OLD STRAFFORD TOWN HALL
1011 PARKER MOUNTAIN ROAD
(N. H. ROUTE 126)
CENTER STRAFFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE
March 3, 2014

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Old Strafford, New Hampshire Town House (1873), view from the west, showing conversion (circa 1960) to office and garage of N. H. Department of Transportation Patrol Section 602

Summary: This report is based on an inspection of the old Strafford Town Hall, now the patrol headquarters for N. H. Department of Transportation Patrol Section 602, on the afternoon of February 25, 2014. Also present at the meeting were Lynne Emerson Monroe, preservation consultant and principal at Preservation Company; JoAnn Brown, chair of the Strafford Board of Selectmen; and Liz Evans of the Strafford Planning and Zoning administration. Both Ms. Brown and Ms. Evans are active members of the Strafford Historical Society. Following the inspection of the Town Hall and of town records preserved at the office of the Strafford Town Clerk, Hill Public Library director Kenneth Berry was consulted at the library and provided further information.

The purpose of the inspection was to gather information and photographs for Preservation Company, which has been commissioned to prepare a New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources inventory form on the property, and to provide data for the present report, which is intended as supplementary background for the Strafford Historical Society.

The inspection revealed that the Strafford Town Hall is conservative in architectural style for its date of construction. It embodies the norms of a vernacular building form that had evolved in New Hampshire since the 1840s to provide for the needs of rural town government after the statutory separation of municipal government and religion in New Hampshire in 1819. The building was remodeled about thirty years after its construction. Town records, although not exhaustive, point to a date of 1905 for changes in the interior finish of the building. The Town of Strafford sold the building to the New Hampshire Department of Public Works and Highways (now the New Hampshire Department of Transportation) in 1960, and the structure was soon thereafter converted to use as a patrol shed, as described below.

Although the structure was dramatically changed in appearance on its northwestern elevation through the insertion of a garage door, as seen in the photograph on the preceding page, the building retains most of its original interior spatial relationships and the interior finishes that were provided in the remodeling of 1905.

Description, exterior: The Strafford Town Hall (Town House) is a rectangular framed building with a gable roof, standing on a foundation of split granite underpinning. The building measures forty feet in width and fifty-five feet in length. The structure faces southwesterly toward Parker Mountain Road (N. H. Route 126), and its gable end is treated as the façade. As seen in the preceding photograph, the façade has symmetrical three-bay fenestration on the first story, and corresponding window placement above. The six-over-six second-story windows light an original selectmen's office, now partly subdivided and used as storage and a lunch room by the NHDOT patrol section staff. The façade has two entrance doors flanking a central window and providing access to an interior lobby or foyer. The central window on the first story is modern.

Each side elevation of the building originally had three large twelve-over-twelve double-hung sashes that illuminated the meeting hall. As seen in the preceding photograph, two of the three windows on the northwestern elevation have been replaced by utilitarian openings: an entry door and a large garage door. The southeastern elevation, seen in the photograph below, retains its three window sash sets intact, and also displays a small window opening beneath the eaves to light a staircase that ascends from the front lobby to the office area on the second floor.

Old Strafford, New Hampshire Town House (1873), view from the south.

The rear (northeastern) elevation of the building has been unbroken by window openings since the renovation of circa 1905. This end of the building is largely obscured by a modern shed-roofed storage shed at its southern corner, and by an added privy (now partly converted to a toilet room with plumbing) at its northern corner. The privy addition measures about 16'-4" in length and 12'-0" in width. As seen below, the privy had two small rear windows, now boarded over.

The building stands on a foundation of split granite underpinning blocks. These average ten inches in thickness, about 18 inches high, and between six and seven feet in length. They are coarse-grained and of a slightly orange hue, reflecting a local origin and displaying geological characteristics often seen in Strafford and neighboring Barrington. In the few areas where the granite splitting marks are visible, the underpinning stones were spilt using plug drills and plugs and feathers.

The walls of the building are clapboarded, with clapboard exposure to the weather averaging four inches. Most clapboards are nailed with cut nails. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles.

The exterior detailing of the building strongly expresses the Greek Revival style in spite of the late construction date of 1873. Town records suggest that the building was intended to be a somewhat enlarged version of an earlier town house of 1840 that stood on the same site. It may be theorized that the present building was deliberately designed to replicate the general architectural character of its predecessor as well as reflecting a vernacular version of a rural town house with no intention to suggest the more elaborate forms of town halls that were then making their appearance in larger New Hampshire communities.

Left: Side window (northwest elevation) Right: Eaves and raking cornices and corner pilasters

As seen in the photographs above, the exterior detailing of the town hall is fully characteristic of the Greek Revival style despite its late date of 1873. Door and window casings are composed of flat, square-edged boards, with the top casing projecting slightly beyond the outer edges of the side casings and being of slightly thicker stock to create a shadow line on the side casings. Their caps are composed of a heavy horizontal board supported by a flat Grecian ovolo bed molding.

As described below, the present window sashes in the building, with the exception of the central window on the first story of the façade, display the characteristic muntin pattern of the early twentieth century.

The corner board and cornice detailing of the building is also reminiscent of Greek Revival detailing of circa 1850. The corner boards are designed to appear as antae. They measure fifteen inches in width and are composed of flat boards with wide applied fillets at each edge and at the top, defining a sunken flat panel at the center of each anta. Each has a diminutive capital composed of a flat Grecian ovolo molding supporting a narrow abacus.

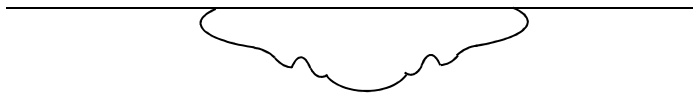
The building's architrave is a flat board, as seen in the photograph on the preceding page. The deeply projecting cornice has a flat Grecian ovolo bed molding and a large, slightly curved crown molding.

Because the windows of the selectmen's room pierce the façade at the level of the building's eaves, the entablature does not continue across the front of the building to define a closed pediment; the rear elevation of the building, although not pierced by windows, is also treated with simple corner returns and clapboarded, as seen in the photograph on page 2.

The exterior details of the town hall are reminiscent of features of the Third Free-Will Baptist Church building (1857) nearby at Center Strafford. The general Grecian appearance of the old town hall echoes that of earlier Strafford church buildings at Crown Point (1835) and Bow Lake Village (1843), and of the Strafford Union (Austin-Cate) Academy building (1834) next to the Third Free-Will Baptist Church building at Center Strafford.

