected a cover, and into which they alternated in rolling a barrel of cider each autumn for their regalement during the noon intermission. Whether these two men drank it all history doesn't show. A local historian has informed me that some of the noon houses were built on the club principle, the members of which took turns in furnishing cider for quenching the inordinate thirst of those days.

THE FIRST MEETING HOUSE.

The early settlers of this town were not different from the settlers of other New England towns. As soon as a sufficient number of families had made their homes on our soil, they began to move for a place of worship, which should also be the place for the transaction of their town affairs,—the town house and the meeting house almost always being the same. Their first move was in 1740, the taxpayers at the time numbering only twenty-nine. But they had the courage of their convictions and so went ahead. The first proposition was to build near the present house of John A. Coburn, and afterwards other locations were advocated, but it was finally voted to place it where it now stands, the land being given for it, and for a cemetery, by Abraham Taylor, who lived near where George A. Ladd now lives. It is a curious fact that the town did not formally accept the gift until six years afterwards, or three years after the owner's death. The house was built by Robert Colburn and David Nevins.

The plainness, simplicity and small size of the first meeting house we can hardly realize. Its dimensions were 22 x 20 feet, 9 feet post,—a little smaller, and one foot lower, than our present library room, but large enough for immediate needs. It was probably begun late in the autumn of 1740, but not completed till the next year, for in October, 1741, it was voted "to have one Glace winder in the meeting house, and to have it underpind as soon as possible." It was originally voted that it should have three glass windows, and the cut in the town history so represents it, but there is no evidence that it ever had more than one. But what a cheerless place it must have been,—a mere shelter, that would hardly protect them from the biting winds of winter, and with no method of heating it. But in this rude affair our first settlers met for worship and for the transaction of their town business, in winter's cold and summer's heat, for a few years until they had become stronger, and so better able to improve the

situation. Some old records recently found by Dr. Samuel A. Green of Boston show that Rev. George Whitefield preached in this town in September, 1744.

THE SECOND MEETING HOUSE.

In 1745 the taxable inhabitants had increased to seventy-seven. They began to be troubled about the inferior quality of their meeting house, so in March of that year they voted to build a new and more substantial one, 50 x 44 feet on the ground, with 23 feet post. The next year, by reason of the change of the town charter and town lines, the names on the tax list were reduced to fifty-three, greatly weakening, and at first discouraging, the people. But at a meeting June 13, 1746, they had so far recovered themselves that they virtually renewed the vote of the previous year, and at once began preparations for building. Meanwhile the first meeting house had been moved a little to the east, probably to a point near where the first horse shed now stands, and where it continued to be used until the second house was ready,—and for years afterwards as a storehouse.

The new house was raised August 13, 1746. There had been much discussion and some ill feeling developed in regard to its location. The town then embraced the east part of Brookline, then called Raby, and the inhabitants of that part of the town naturally desired to have it located more conveniently for themselves, and so tried to have it built on Proctor hill. But here, as elsewhere, the majority must rule, and the majority decided it should be on the old location, where it now stands.

In this house our fathers worshipped, and attended to the town's business, through the trying times of the French and Indian, and the Revolutionary wars, from 1746 till 1804, without fire in winter save that kindled in their own bosoms by the sermons they heard and the discussions in which they took part, and that which our good mothers carried in their little foot stoves. They came hither each Sunday, long lines of people on horseback, from all parts

of the town, the children and young people walking, in summer with bare feet until they had reached a point near the house, when they put on their stockings and shoes which they had so far carried in their hands, and which they removed after service,—a custom that was kept up for seventy-five years or more. Here the people listened to two sermons each Lord's day, each of about an hour's length, with the devotional service nearly as long. Including the intermission they could hardly have spent less than four hours each Sunday at the place of worship. What say those to this who now look upon a single service of one hour as exceedingly wearisome, and if it be protracted to an hour and a quarter as beyond endurance? But how the people must have suffered during the cold winters, with no fires, and no such protection from warm garments as we now have. But I suppose they had their compensations, and they didn't realize that they were suffering.

This second meeting house had pews around the walls only; the interior of it was fitted with benches facing inward toward the aisle, so the people sat with their sides to the pulpit, the men on one side and the women on the other. But in it, in 1764, was organized the church of Plymouth, N. H., made up of our own citizens who were about to emigrate thither, and here in 1765 Peter Powers, Jr., was ordained pastor of the little church he had gathered in the wilderness at Newbury, Vt.

THE THIRD MEETING HOUSE.

As early as 1797 the question of a new house began to be agitated. The people had outgrown the old one, and they felt that they needed a better one. Notwithstanding the emigration, and the Revolution, the population had increased so that by the census of 1800 we had 1554 inhabitants. We find an article in the town warrant of 1797 to see if the town will build a new meeting house. It resulted in a vote instructing the selectmen to "repair the windows and make it do for the present." The next year the

THE MEETING HOUSE OF 1804.



article appeared again, but the town voted to pass it. We can easily see that the matter was being carefully canvassed, the arguments for and against a new building being presented in private and in public. In 1799 the town voted to accept the report of a locating committee previously appointed, which committee fixed upon the position where it now stands.

