

STEEPLE & WEATHERVANE

Most Recent Renovation of Historic Buxton Centre Baptist Church

A petition drawn up by a distinguished company of 68 Buxton inhabitants was presented to the Proprietors Committee in October of 1798. The list of petitioners reads like a "Who's Who" of early families in the area: Woodman, Bradbury, Elwell, Lord, Came, Elden, Dennet, Atkinson, Harmon, Palmer, Libby, Woodsun, Boothby, Rankin, and Redlon, to name a few.

The church was incorporated in 1799, and the "Baptist Church of Buxton and Saco" began to organize itself. In spite of the transient nature of its early ministers following the retirement of its first settled minister, Elder Abner Flanders in 1829, the membership at Buxton Center Baptist grew. In 1831 a new building was erected at a cost of \$2000 to \$3000. The new church building was a little smaller than the original, but its architecture was somewhat more elaborate.

In the spring of 1845, a steeple and bell were added, "calling the worshipers to the house of God with tones of inspiration."

Time takes its toll, however, and by the time the Rev. J. M. Burtt was called to be the minister of the Buxton Centre Baptist Church in 1871, the membership decided that they needed to update the building. The initial plans were moderate, but under

the Rev. Burtt's leadership the congregation decided to make more extensive changes to the building. They mounted what we would now call a capital campaign with great success. According to a Portland Press article dated May 24, 1872, "...the result is that the church, now completed, is one of the pleasantest without and most delightful and attractive within of any village church in the State."

It was during these renovations that the church was raised and a brick basement built that was tall enough to accommodate a vestry room and minister's study. According to the Press Herald article the basement was "...constructed at the expense of two worthy sons of honored mothers, of sainted memory in the church."

A large number of improvements and repairs to the church building were completed during the next hundred years. Most of them included modernization, such as installing electric lights, central heating, a kitchen, and bathrooms with flush toilets.

In 1966, however, a change was made that was neither pragmatic nor useful, but simply just beautiful. Members of the former Blue Point Congregational Church offered the Buxton church trustees seven stained glass windows. The men of the church responded to the challenge of removing the windows, transporting

them to Buxton, and installing them in the sanctuary. Each wonderfully colored and crafted window represents a beloved Biblical story or symbol.

Recently the steeple that dated from 1845 showed alarming signs of deterioration. The congregation began a steeple renovation fund and sponsored bean suppers, rummage sales, plant sales, and other activities to raise money for the project. The estimated cost of repair and renovation and the rapid decay of the steeple, belfry, and the roof around required greater resources in a shorter period of time than the congregation could manage by itself. The church turned to the *Narragansett Number One Foundation* for help. The Foundation responded by awarding the church a substantial grant in 2003 for restoration of the steeple and bell tower.

In June 2004, the contractor, *Limerick Steeple Jacks*, removed the top of the steeple tower and the weathervane to begin the restoration work. Upon doing so, it was discovered that the church roof, including the main support timbers for the spire, needed extensive structural repairs.



Docents Needed!

To present programs at

N. C. Watson

One-Room School

Curriculum

(including CD's)

available

Contact Lou or Lucille

FMI @ 727-3766.

The finials could not be repaired, so new ones exactly replicating the originals were constructed.

A new bell cradle was also fabricated. Additional repairs to the roof of the steeple, the floor under the bell, and the four corner boards were necessary.

The weathervane had been completely dismantled and was scattered throughout the church in various closets and cubbyholes. Some pieces were even found in the belfry. Amazingly, every part was found, and Ryan Weeman, a church member, metalworker and owner of *Gorham Machine and Fab*, reconstructed the weathervane, arranging for a friend in Auburn to do the necessary lead work.

It is with great joy that in July, 2010 the steeple, the bell, and the weathervane were once again back together for church members and townspeople alike to enjoy and appreciate, standing tall over the old church and restoring its graceful New England charm to Buxton Center.

Meg Gardner, Staff Writer
Jan Hill, Editor