Description, interior: The interior of the town hall is composed of an entry lobby or vestibule at the front, with selectmen's rooms of equal overall dimensions on the second story; and a large meeting hall with a ceiling supported by roof trusses in the attic and unencumbered by interior columns. A modern chimney of concrete blocks rises through the building against the center of the vestibule partition, now providing a connection for a wood-burning stove in the lobby and for an oil-fired forced-hot-air furnace in the former meeting room, which is now used as a garage and workshop. This chimney replaces a brick stove chimney that is seen in older photographs of the town hall and that provided connections for stoves in the selectmen's office on the second story and in the meeting hall.

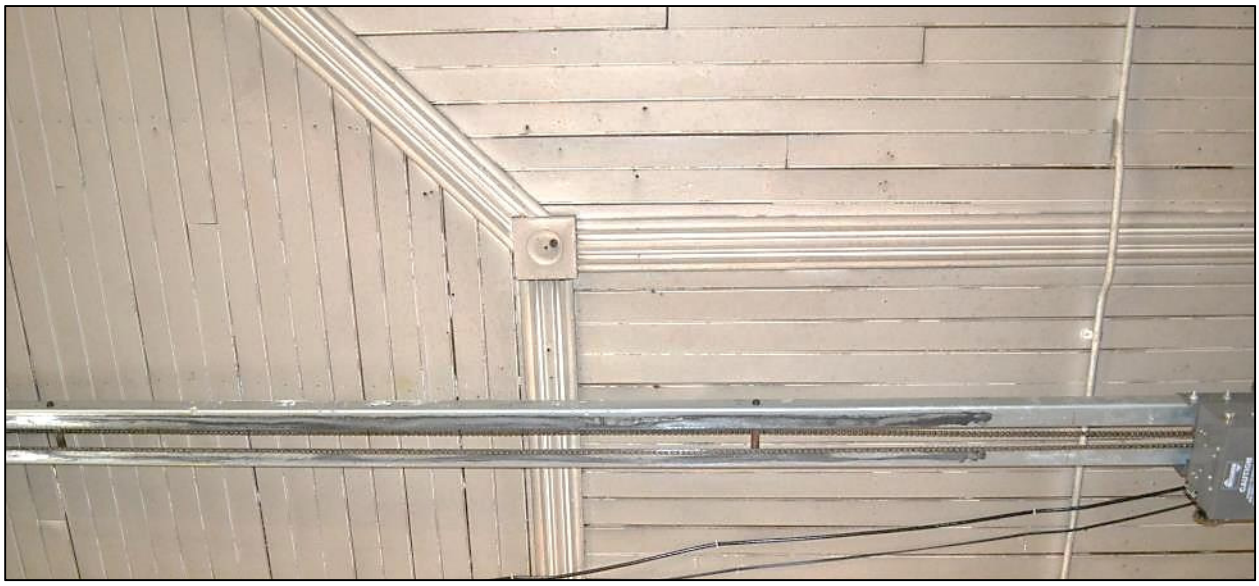
The principal room of the interior, the meeting hall, is sheathed on all four walls and on the ceiling with single-beaded ceiling boarding. As seen in the photographs on the following page, the walls of the hall are sheathed vertically down to the former floor level. The ceiling, by contrast, is sheathed with a central enclosed rectangle framed by four trapezoidal quadrants, with the ceiling boarding mitered at the junctures between quadrants. The mitered joints are covered with an applied molding of this profile:



NOT TO SCALE

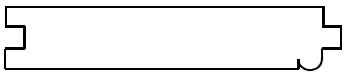
The intersections of these moldings are marked by square wooden blocks, as seen below.

Meeting Hall, looking southwest toward the partition between the hall and the front lobby



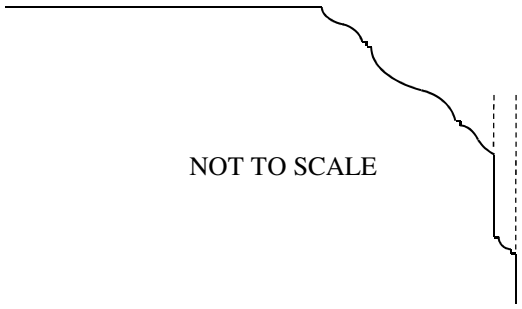
Meeting Hall ceiling: juncture between central panel (lower right) and two flanking quadrants

The tongued-and-grooved ceiling board that covers the walls and ceiling has a single-beaded profile:



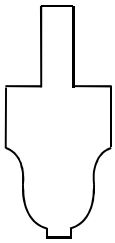
The hall has a molded cornice applied at the juncture of ceiling and walls. The cornice is composed of an assemblage of ogee moldings to suggest a classical cornice profile, as seen below.

Above: Photograph of hall cornice. *Below: Section of hall cornice*



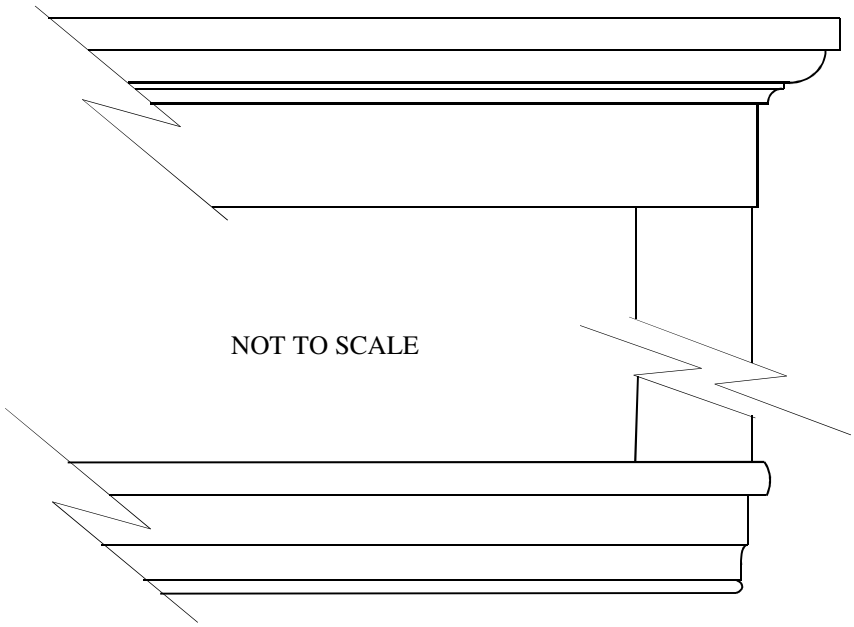
Although the hall was lighted by three large windows on each side before conversion of the building to a garage, the original specifications reveal that the room originally had two additional windows of the same dimensions on the rear (northeastern) elevation, providing a total of eight windows for the room. The two rear windows were apparently sealed when the room was sheathed with ceiling boards.