But they were not then quite ready to build, for in March, 1800, they "voted to repair the windows," and a little after "to repair the house." But the agitation went on. The warrant for 1801 contained an article "to see if the town will move off the old meeting house in order that a new one may be built, agreeably to what the town has voted at a former meeting, and act on all matters relative to building a new meeting house." The temper of that meeting, however, was such that the voters were not ready definitely to act, and so the meeting was "adjourned so far as that article was concerned till March 2nd," and again till April 6th, and then again till May 4th, when it was voted to build, "provided a plan could be devised to build without a tax." It appears that already disinterested parties from Pepperell had been asked to appraise the pews of the old church, and had done so; and so at this meeting a committee was appointed "to devise a plan to build a meeting house free from tax, including the old meeting house and burying yard wall the length of the new meeting house, and paying the holders of the old pews the sums at which they were appraised by a committee from Pepperell." This language is somewhat obscure, but the report of the committee shows what was meant. It was as follows:

1. That the town fix on some plan for a meeting house, and how the same shall be finished.

2. That a committee of three be chosen by ballot who shall number the pews on said plan, and sell them for the best advantage for the benefit of the town, reserving a minister's pew for the benefit of said town, and every seventh pew below, and every fifth pew in the gallery, till the rest shall be sold; then to be sold or reserved till the house be finished, at the discretion of the commit-

tee. Said committee shall keep a fair record of their proceedings, and after said house shall be finished and all the pews paid for, all sales of pews shall be recorded in a town book, to be kept as a record of titles to pews in said meeting house, and signed by said committee and attested by the town clerk, and this shall be considered as a good and sufficient title for each purchaser to his pew.

3. That the conditions of the sale be as follows:— Each purchaser shall be responsible for the payment of the sum for which his pew shall be struck off to him, in the following manner;—five per cent. to be paid down in cash at the time of the sale; one-eighth part of the remainder in cash on or before the 10th day of January, 1803; one-eighth more in cash on or before the 10th day of March, 1803; one-half of what still remains in materials, as follows: all the materials for frame and underpinning to be delivered on the common on or before the 15th day of March, 1803; all outside finishing on or before May 1st, 1803; all inside finishing on or before June 15, 1803, or in cash on or before the said 15th of June; and the remainder in cash in one month after said house shall be finished, unless previously paid in materials or labor. Each pew shall be held as collateral security for the payment of the purchase money, and shall be liable to be sold by said committee at public vendue if the purchaser shall fail of fulfilling any of the articles of sale; the overplus, after deducting the cost of such sale and making good his deficiency in payments, which shall have become due before the time of such sale, to be returned to the original purchaser; the new purchaser to be holden for the fulfillment of the original contract according to the articles of the first sale.

4. A committee of three shall be chosen by ballot, one of whom shall be a carpenter and joiner, who shall divide the materials for said house, and the labor to build and finish the same, into as many lots as they shall judge convenient to give an equal chance to the purchasers of pews, which lots shall be set up at vendue by said committee and struck off to the lowest bidder. Each person who shall bid any of them off shall be responsible for the performance, with surety to the satisfaction of the last said committee. The last said committee shall inspect all materials, and labor done, and shall accept or reject the same at discretion,— and if it be in labor the person or persons so deficient shall make all damages good to the satisfaction of said committee.

5. All committees to be employed in said building shall be paid a reasonable compensation for their services from the moneys raised by the sale of pews.

6. Said house shall be finished on or before the first day of November, 1803.

Subsequently, at the same meeting, it was voted "that the mode of finishing the meeting house be left to the second committee mentioned in the above report, reserving to the town the liberty of giving special directions if they see fit cause."

It would appear that some committee was looking about for plans for the new house, but what committee it is not quite clear, for at a meeting Dec. 28, 1801, the town "voted to accept the Billerica plan as altered by the committee for that purpose." It also "voted that the pews build the meeting house and the burying yard wall, and pay the old men for their pews, as appraised by the committee from Pepperell."

The "burying yard wall" comes to notice in most of the action taken, though as far back as 1758 the town voted to have it fenced, and in 1761 had paid John Atwell for building a stone wall. Still later, March 12, 1805, it "voted to choose a committee to see that the west burying yard wall be finished according to agreement, free of expense to the town."

At a meeting March 16, 1802, a committee was chosen "to look over the proceedings of the various meetings in relation to the new house, and at a future meeting report to the town what votes it shall be thought best to record." It was evident they had become a little mixed in their views and wished to have the record clear before proceeding further. To give time for this report, or because they were not quite ready to act, it was voted at this meeting "to postpone the building the meeting house for one year, and all matters relating thereto." It is probable that the votes that are permanently recorded were the report of this committee; that the original record was made on loose sheets, and had not been entered in the book.