The window sashes currently installed in the surviving window openings of the hall, and also the sashes in all other window openings in the building with the exception of the modern window unit between the two front doors, display a muntin profile that is characteristic of twentieth-century joinery, first appearing during the 1880s or 1890s. Shown below, this profile suggests that the sashes in the building were renewed in 1905, at the same time that the interior walls and ceilings were covered with wooden sheathing. It is also possible that these sashes are original to the building and thus represent an extremely early appearance of this muntin profile.



Muntin profile of existing sashes in the building

The original window and door casings on the hall exhibit simple detailing, as shown below.



The entry or vestibule of the building is a narrow subdivision, 9'-6" in depth, that separates the front of the building from the main hall and provides for a second story above, originally accommodating rooms for town office uses. The entry has a floor of pine boards covered with plywood and an original wainscoting of planed and matched but unmolded boards. The wainscoting rises as high as the sill of the original front window. Above that elevation, the walls and the ceiling of the entry are sheathed with beaded ceiling boards that match the present finish in the hall beyond.

At the southeastern end of the entry is a three-foot wide staircase that provides access to the selectmen's rooms above. Having winders at its base and top, this stairway is lighted by a single, fixed, six-light sash at the top, visible under the eaves of the building in the photograph on page 2, above. Three truncated balusters near the midpoint of this staircase, extending from two of the treads to the ceiling above, indicate the design of the open balustrade that formerly rose along the open stringer of this staircase. The handrail and most of the balusters have been removed.

Entry vestibule, looking north, showing original firewood room partition and vault at the far end

The western end of the entry was originally subdivided by a partition to create a firewood storage room six feet long and the full 9'-6" depth of the entry, lined on the interior with wooden sheathing. This space has now been further subdivided. On the south, the space accommodates a concrete vault with steel outer and inner doors, manufactured by Valentine and Butler of New York and installed in 1904. To the north of the vault, the remainder of the wood room accommodates oil tanks that store fuel for a wall-mounted forced hot-air furnace that heats the hall, as seen in the photograph on page 5, above.

The space above the entry, accessible by way of the staircase at the southern end of the latter, is now divided into three rooms: a lunch room to the south, a storage room in the center, lighted by the central window in the upper façade, and an office at the north. Originally, as shown by the building specifications, the second-story space was subdivided into two rooms. The larger, at the south, was a selectmen's office twenty-five feet in length. The second, at the north, was a "private room" 10'-6" long, probably used to safeguard files before the vault was installed on the first story.

The two original rooms on the second story are finished with floors of hard pine boards of medium width. These rooms are wainscoted to the level of the window sills, and along the partition subdividing the front rooms from the meeting hall, with planed and matched but unbeaded boards. Above the wainscoting, the second-story rooms are sheathed with ceiling

boards on wall and ceiling, as in the entry below. A scuttle or small door in this wall provides access to the attic of the building.

Selectmen's room, second story, with the original private office beyond, looking north
A portion of the original seating bench is visible beyond the chair

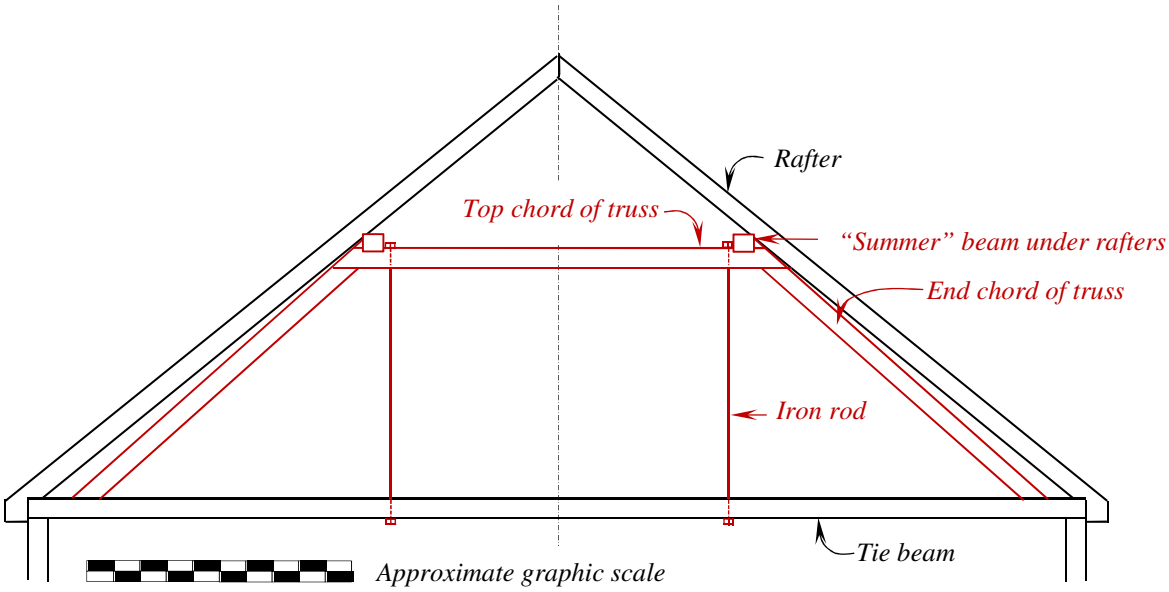
Door and window casings on the second floor are mostly composed of simple, square-edged boards.

The roof frame of the building is based upon three wood-and-iron queenpost trusses that run across the building at regular intervals and support a roof membrane of sawn common rafters measuring 2" by 8" and placed about two feet on centers. The original building specifications and timber schedule enumerate a total of twelve posts, 14½ feet tall and 5" by 8" in cross-section, together with 36 braces. This apparently indicates that each of the side walls of the building incorporates six posts, including three pairs beneath the roof trusses, braced to the plates at the top of the walls. The remaining posts would stand at the corners of the building and at the plane of the wall that separates the entry and selectmen's room from the main hall.

The attic roof trusses (described as "trussels" in the specifications) are characteristic wood and iron trusses that utilize wooden members in compression and ¾-inch iron rods in tension. The

specifications indicate that the ends of the rods were to be thickened or upset by a blacksmith prior to being threaded, thus providing a diameter of ⅞" and leaving a full ¾" diameter inside the cut threads and preserving the full cross-section and strength of each rod at the threaded ends.

Attic roof framing, old Strafford Town Hall, looking north. Inner steel rods are later additions



Section through roof frame, showing the elements of the wood and iron roof trusses in red
Additional steel rods and wooden braces, seen in the photograph above, were added later

The timber schedule reproduced in the appendix to this report indicates that many of the timber elements of the town hall frame were of unusual lengths. The specifications make no mention of joined timbers, suggesting that the lengths specified were to be delivered as single members. The two side sills of the building are each 55 feet long and 8" by 8" in cross-section. The wall plates are likewise 55 feet long, measuring 5" by 6," and the two "summer" beams that rest on the top chords of the roof trusses and support the midpoints of the rafters, also 55 feet long, measure 6" by 6." The rafters themselves are a full 26 feet long.

The average nineteenth-century country sawmill often had a saw carriage adapted for producing common lengths of boards or timbers, and these were often only sixteen, eighteen, or twenty feet in length. The visible framing members of the town hall are sawn in a circular sawmill, which itself denotes a considerable investment in new sawing technology. Evidence of such a mill, combined with the exceptional length of the framing timbers, raises the question of where or from whom such timbers were obtained.

The roof trusses that compose the main structural system of the building's roof are wood-and-iron queenpost trusses. Trusses of this general type began to be used widely during the mid-nineteenth century to span wide spaces. At that period, such truss systems represented a relatively new phenomenon in American construction, though their principles had been understood and promulgated in England for more than half a century. Once accepted in the United States, the concept of using wood for compression members and iron rods for tension members in trusses was adopted not only for roof trusses of buildings, but was also translated into a popular and successful bridge truss, the Howe truss, patented by William Howe of Massachusetts in 1840.

The combined use of wood and iron became a widespread structural solution to covering large buildings in the mid-1800s. Where gable roofs permitted the inclusion of kingpost or queenpost trusses under a roof, such trusses of wood and iron may be expected in non-domestic buildings of this period. Their function was usually to support the roof planes of the building while simultaneously providing an attic floor that required no support from below. Such truss systems were therefore widely used not only in churches, public halls, and factory buildings, but also in stables and livery buildings where unencumbered movement below the roof was desirable.

A leading proponent of wood and iron roof trusses was Boston architect and author Thomas W. Silloway (1828-1910), one of the most prolific New England designers of the mid-to-late 1800s. Silloway was credited with the design of more than three hundred church buildings. In 1857, at the age of twenty-nine, Silloway was selected to rebuild the Vermont state house at Montpelier after the original building of 1836 was heavily damaged by fire. Silloway was a strong advocate of timber and iron roof trusses, and was so impressed with the advantages of this type of composite system that he pronounced such trusses "an invention, which has, in the process of time, brought about as great a revolution in the art of carpentry as the introduction of the arch did in that of masonry."[1]

[1] Thomas W. Silloway, *Text-Book of Modern Carpentry* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Co., 1858), p. 103.

Silloway's church commissions frequently required the design of large roof trusses to provide expansive ceilings that were unsupported from below. Silloway thus became adept at designing such trusses of timber and iron, but also became interested in the history of the introduction of such combination structures into American architecture and engineering. In his *Text-Book of Modern Carpentry* (Boston, 1858), Silloway recapitulated the history of the wood-and-iron truss and illustrated a number of his own designs for such trusses, including a complex version that he was employing in the Vermont capitol, then under construction.

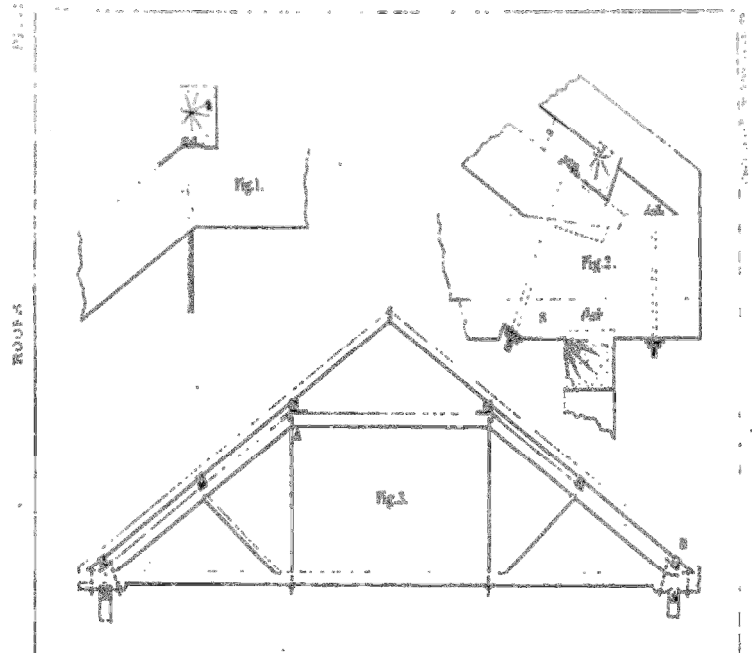


Plate VI, Thomas W. Silloway, Text-Book of Modern Carpentry *(1858), showing "a design for a roof of from forty to sixty feet span."*

Silloway found that the idea of substituting iron tension members for timber members in roof trusses had first been suggested by the prolific and influential Scottish author Peter Nicholson in his *The Carpenter and Joiner's Assistant* (1797). Nicholson illustrated many timber roof trusses in this book, but also included two that combined wood and iron. The first, an existing system that had been employed at the chapel of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich by architect Samuel Wyatt as early as 1785, was a flat-topped variant on a kingpost truss, with the central vertical composed of an iron rod; this truss has a clear span of 51 feet. Second, Nicolson illustrated a multiple kingpost, or kingpost-queenpost, truss, apparently of his own invention, having three vertical iron tension members.[2]

[2] Peter Nicholson, *The Carpenter and Joiner's Assistant* (London: printed for I. and J. Taylor, 1797, Plates 71 and 79.

Silloway noted that the idea of composite timber and iron roof trusses had received only limited acceptance in England even as late as the mid-1840s.

By that time, the principle had been incorporated in the bridge patent of Howe in Massachusetts. The use of iron tension members in roof trusses had also been practiced by the Boston architects Alexander Parris and Charles G. Hall. Such trusses were first illustrated in the United States by the Boston architect and author Asher Benjamin, supposedly under the influence of Hall, an English architect and engineer who had immigrated to the United States in 1823.[3]

Asher Benjamin, whose seven architectural guidebooks were published in Massachusetts over a period extending from 1797 to 1843, had a powerful influence over American builders in matters of both style and technology. His *Practice of Architecture* (1833) included one timber and iron queenpost truss roof frame similar to the later Silloway design shown above, together with the observation that a wrought iron rod having a cross-section of one square inch had a tensile strength of 76,400 pounds, more than ten times the tensile strength of any species of wood. Of the use of iron, Benjamin noted that metal "avoids the difficulty of shrinkage and indentation of the heads of the queen post."