The carefulness with which they guarded their action is shown by a vote taken May 30, 1803, "that whereas some doubt has arisen relative to the import of the third vote passed at the adjournment of the meeting Dec. 28, 1801,

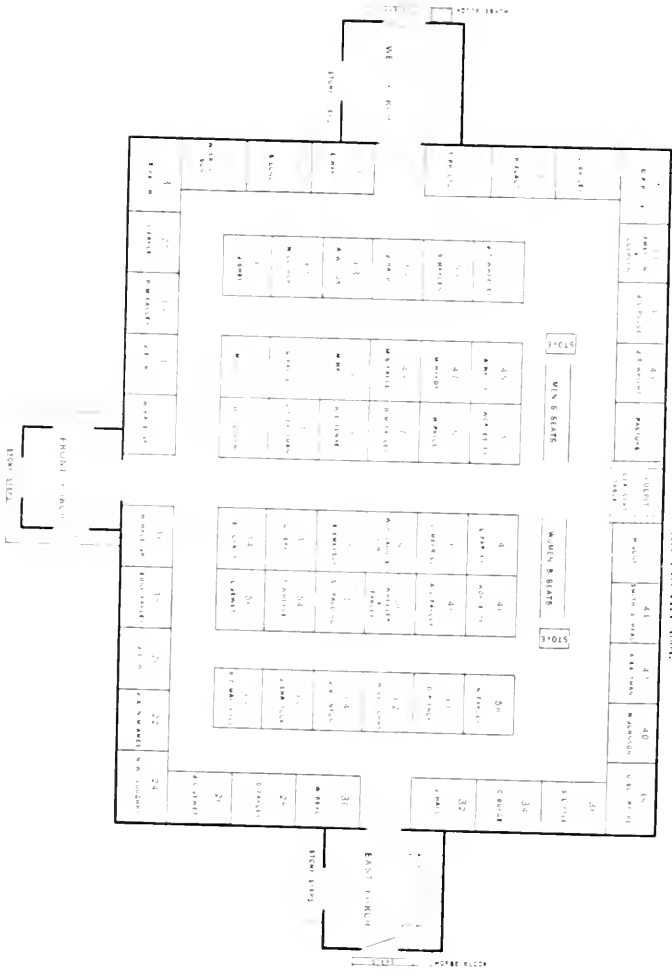
they then intended and now understand that the true meaning and intent thereof was, that the pews should build the meeting house; and that if the pews should sell for more than enough to build said house, each purchaser should receive back his portion of the overplus according to the price of his pew; that no more of the burying yard wall was intended than the length of the meeting house. And it is further understood that if any of the pews remain unsold when the house shall be finished, said unsold pews, except a ministerial pew, are to be the common property of those who have purchased in proportion to each one's purchase; and that in case all the pews shall not be sold for enough to build said house, each pew holder shall be assessed and be obliged to pay his proportion of the deficiency in proportion to the price of his pew."

Instead of building the house in 1802 as first proposed, or in 1803, the old house was continued in use until 1804. At the annual meeting of that year, March 15th, it was "voted that the second committee take down the old meeting house as soon as they may think necessary, at the expense of the pew purchasers"; also, "that the said committee be under the direction of the pew purchasers in raising the meeting house." Further votes on that occasion were "that the meeting house may be finished with a tower and a low steeple, if it can be done without expense to the town," and that "a shelter may be erected before the school house to accommodate public worship, and that if any expense arise it shall be assessed with the minister rate."

When the meeting house was taken down the windows were purchased and used in the building of the house now owned by Mrs. Timothy Flagg,—the house being made with higher posts than usual to accommodate the size of the windows. The windows in the upper story of that house at the present time are the very ones that were taken from our second meeting house. The timbers constituted the frame of the present barn of George D. Verder.

Previous to 1804 it is suspected there had been agitation

MEETING HOUSE IN HOLLES, BETTLE 1804



in regard to building a town house separate from the meeting house, and that at some time a vote had been passed so to do. In 1804 an article appeared in the warrant to see if the town would build a town house, but no action on it is recorded. The next year there was an article "to see if the town would build a town house and a gun house." It voted not to build. In 1810 an effort was made to get a vote to "provide a house for the benefit of funerals," which failed.

In 1804 the work of building our present house began in earnest. We can imagine the people from the various parts of the town drawing to the common the logs that were to be hewn into timbers, or to Hayden and Bailey's mill and elsewhere where the boards were sawed. We can seem to see the people as they congregate on the common with their chalk and lines, their broad axes, augers and chisels, for the purpose of hewing these timbers into shape and making the mortises and tenons. We can fancy that it was a sort of picnic for them as they worked, and joked, and gossiped, and chaffed one another. The master workman was Nathan T. Holt, a young man of 29, who lived where Mrs. Isaac VanDyke now lives, where he had a mill, and manufactured hay rakes and grain cradles. He was a young man to have charge of so important a house as this, but the building shows that he was equal to it. There is a tradition, however, that at some stage of the proceedings he became perplexed because unable to adjust some of the timbers in a satisfactory manner. In his dilemma he went to the house of Parson Smith and laid the case before him. The good minister advised taking to the Lord, so they both kneeled in prayer, asking for counsel and wisdom. Returning to his work he found himself able to make the timbers fit as he desired.

A story is told of one who was drawing a load of boards from Hayden and Bailey's mill, who took his little son with him on the load. While passing over a corduroy road a little this side of the mill the boy was thrown off in such a

way that a wheel passed over his neck. But he had fallen in such a manner that his head lay between the logs, so he was not seriously injured by the accident.

What a great day it must have been when the people gathered to raise the building! A "raising" was a great event, even if it was no more than a common barn; but a great house like this would call together practically every able-bodied man or boy in town. I imagine I can see them coming from all parts of the town, with pike poles long and short, grasped in their brawny hands. It would require a small regiment of men to raise from the ground one of the framed sides of this large building, many of the timbers being of hard wood, and of larger dimensions than are now made. But "they had a mind to work," and so, as in Nehemiah's time, the building was erected. The people were in the spirit of the occasion, and the spirit of cider and rum was probably in them. The temperance movement had not then begun; nearly everyone drank ardent spirits, and especially at "raisings." It would be interesting if we knew just how much spirit it took to get these timbers together, but I have found no record of it; the bill was probably charged to the pew owners.

The house was finally completed at a total cost of \$7,049.-35, including the value of the pews in the old house. The new pews sold for \$8,416.35, besides those unsold which were valued at \$568, the excess of receipts being returned to those who had bought the pews, in proportion to the amount they had paid. We said the house was completed, yet we find this significant vote passed at the annual meeting in 1805, "that the town will give leave to have the common levelled, and the underpinning of the meeting house secured under the direction of a committee, provided it can be no expense to the town."

Many who are living remember this house, and especially the dark rolling clouds painted on the blue ceiling in the northwest corner. Whatever its purpose was it served to frighten the children, portending as it did a coming storm.

It may be noted here that at this period, both before and after building this house, the care of the meeting house was sold at auction at each annual meeting, as was the ringing of the bell until within a few years. The care of the house was to include sweeping it from eight to twelve times a year, shovelling paths to the horse blocks and keeping them clear, locking and unlocking the house on all public occasions. Nothing is said about building fires, as they had none. For this service about eight dollars a year was usually paid after the completion of the new house: in the old house it was less; in 1802 it was bid off to Thomas Cummings for \$5.25. It was usually provided that the sexton must "do his work to the satisfaction of the people or have nothing." Where in these days could a man be found for sexton who would be willing to have his salary depend on his satisfying everybody?

We have no record of the day of dedication of this house but not unlikely it was some day late in November, or in December. It must have been a glad occasion when they exchanged the old house for the new, and gave up their cramped quarters in the school house occupied by the women, and the shelter at the front door where the men were seated. They could say to one another with David, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord," for not only their money and their labor had gone into its construction, but their love.

The house was originally painted yellow, or a straw color, so that afterwards, when painted white, the yellow would sometimes, especially after a rain, show through. The house for many years had over the front this inscription,—“Built in 1804.” Would it not be well now to replace it?

We are wont to think of all the people of a hundred years ago as being honest, and doing their work in a thorough manner so it would stand the closest inspection and endure much longer than modern work. Shall I shock you if I tell you that in 1810 the town “voted to see if there

can be any damages got for the fraud in painting the meeting house"; while in the same year there was an article in the warrant "to see if the town will repair the meeting house." It isn't known to what this refers, but we naturally think that if a new house comes to repairs in six years there must be some reflection on the materials used, or on the workmanship.

As early as 1808 there was an article in the warrant to see if the town would purchase a bell, but it was voted down. In 1821, however, 160 persons subscribed \$570.36 for the purchase of a bell. This was unfortunately cracked about 1850, when the present bell was secured.

Horse sheds are a necessary adjunct of a well regulated meeting house. I am informed that the first in town were located farther west than the present ones on the west side,—nearly as far as the town pump; that they were so narrow as to accommodate a horse only, as in those days people came to church on horseback. The first reference to them in the records that has been found is in 1826, when it was "voted that individuals have liberty to build horse sheds near the meeting house, under the direction of the selectmen, where they now stand," and a committee was drafted to draw plans. If the language of the last words refers to the sheds, and not to the selectmen, it would appear that some were already on the ground, and that this action referred to new ones. In 1828 another committee was appointed to find land on which to build. In 1829 it was "voted that the selectmen sell at auction the ground formerly occupied as horse sheds west of the meeting house extending from the corner of the burying ground south, and so much land in addition as may be necessary for new stables, to the citizens of Hollis and no other; that the selectmen sell at auction the ground formerly occupied by horse sheds extending west from the south end of the ground above described to the citizens of Hollis and to no other, for the express purpose of building horse sheds thereon; and if ground cannot be obtained of Henry Price

for the purpose of making such sheds of a suitable depth, that those who may build sheds have four feet of ground from the road, the town discontinuing the same as highway on condition that they procure land of Mr. Smith on the south side of the road, so as to preserve the present width of the road." In this connection it may be said that the further end of the row of sheds now on the east side of this house originally opened to the south, making a corner of the buildings.

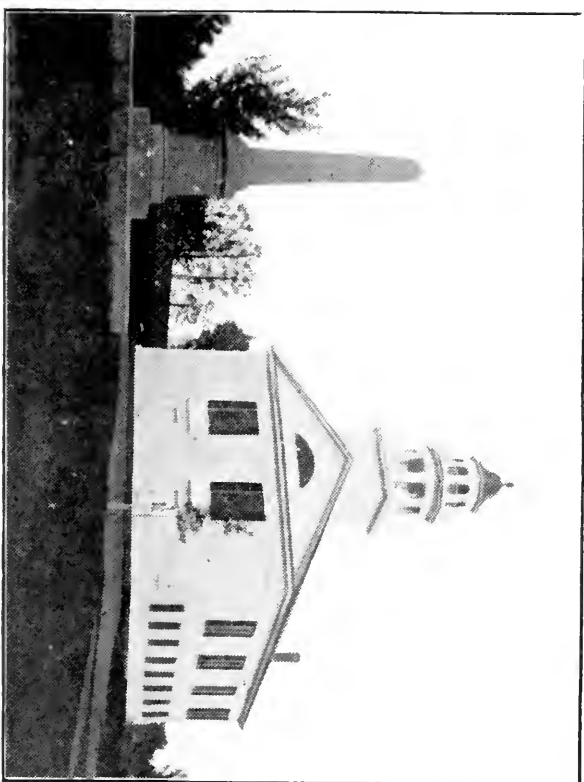
While the question of horse sheds was being agitated, that of stoves in the meeting house was also before the people. We of this generation cannot understand why it had been so long delayed, or why there should have been opposition to their introduction. In 1825 an article appeared in the warrant to see if the town would purchase stoves for the meeting house, but it was at once voted down. The next year it appeared again, but no record of action taken can be found. In 1828 it was "voted to give liberty to place stoves and funnels in the meeting house, provided it can be done without expense to the town." As a committee was then appointed "to locate them" it is supposed they were soon obtained by private subscription.