In his next book, *The Builder's Guide* (1839), Benjamin illustrated another timber and iron queenpost truss, this one with diagonal struts like those in the Silloway diagram above. He also illustrated a timber scissors truss reinforced by iron rods whose tension was adjustable by turnbuckles. Benjamin's last volume, *Elements of Architecture* (1843), was more like a textbook than a builder's guide. It had extensive text, including fairly extensive coverage of the strength of building materials, but few plates. This volume illustrated several timber and iron combination trusses. It also illustrated an all-iron truss floor system designed to support the weight and thrust of a series of brick vaults that lie on top of the trusses, thus anticipating various attempts at noncombustible construction.[4]

Of these designs, published between 1833 and 1843, Silloway said, "the work of Mr. Benjamin was no sooner published than a reform commenced, which has steadily advanced, until its great value and economy are universally acknowledged."

By the time that the Strafford Town Hall was constructed, the principle of wood and iron (later wood and steel) trusses was universaly accepted. Such trusses were commonly found in churches, town halls, and industrial buildings. The employment of such trusses in Strafford was not unusual but, in terms of the National Register of Historic Places, identifies the roof system of the building as an excellent example of a widely used type of structure.

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[3] Silloway, *Text-Book of Modern Carpentry,* p. 105.

[4] Benjamin, *Elements of Architecture* (1843), Plate XXVI. In some of his truss designs, Benjamin illustrated iron tension members with branched tops or heads created by forge welding to fasten both to the top chords and the slanted end posts of the trusses, and thus involving increased reliance on blacksmithing. In older all-timber trusses, smith's work had generally been restricted to the forging of iron ties or stirrups, commonly used to lock the feet of heavy timber king- or queenposts to the tie beams into which the feet of the posts were traditionally tenoned. By the time that composite timber and iron (or later timber and steel) trusses had become universally accepted, threaded rods were generally used as they came from rolling mills, with little later manipulation by blacksmithing except for threading of the ends.

The addition of supplementary iron or steel rods and plank braces to the roof frame, some of which are visible in the photograph on page 10, above, suggests that the roof frame of the town hall experienced movement or sagging and required remedial action. Whether this was a result of insufficient structural capacity of the original design, or the result of the extensive changes that converted the hall to a garage, is unclear without further study.

Original appearance: The building specifications in the appendix to this report, transcribed by Laura B. Driemeyer, provide an unusually detailed portrait of the building when new, and a means of differentiating its current appearance from its original condition. Some of the original features of the building that differ from current conditions have been noted previously.

One feature of the building that was character-defining and is now evident only upon close examination was the original presence of stepped seating along selected walls of the building. This seating was described in the specifications as running along both sides of the meeting hall, extending between the two doors leading from the entry to the hall, and running along the inner wall of the selectmen's office. Traces of the hall seating are visible only as patches in the later wooden sheathing, and as a paint line along the wainscoting of the selectmen's office upstairs. All traces of the seating were of course obliterated along the northwestern wall of the meeting hall when this wall was altered for garage functions.

Apart from its conversion to a Department of Transportation patrol office and garage, the most striking change to the building was its remodeling circa 1905. It is clear from the original specifications that the interior walls of the building were originally plastered above the wooden wainscoting. All of the original plastered surfaces are now covered with single-beaded ceiling board, as discussed above. The town records transcribed in the Appendix show all the rooms in the building, with the exception of the firewood room, were "to be lathed on the walls and overhead with half inch boards and plastered in a good plain thorough and workmanlike manner." Half-inch laths are unusualy thick, and suggest that the plaster job on the building was intended to be exceptionally solid and enduring.

Despite the presumed ruggedness of the plastered interior, the town apparently chose to transform the wall and ceiling surfaces some thirty years after the town hall was first opened. The records show that $500 was appropriated in February 1905 to "repair the town house," and this work apprently entailed the complete sheathing of the interior. This decision may have been aesthetic in part; many formerly plastered buildings, especially railroad stations, were likewise being covered with beaded ceiling board over older wall and ceiling plaster at the turn of the twentieth century. Possibly part of the decision was practical. Plaster applied over half-inch lath might not "key" to the wooden substrate as well as if applied over the more common thin lath. Plaster may have been failing in areas of the town house in the same manner that it often fails when applied over the older split-board lath.

As shown above, the refinishing of the interior transformed the appearance of its spaces. The sheathing of the large hall was done with special care, giving the ceiling an interesting geometric pattern that remains.

The appropriation of $500 to "repair" the town house may or may not have been sufficient to purchase new window sashes for the building. All of the sashes that have not been changed in recent years display a consistent muntin profile, shown on page 7, above. This pattern is characteristic of the period after the 1880s at the earliest, but the consistency with which it appears throughout the unaltered parts of the Strafford Town Hall raises the possibility that these sashes are original to the 1873 building rather than products of the remodeling of 1905, as would normally be supposed.

The specifications of 1873 make it clear that the meeting hall originally had a stage along its rear (northeastern) wall, and that two large windows, matching the other six in this room, lighted the stage. All visible traces of the rear windows were obliterated when the hall was sheathed with ceiling boards; the fate of the stage is presently unknown.

The original specifications reveal that the building had a shallow crawl space under the wood-framed floor of the meeting hall. A series of "substantial stone bearings within 10 feet of each other under all the main flooring timbers" supported the major girders under the floor. When the hall was converted to garage use after 1960, the entire original floor system was of course removed and replaced with a bed of solid fill, upon which the current floor of concrete was poured to provide for vehicular use.

Town hall context: The Strafford Town Hall is an excellent, architecturally conservative example of a vernacular building type that appeared in the early nineteenth century, and proliferated in the 1830 and 1840s, to replace the older meeting houses that had accommodated town meetings as well as religious services.

Prior to 1819 and usually for some years thereafter, most small New Hampshire towns maintained a meeting house that served both religious and secular needs. Such buildings were used on Sundays as meeting places for adherents of one or more religious societies in the community. Following a practice that originated at the time of the first settlement of New England, most communities had a single "standing order" or "orthodox" church that possessed the sole right to use the meeting house for religious meetings and enjoyed a measure of town sponsorship through taxation for support of the minister. Often, the established church was also granted town lands for a parsonage or for income that was used for ministerial support. In the majority of New Hampshire towns, the Congregational church was the "standing order;" in a few, a Presbyterian or Baptist church became the town-supported society.

As frequently noted in literature, the meeting house was usually the single publicly-built and -owned structure in younger towns. As the single building that was available for general public use, the meeting house typically housed town meetings as well as religious services.[5] The principal (or annual) town meeting was usually held in March of each year, but in contrast to today's practice, the annual meeting was often adjourned to one or more later dates in order to continue debate on various important topics. Meeting houses were not heated until the nineteenth century, so during the cold months town meetings, like religious services, were not comfortable gatherings.