Shortly after, or in 1830, under a state law passed July 3, 1827, an ecclesiastical society was organized, whose object was "to support the gospel in Hollis, and to have constantly settled over them an evangelical gospel minister." From that time to this the society has acted the part in ecclesiastical matters formerly taken by the town. At first, and for many years, its methods were those of the town, by assessing and collecting a poll and property tax on its voluntary members, which at that time included a large majority of the voters of the town, as well as some women. Any person could become a member by signing the constitution, and could withdraw by a written application, and a certificate from the treasurer that all assessments had been paid.

THE CHANGES OF 1849.

But we pass to speak of the changes made in this edifice in 1849. Up to this time the town had permitted the church and society to occupy its house as had been the custom from the beginning; very likely it would have allowed its use till the present time had it been desired. But a strong sentiment was being developed in favor of a more modern constructed house, and one that legally should be under the control of the society. The people had begun to speak in terms of disrespect of "the old slam bang meeting house, and pig pen pews." This led to the insertion of an article in the town warrant in 1848, at the presidential election, "to see if the town will convey or release to the Evangelical Society of Hollis such part of the meeting house as may be necessary for public worship, reserving to said town such parts thereof as may be suitable and convenient for town purposes." The town chose a committee to report on what terms they would release or convey to the society a part of the house, and a plan of alteration and repairs. This committee consisted of fifteen persons, of whom Benj. M. Farley was chairman. They made their report at an adjourned meeting, November 28th, recommending the turning the meeting house one-quarter around, so that the steeple and belfry, which had been on the west, should be on the south. A committee of three was appointed to appraise the pews, and instructions were given that pew holders should be paid such sums for their pews as this committee should fix, or that the amount should be credited toward a pew in the new house. This committee consisted of Judge Edmund Parker of Amherst, Leonard W. Noyes, Esq., and Gen. Israel Hunt, both of Nashua.

Now we leave the town and come to the society. On the following December 18, 1848, the latter body "voted to accept the grant of the meeting house, with its various specifications," and chose a committee of ten whose duty it should be "to furnish a plan or plans for fitting up anew



THE PRESENT MEETING HOUSE.

for religious worship and purposes therewith connected such parts of the meeting house as the town voted to release to the society." This committee, of which Benj. M. Farley was also chairman, reported January 2, 1849. A part of the report was accepted, but it appears that all were not of the same mind. Several plans were exhibited at this meeting as models for the inside of the house, but none were adopted; their experience was much what it has recently been in changes made in our school building.

Another meeting was called for January 29th, when it was "voted to change the present position of the meeting house, by turning the west end to the south; 29 yeas, 21 nays." "Voted to new model and fit up anew the meeting house for public worship, and for purposes therewith connected; to retain the belfry part, and fill up the corners so the belfry part shall be as wide as the body of the house; that the pews or slips be constructed so as to have three aisles lengthwise of the house." A committee was appointed "to furnish a plan for finishing the body of the house, make an estimate of the expense, and obtain such information as they may deem necessary in order to accomplish the object in view, and the manner of proceeding in order to obtain funds for carrying forward the work."

Two weeks later, or February 12th, another committee was appointed to "examine other meeting houses, and consult with such carpenters as have had experience in building and new modeling meeting houses, for the purpose of ascertaining whether it is necessary to lower the gallery or not, and also to make inquiry as to the probable expense." Three days later decisive action was taken by adopting the report of the committee as follows:—

That the pulpit be placed at the north end of the house when turned; that seats or gallery for the singers be placed over the entrance to the house; that there be six tiers of pews and three aisles, the pews on the broad aisle and the walls of the house to be of the same length, and the other tiers of pews shorter; the pews to be two feet ten inches wide, numbering about one hundred sixty, six or eight of which are to be left for free seats; the stoves to be

placed in the porch, the pipes extending over the side aisles to the chimneys, which are to be placed on each side of the pulpit.

The committee estimate the expense of fitting up the house in the manner above described, including the expense of enlarging the windows, furnishing the blinds for the upper part of the house, painting, carpeting, cushions, stoves and chandelier, &c., at \$3,120.00; of fitting up the vestry and room or rooms connected therewith, and blinds for the lower part of the house, at \$500.00; turning the house, furnishing the timbers, removing and setting the underpinning, and finishing what is now the north side of the house, at \$550.00. The old pews having been appraised at \$1,994.00, makes the whole sum to be raised \$6,164.00.

The committee are of the opinion that the sum thus to be raised should be divided into shares of ten dollars each and subscribed for by persons wishing to become purchasers of pews, or interested in the house thus to be fitted up, and to be paid in installments in such sums, and at such times, as may be ordered by a committee appointed by the society for that purpose,—only so much of said sum to be paid as may be necessary for the purposes aforesaid.

After the adoption of this report this committee was instructed to call a town meeting, if it thought it expedient, “to see if the town would give the society liberty to let down the gallery floor three feet, and the lower floor two feet.” It is not certainly known what is meant by “letting down the lower floor two feet.” It is the recollection of one of our older citizens that it was proposed to drop the floor two feet below the sills of the house. If this was the scheme it was abandoned. Ralph E. Tenney, Joel Hardy, and William P. Saunderson were appointed a committee “to carry forward and superintend the changes that were made, with authority to make such variations as they might think necessary and indispensable.” Under the authority given in the last clause this committee changed the length of the wall pews from what was voted to their present length. Another committee was appointed “to furnish a plan of meeting house stock, with the necessary conditions and regulations,” and another “to obtain a conveyance from the town to the society of such parts of the meeting house as the town have voted to release and convey to the society.”

The deed is here given that it may be known just what our title is to this house of worship; it is as follows:

Know all by these presents that the town of Hollis, in the county of Hillsborough, and the state of New Hampshire, by their agents duly authorized and empowered by a vote of said town, in consideration of one dollar paid to said town, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, and in consideration of the engagements entered into, liabilities assumed and incurred by the Evangelical Congregational Society in Hollis, release and convey to said society the upper part of the old meeting house in said town, to a point nine feet and nine inches from the lower floor thereof, and the west or belfry porch, and also the northwesterly part of the lower story of said house extending thirty-two feet from the north-west corner thereof, as it now stands, measuring on the inside of the same, and extending twenty-seven feet to the east, so as to contain eight hundred sixty-four square feet on the floor, for public worship, religious instruction and purposes therewith connected, with the right to said society to turn around said house, and remove it from its present position so that the belfry porch will stand to the south instead of the west as it now stands, and also the right to take off and remove from said house the south and east porches and convert them to the use of said society, and also to do any and all acts in regard to said house which may be necessary and expedient to remodel, fit up, and finish the same in the manner contemplated, and also the right to erect and construct two chimneys, in that part of said house reserved and designed for town purposes, so as to accommodate both said society and town.

This said release and conveyance is made upon the condition that the said society shall pay or tender each of the pew holders or owners if living in Hollis, before any change or alteration in said house shall have been commenced, the sum or sums of money at which his or her pew shall be appraised by an impartial committee of three, to be appointed by said town for the purpose, and that the expense of said appraisal shall be paid by said society, and in case any pew holder or owner shall not have been paid or had tendered to him or her the sum at which his or her pew shall have been appraised as aforesaid, said society shall pay such pew holder or owner the sum of money at which his or her pew shall have been appraised whenever the same shall be demanded of the treasurer of said society. And it is further understood and agreed that the said town at their own expense shall shingle anew said house as soon as it can conveniently be done, and that said society shall ever after keep in good repair the roof of said house and all other parts of the outside thereof except the west or belfry porch as it now is or may

hereafter be constructed, which west or belfry porch after the same shall be fitted up and finished, shall be kept in repair by said town. And it is further agreed that the part of said house used for town purposes shall never be used by said town, or their permission, for purposes inconsistent with or injurious to the appropriate and convenient use on Sabbath days of that part of said house hereby conveyed. And said town hereby grants to said society the right to remove said house so far north from where it now stands as may be done without encroaching upon the rights of individuals, relations of deceased persons buried in the burying ground directly north of said house.

This deed is signed by William P. Saunderson, David J. Wright and William N. Tenney, selectmen, and is dated June 22, 1849.

The house was turned and moved a little to the north under the superintendence of a man from Nashua, skilled in moving buildings, of whom it is said that he could do no work until he was filled with liquor, and though in a very intoxicated condition he could tell just where to place the rollers, and if one was deflected from its position by a hair's breadth he was sure to see it. The contractor was Abner Andrews, also of Nashua.

In due time the house was completed as we now have it, and ready for dedication in November, the services being held on Thanksgiving Day, the 15th of that month. Almost all the town was here. Such occasions usually brought together more or less people from adjoining towns, especially ministers. But it being on Thanksgiving Day it is not likely that many strangers were present. It is remembered, however, that Rev. Humphrey Moore of Milford was here, and congratulated the people on their pleasant house of worship, and that they had shown good sense in making the floor level instead of with a slope as was the custom in many places at that time. There was a large choir in the gallery, of which three persons only are now known to be living. It was a glad day, and one long to be remembered. The housewives somehow managed to leave their Thanksgiving dinners in the brick ovens or elsewhere to keep them warm, which without doubt they

enjoyed and which gave them just as toothsome a feast as though they had remained at home. The men were here, too, rejoicing in their completed labors for the improvement of the sanctuary. It would be too much to say that all were satisfied with what had been done. Some were strongly opposed to any change; others desired a different plan. Human nature showed itself to have been the same as it has since manifested itself. But the majority must rule, and time has healed the wounds and justified what was done. We were given a house of worship that we have used these fifty-five years, and the workmanship and material were so good that it has required hardly any expense since that date except for painting and shingling. It should be noted, however, that in 1892 the timbers of the belfry had become so weakened by decay that the whole was taken down and rebuilt in exactly its former shape. In 1899 the steps in front of the meeting house were relaid,—both jobs being done by the town.