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[5] The literature on New England meeting houses is extensive. A recent study, which includes a good bibliography, is Peter Benes, *Meetinghouses of Early New England* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

Prior to construction of the meeting house, both town meetings and public worship in many towns were held at private houses, taverns, or barns, and the locations for these gatherings were voted upon at town meetings. Town meeting and religious services were both sometimes adjourned so that attendees could warm themselves in a nearby house or tavern before resuming.

As religious denominations began to multiply in the late 1700s and early 1800s during a religious foment that is often called the "second great awakening," their adherents often objected to paying taxes to support an "orthodox" minister with whose tenets they did not agree. Many of these societies also wished to build separate meeting houses of their own, but were prevented from doing so by the burden of being taxed to maintain the town meeting house.

The eventual result in New Hampshire was passage of the "Toleration Act" in 1819.[6] This legislation severed the connection between church and town, making support of a religious organization a voluntary act.[7] Passage of this law frequently resulted in the physical as well as the legal separation of town and church, with the town often taking steps to acquire sole ownership of the old meeting house for use as a town hall. At the same time, all sects that could afford to do so, including the "orthodox" church, often built modern church buildings to be used strictly for religious purposes, usually in the new ecclesiastical form that is recognizable as a "church."[8] The architectural result, at least in prosperous communities, was a proliferation of religious buildings from the 1820s onward, and also the appearance of a new form of church structure that had its entrance on a gable end, beneath a belfry and steeple.

Some communities adopted a less expensive option. Not infrequently, a religious society and a town agreed to insert a floor at the level of the former gallery (balcony) of the meeting house, dividing the building into two properties. One level, usually the first floor, would become a hall for town meetings, perhaps with one or more convenient offices. The other level would be remodeled as a church room. In 1842, for example, the town of Washington, New Hampshire, voted "to give any individuals the privilege of flooring over the town house . . . and [to] choose their own agent, provided they do it without any expense to the town."[9] Many other New Hampshire communities followed this model. Sometimes a meeting house was divided into two stories to permit a church organization to occupy one level of a building while another organization, such as an academy, occupied the other floor of the remodeled building.

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[6] *Laws of New Hampshire: Vol. 8, Second Constitutional Period, 1811-1820* (Concord, N. H.: 1920), pp. 820-821; William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), II, 894-911; Charles B. Kinney, Jr., *Church and State: The Struggle for Separation in New Hampshire, 1630-1900* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1955).

[7] Everett S. Stackpole, *History of New Hampshire*, 5 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, 1916-17), IV:230; Kinney, *Church and State.*

[8] The history of this separation of church and town is chronicled in Ronald and Grace Jager, *A Cloud of Witnesses: A History of Washington Congregational Church, 1780-2005* (Washington, N. H.: by the church, 2005), especially in the chapter "A New Meetinghouse (1835-1845)." A narrative of the architectural impact of the Toleration Act in New Hampshire is given in the chapter by Ronald Jager, "The Meetinghouse Becomes a Church," in Charles E. Clark and Elizabeth C. Nordbeck, eds., *Granite and Grace: Essays Celebrating the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ* (Concord, N. H.: New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ, 2001).

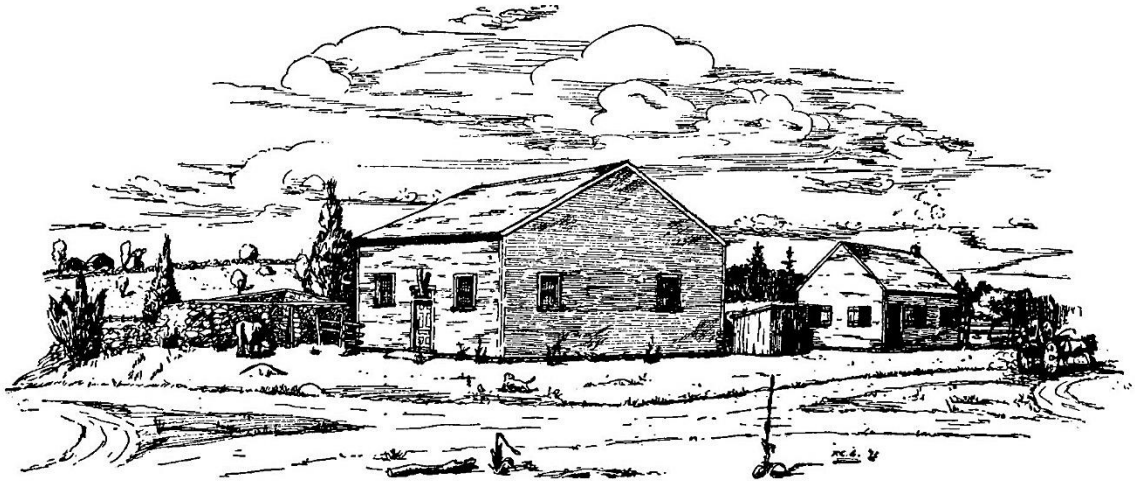
[9] Ronald Jager and Sally Krone, *". . . A Sacred Deposit," The Meetinghouse in Washington, New Hampshire* (Washington, N. H.: Peter E. Randall for the town, 1989), p. 72.

New Hampshire meeting houses that were divided between town and church following passage of the Toleration Act included those in Rindge (built 1796), divided between town and church in 1839; North Sutton, built in 1797 and divided in 1855; and Boscawen, built in 1799 and raised for the insertion of a town hall beneath the building in 1847.

In instances where the religious society decided to build its own structure elsewhere, however, the older meeting house was sometimes remodeled for sole use as an accommodation for town meetings and other business. A town house in the mid-nineteenth century was usually a smaller building than a meeting house, since meeting houses or churches needed to accommodate both the men and the women of a community, whereas a town house needed to accommodate only the voters, who were then men only.

In New Durham Corner, the two-story meeting house of 1770 was reduced to a one-story town house in 1838; in Chichester, a meeting house of 1793 was reassembled as a town house in 1845; in Groton, a two-story meeting house of 1794 was reduced to one story and shortened for town use in the mid-1800s; in Milton, the meeting house of 1803 was cut down to one story in 1855; and in Plainfield, the upper portion of a meeting house of 1798 was moved some distance and remodeled into the present town house in 1846.

The architectural template to which these once larger meeting houses were converted seems to have appeared in rare instances in the early 1800s, before passage of the Toleration Act and the compulsory separation of support for municipal and religious institutions. In one unusual instance, the town of Pembroke, New Hampshire, constructed a small town house in 1811, despite the fact that the town supported both a Congregational and a Presbyterian meeting house that had previously housed town meetings, usually in alternating years. The reason for the seemingly unnecessary expense of building Pembroke's town house at such an early date is unclear.