The whole cost, including the payment for the old pews, for the use of the Baptist meeting house (a Baptist meeting house was built in 1838 on or near the spot where the town hall now stands, which ceased to be used and was removed in 1869), while the changes were being made, for carpeting, upholstering, pulpit furniture, stoves, settees for the vestry, and blinds, was \$7,059.98. The receipts for the sale of pews and unused lumber covered this amount into \$7.85, and this deficiency was afterwards met by the sale of the rubbish fuel that had accumulated.

One item in the bills was \$48.35 for "furnishing the minister's study," which was the room, or part of it, now occupied for the Social library. Formerly there was a door on the east side of the meeting house opening directly into the town hall. After entering there was a door at the left opening into the selectmen's room, which, with the minister's study were thrown together in 1887, making the present library room. At just what date the Social library began to use the "minister's study" has not been ascertained,

but it was long before the partition between it and the selectmen's room was taken away, probably soon after 1852.

Some acts of the society soon after these changes were made are worth recording, as showing the changes wrought by time. In January, 1850, it was voted "that the standing committee light the lecture room for the singers as they think best, and furnish wood;" "that the lecture room be used for religious purposes and singing meetings, and not for every purpose;" that "the singers be authorized to appoint a person or persons to keep order at singing meetings, and have the same power to control the room at such meetings as a person has to control his own home;" and "that the proprietors of the old library have liberty to place the same in the lecture room, or in the study room, if it be Mr. Gordon's desire." A year later, or in 1851, it was voted "that the standing committee be authorized to allow schools to be kept in the vestry room at proper hours, responsible persons coming forward and engaging to see that the room is properly used," and "that the committee be directed to allow singing schools to be kept in the vestry room, and that they be authorized, in case two schools shall be taught in the same week, to settle the evenings that each school shall occupy the room, so that no collision may take place, provided the parties cannot agree themselves." It is remembered that private, or select schools as they were called, were kept for a few terms in the vestry, and afterwards for many years in the town hall. The schools were mostly in the autumn only, and were taught in 1850 by John H. Goodale; 1851 by Charles G. Farrar and Miss Sarah C. Worcester; 1852 by George Clary; 1853 by Charles C. Torrey; 1855 by Andrew Jewett of Pepperell; 1857 by Miss Lucy E. Worcester; 1859 and 1860, and the winter between, by Henry H. Huse; 1861 by B. Cole; 1864 by Edward F. Johnson and Miss Sarah A. Flagg; ——— David Worcester; 1873 by Miss Carrie F. Proctor; 1874 by Miss Marion E. Center.

There were singing schools in the vestry nearly every

winter for many years, but it seems strange that rival schools could have been supported, and yet it is a fact that they were, perhaps all the more successfully because they were rivals.

During the ministry of Rev. Hiram L. Kelsey, the former pulpit was exchanged for the present one, and in 1883 the house was re-upholstered and frescoed, and the organ moved to the rear of the pulpit platform, into a projection built on the rear of the house, at a cost of about \$2,000. In July, 1890, memorial windows, of stained glass, the gift of different individuals, except those in front, which were furnished by the town, were placed in position.

The agitation for a town house separate from the meeting house, which began in 1803, was renewed about eighty years after. The opposition prevented action in favor of it until 1886, when a vote to build was obtained, and our present structure erected. Overtures were then made to the town by the Patrons of Husbandry for a long lease of the old town hall, and when matters were satisfactorily adjusted in 1887, they fitted up the hall and its connecting rooms for their special uses, as we now have them.

In what has thus far been said you have a history of this town, and meeting house. Time would fail to tell all that has taken place under its roof, of the sermons that have been preached, the distinguished speakers that have been heard from pulpit or platform, of the meetings that have been held for religious, political, or philanthropic purposes, of the discussions that have been heard on matters pertaining to the interests of the town, some of them, perhaps, in more of a spirit of acrimony than of love; of the teachers who have taught, and the pupils who have been instructed, in vestry or town hall; of plans that have been presented that came to an untimely end, and of others that were carried out for the improvement of conditions; of the purposes of reformation that have here been formed; of the souls that have been saved, and the saints who have been confirmed in the faith; of the influences for good that have

gone out to bless this community, and even the great world at large. The story would be too long for this occasion.

With two practical suggestions I close. The methods adopted in 1746, 1804, and again in 1849, for building and remodelling this house were well enough for those times,—perhaps the best that could have been devised. Most of the families of town then attended church; if there were strangers here they came with the families whose homes were here and occupied seats with them. Summer boarders were then unknown: front seats were the best seats, and the wing pews were the pews of honor. When a family left town it disposed of its pew as soon as it did of its real estate. But conditions have changed. Many of the pew owners have left town and abandoned their pews, and in some cases it is difficult to find or reach the owner; people have developed a dislike to the front, and especially the wing pews. But worse than all, many families living here who own pews are seldom at church, and yet they wish to hold them, so it is difficult to rent sittings. They are willing their seats should be occupied without remuneration when they are not present, but they want their use when they are here. A new family coming to town doesn't like to be dependent on the courtesy of others.