Pembroke, New Hampshire, Town House of 1811 (source of drawing unknown)[10]

[10] This drawing is reproduced in N. F. Carter and T. L. Fowler, *History of Pembroke, N. H., 1730-1895* (Concord, N. H.: Republican Press Association, 1895), reprint ed., Allenstown-Pembroke Bicentennial Committee, 1976, p. 167.

Buildings like the Pembroke structure, rare though they were in the early nineteenth century, established principles that eventually shaped the vernacular building form of which the Strafford Town Hall is an excellent example, though a late one. Such buildings were basically one story in height rather than the lofty two stories that had characterized all but a few meeting houses. They were relatively small in floor area, being intended to accommodate voters, who were men only, rather than a town's full religious population of men, women, and children. As suggested by the stove pipe projecting from above the door of the early Pembroke building, above, town halls were typically heated, if only in makeshift fashion, unlike the traditionally unheated meeting house. Where meeting houses had typically provided seating in enclosed box pews that occupied the full area of the main floor, town houses were usually provided with settees that allowed seating to be arranged as needed or removed if the building was to be used for a social function such as a dance.

From these basic principles, the classic vernacular town house or town hall gradually developed. As perfected, the town house included the elements that were originally present in the Strafford building: a gable-front orientation; a large meeting hall, heated with one or more stoves; an entry or lobby, identical to that of the contemporary church building, to exclude drafts and roadway noise from the meeting room; and a selectmen's office, also heated, in a partial second story located above the entry.

In the absence of a fuller statewide building inventory and documentary survey, the chronological history and evolution of the New Hampshire town hall cannot yet be told with accuracy. What is presently clear is that town houses did not appear immediately after passage of the Toleration Act in 1819. Despite this statute, most towns continued in their old ways, probably ceasing municipal support of an "orthodox" minister as soon as existing ministerial contracts expired, but otherwise making little physical change in the accommodation of church and town.

By the 1830s, however, the physical separation of church and town began to be evident in architectural form. Probably because the strength of religious sentiment during the early nineteenth century led to the formation of many sects in addition to the former "orthodox" church in many towns, far more new church buildings were constructed in New Hampshire than new town houses. A number of religions gained newfound strength during this period alongside the long established Congregational, Presbyterian, and Calvinist Baptist churches of New Hampshire. These included the Free-Will Baptists, the Methodists, the Christ-ians, the Seveth-Day Adventists, the Universalists, the Unitarians, and a few smaller sects. The result was a proliferation of new-style church buildings across the landscape.[11]

A number of purpose-built town houses have been noted and in some cases studied and listed in the New Hampshire State and National Registers of Historic Places. Among these are town houses in Sanbornton (1834, unusual in having a belfry), Wakefield (1836), North Hampton (1844), Kensington (1846), Nelson (1846), Epsom (1851), Campton (1855), and Orford (1859).

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[11] For a listing of characteristic church buildings that survive in New Hampshire from this period, see the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources Inventory Form for the South Sutton, New Hampshire, Meeting House, in the files of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, Concord, N. H.

It should be noted that more elaborated forms of town halls were developing alongside the late examples of the vernacular type represented by the Strafford Town Hall. Among these were buildings that combined facilities for plays, operas, and other cultural events adjacent to spaces for town meetings and other government functions. Occasionally, a public school or private academy might occupy one of these spaces, as in the New Ipswich Town Hall, built in 1817 as a town hall and academy, and converted to town use alone in 1869.

Such buildings, typically of two stories with two halls, established a more monumental alternative to the vernacular one-story town house. A notably ambitious example of the two-story form appeared in Deerfield, New Hampshire, built by J. L. Foster and F. S. Robinson of Concord, N. H., in 1856. Still more monumental is the brick Charlestown, New Hampshire town hall, with two meeting rooms on two floors, designed by noted Concord architect Edward Dow in 1872.

Such buildings as these led to still more urbane town halls after the Civil War, usually combined with the then-fashionable opera hall. Examples of combined town halls and opera houses are numerous throughout New England. In New Hampshire, good examples include those in Newport (1888), Alton (1894), and Wakefield [Sanbornville] (1895). The two latter examples, of brick, along with a third wooden example in Salmon Falls Village in Rollinsford, were designed by the prolific Dover architect Alvah Ramsdell. Even more grand, the town hall and opera house in Claremont, New Hampshire, was designed by New York architect Charles A. Rich in 1895-7.

These larger buildings usually included prominent towers and public clocks, varied patterns of masonry or wooden exterior finish, elaborate interior staircases and architectural woodwork, especially in the hall or "opera house," asymmetrical but balanced architectural design, and classical detailing. Occasionally, as in the examples in Wolfeborough (1885) and Antrim (1893), New Hampshire, such buildings provided income-producing stores or offices on the street level and (as in Wolfeborough), rooms for a public library.

Within this context, the Strafford Town Hall of 1873 represents a late but characteristic example of the earlier type of town building that had flourished from the 1830s through the 1850s. Despite the changes that it has undergone and its altered use, the Strafford Town Hall still exemplifies the rural values and norms of an agricultural community that chose to retain the form and character of its earlier town house of the 1840s when it built anew in 1873.

APPENDIX

The following Appendix, a transcription of pages in the Strafford town books that document the construction and later alterations to the old Strafford Town Hall, is the result of work by several people.

Liz Evans of the Strafford Historical Society researched the town books for references to the old Town Hall and provided the first abstract of the relevant pages.

Lynne Emerson Monroe of Preservation Company of Kensington, New Hampshire, photographed each of the relevant pages for transription by computer.

Laura B. Driemeyer of Preservation Company painstakingly transcribed the photographic copies of the pages, providing the digital document that follows.