The solution of the problem presented by the situation is not easy: it is admitted, but if all the pews were owned by society and annually rented they would be taken only by those who attend church more or less, so there would be permanent sittings for all. Or, better yet, if the pews were free and one could sit where he pleased, provided the seat was not preoccupied, it would be an incentive to some to come to the house of God who now seldom darken its doors.

And when one comes to think of it, is there not an absurdity in the present three-headed arrangement of our ecclesiastical affairs of pew owner, society, and church? It may be said that their offices are distinct; so they are, but their interests are the same. The society has the title to

the property as a whole, the pew owners to its different sections, or as one of those said in 1819 who objected to selling his pew, he owned that spot clear up to the heavens and down to the nether regions. It would be possible for the society practically to drive out the pew owners, as was actually done in one of the towns of this state about thirty years ago. In many instances the society and the church have not harmonized, resulting in their disruption. It is true that old customs are more easily followed than changed, that it is easier to go in the ruts than to get out of them; but changes and improvements have been made or we should still be worshipping in the old "barn meeting house," and sitting in the old square pews.

I believe the citizens of this town, almost without exception, are proud of the fact that we have a house of worship that is so pleasant and comfortable. It is noticeable that when property is advertised in the country, the seller is always sure, if the facts warrant, to say it is near post-office, school, and church, as though the three were desirable and important. The maintenance of religious worship adds largely to the value of property. Now if a meeting house, and religious services in it each Lord's day, are desirable, would it not be well for every citizen to have a place in the house of worship, and habitually be in that place? If it is worth while to maintain religious worship it ought to be worth the while of every able-bodied person not necessarily detained to take part in it. Would not a revival of the old customs of church attendance be for the welfare of the town as well as of the individuals themselves? Or, have we so far advanced in our religious attainments that some of us no longer need the benefit that others receive from habitually joining in the services of the sanctuary?

I commend to you the spirit of one of our citizens of former days who one week had a heated controversy with his minister, in which both became considerably heated. But on the following Sunday the parishioner was in his pew

as usual,—much to the surprise of one who had witnessed the tilt. He told him he didn't expect to see him there, when the instant reply was "I'd have ye understand, sir, that my quarrel was with the man, and not with the gospel," and so he was in his usual place. I also commend to those who so readily find an excuse for non-attendance in their impaired faculties, the habits of one of the good old dames of this town (Mrs. Sarah Heminway Holden), who was so deaf she could hear nothing from her pew, and so was not ashamed to go into the high pulpit in the presence of the whole congregation, and in a chair at her pastor's side listen to and take part in the services. I also commend to you the spirit of Captain Daniel Bailey, another of our citizens, who one Sunday morning was thrown from his wagon in his dooryard just as he was starting for church. He was considerably, but didn't think at the time seriously, injured. But he declared he wouldn't let that old horse cheat him out of the privilege of going to meeting, and so he came. But the injury was more serious than he supposed, so that ever after he was compelled to use crutches. His custom for years was to have his family place him in his wagon on Sunday mornings, when he would drive to church as aforetime, where willing hands would lift the body of the carriage from the forward wheels and draw it to the stone steps, enabling him comfortably to make his way into the meeting house. If all today were of a similar mind we should have on each Lord's day a congregation nearly as large as it is today.

APPENDIX.

[Contributed by *Cyrus F. Burge.*]

In Hillsborough County Records, Province of New Hampshire, Vol. 1, Feb. 1772, a deed is found given by Rev. Daniel Emerson to the parish committee, covering one acre and fifty-three rods "on which the meeting house now stands." Its north and south boundaries as described, show that the common had been extended before that date.

Rev. Prof. Ralph Emerson, in 1847, preached in this house the funeral sermon of Rev. Eli Smith; the funeral services of Rev. Pliny B. Day, D.D., were attended here in 1869; of Rev. James Laird in 1871. The bell was tolled in 1852 when the news of the death of Daniel Webster reached town. In 1865 Rev. Pliny B. Day, preached a sermon in memory of President Lincoln, and Rev. Frank D. Sargent, Aug. 8, 1885, one in memory of Gen. U. S. Grant. At different times Hon. J. B. Grinnell, William H. Prescott, S. P. Adams, B. F. Ayer, Hon. H. W. Blair and James F. Briggs have addressed the people in the town hall. The Abolitionists in 1852 were barred from the church when two colored men came here soliciting funds to aid the fugitive slave Anthony Burns; after considerable parleying the town hall was opened for their use. In 1856 the anti and pro-slavery feeling ran so high that, for a short time during the presidential campaign, three or four political meetings were held each week in the town hall, one of them being followed by a barbecue.

A temperance society, called The Young People's Cold Water Union, was organized here in October, 1841; at dif-

ferent times two hundred seventy-three persons joined it. In November, 1857, the Hollis Temperance Association was formed, and in January, 1871, the Hollis Temperance Society. Eighty names of members of the latter society have been preserved.

The Hollis Agricultural Society was organized under this roof, as was its successor, the Patrons of Husbandry; so also the Golden Cross, the Good Templars, the W. C. T. U., and perhaps others also.



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