Notes, from Selectmen's minutes:

p. ?? 2 Nov 1872

p. 552, Petition for Town Meeting to be held 7 Dec 1872
Item 4: "To see if the town will vote to build a new town House for the use of said town and make appropriations for the same."

p. 553, Town Meeting Warrant, Dec ??[crossed out] 1872
Item 4: "To see if the town will vote to build a new town House for the use of the said town and make appropriation for the new [no more words on next page related to this]

p. 555 10 Dec 1872, Town Meeting
Only voted on first three items; adjourned to meet on 21 December

p. 556, 21 Dec 1872
Voted to build a new town house
Voted to elect a committee of three to draft a plan for a new town house and make an estimate of the expense for it and report at the meeting prior to the March 1873 election. The committee elected consisted of Paul Perkins, Dennis Foss, Jr., and Azeriah B. Hill.

p. 559, 25 Jan 1873
Heard the report of the committee elected at the last meeting—concerning the plan and estimate for new town house. It was accepted and adopted
Then voted to appropriate a sum not exceeding $2,000 for the new town house
Also voted to build the new Town House on the same lot of the existing one
Voted to elect a building committee of three to superintend the building of the new town house. Persons chosen were Abram S. Clark, John O. Parshly, and Joseph D. Caswell

p. 576, 12 Mar 1873
Motion voted to appropriate sum of $2000 for the purpose of building new town House, to be paid out of the town Treasury
Also motion voted "to sell the old town House at Auction as soon as the meeting is adjourned."
On motion , chose John D. Parshly to be the agent to sell the old town house

P. 561
p. ??, 20 Feb 1904
Purchase a safe for Town House?

p. 295, date, possibly 3/8/05
The selectmen are to charge $3.00/night for use of town hall

Appoint a janitor, to be paid out of that $3.00

Appropriation of $500 to repair the town house

p. 561 Agreement Wilson Gray to Town of Strafford

Building Contract between Wilson Gray and Town of Strafford to construct a new town house

Articles of Agreement made and concluded the Twenty sixth day of February one thousand eight hundred and seventy three between Wilson Gray of Strafford in the County of Strafford and State of New Hampshire of the first part and the town of Strafford in the county of Strafford and State of New Hampshire by their building committee elected and authorized by said town to superintend the building of a new town House of the second part as follows viz
The said Wilson Gray for the consideration hereinafter mentioned doth for himself his heirs executors and administrators covenant with the said town of Strafford that he the said Wilson Gray shall and will between the date hereof and the first day of November one thousand eight hundred and seventy three in good and workmanlike manner and according to the best of his knowledge and skill well and substantially build set up finish and furnish one house for the use of said Town as a town Hall and selectmens office on the lot now owned and ocupied[sic] by said town in such place as said building committee shall direct of the dimentions[sic] and specifications following viz
The building to be 40 by 55 feet on the ground
14 foot posts (14 feet from the top of the sill to the bottom of the plate) with a sixteen inch projection
A Hall entry, woodroom and stairs to be finished on the ground floor
A selectmens office and private room over the entry and wood room
The Hall to be 39 by 44 feet inside and 14 feet high
[The] entry to be 9 feet 6 inches by 29 feet and 8 feet high
[The] wood room to be on one side of the entry 6 ft by 9 feet 6 inches and 8 feet high
Stairs to be on the other side of entry 3 feet wide
The Selectmens office to be over the entry 9 feet 6 inches by 25 feet, 9 feet high with the stairway on one side 3 feet wide and
Selectmens private room on other side 9 feet 6 inches by 10 feet 6 inches, 9 feet high
The walls of the wood room to be ceiled with boards planed and matched
All of the other rooms to be ceiled as high as the bottom of the windows with merchantable pine boards planed and matched
The building to be underpined [sic] with good split stone to be 18 inches deep and not less than 6 inches thick, to be set on a good foundation
The foundation to be a trench dug 3 feet deep and 2 feet wide (unless where the ledge interferes) and to be filled to the top of the ground with small stone and drained.
Also good and substantial stone bearings within 10 feet of each other under all the main flooring timbers
The foundations for these bearings to be the same as for the underpinning
To be two door steps of good split stone rough hammered and to 2 ½ feet wide 5 feet long and 8 inches thick after it is finished
The frame to be of timber of the size described in the following schedule viz

2 Sills	55	feet long	6 in by 8 in	56 Rafters	26	feet long	2 in by 8 in				
6 “	40	“	“ 8 x 8	16 Studs	14½	“	“	4	x	5	
2 Plates	55	“	“ 5 x 6	98 “	14½	“	“	2	x	5	
5 Beams	43	“	“ 6 x 8	10 “	8½	“	“	4	x	4	

1 Beam	45	"	"	4	x	8	28	"	8½	"	"	2 x 4
2 Girts	40	"	"	8	x	8	19	"	9½	"	"	2 x 4
12 Posts	14½	"	"	5	x	8	6	"	15	"	"	4 x 4
2 "	13	"	"	4	x	8	12	"	15	"	"	2 x 4
19 Flooring joists	10	"	"	3	x	8	19	"	10	"	"	2 x 4
8 "	"	11½	"	"	6	x 8	48 Beams	14½	"	"	2 x 8
44 "	"	11½	"	"	3	x 8	6 "	35	"	"	2 x 8
36 "	"	8	"	"	2	x 8	8 Girts	11½	"	"	6 x 8
36 "	"	5½	"	"	2	x 8	36 Braces	5	"	"	3 x 4
36 "	"	3	"	"	2	x 8	3 Tressel Beams	15	"	"	6 x 6
20 "	"	10	"	"	2	x 8	6 " Braces	17	"	"	6 x 6

2 Summers 55 " " 6 x 6 To be laid on the tressel Beams for support of the roof Rafters to be notched on to these and spiked on

Three beams to be treseled with 2 iron rods rods [sic] in each beam made of ¾ inch rod to be 7/8 inch at the end where the thread is cut

The walls to be boarded with good hemlock boards, mill edged and planed

The roof to be boarded with hemlock or pine suitable for the purpose to be shingled with No. 1 old growth pine or cedar shingles to be laid one third to the weather

To be clapboarded with first quality sap clapboards

To be painted outside with two good coats of good white lead and oil

The [exterior] finish to be of good merchantable pine lumber of the following dimensions viz

The planciers to be 16 inches wide with a ½ inch crack in the middle with a return drip [illeg] filet to show 3 inches and cant board to be 5 ¼ inches at the eaves and 6 inches in the rake frieze (head trail board) to be 15 inches wide and double with a bed moulding.

Corner boards 15 inches wide and double with a caption at the head

To be 8 windows in the Hall, 24 lights of 10 x 15 glass and

for entry and other rooms 4 windows of 12 lights of 9 x 13 glass

To be good substantial sash and glass

middle fastenings to be put on all the windows, two on the large ones and one on the small ones

The window frames to be made of good materials.

Sills 3 inches thick, the casings to be 6 inches wide, top casings to be 1¼ inches thick and mortised on

the small windows the casings to be 5 inches wide and otherwise the same as the large ones

To be leaded or coppered

The two outside doors to be 3 x 7 feet, 1 ¾ inches thick

casings to compare with the other finish with a cap 2 inches thick

The two doors to the hall to be 2 feet 8 inches by 6 feet 8 inches, 1 ½ inches thick

The other three doors to be 2 feet 6 inches by 6 feet 6 inches, 1 ¼ inches thick

The outside doors to be leaded or coppered

Good locks to be put onto one outside door, one of the Hall doors and to both doors to the Selectmens office with three keys to fit each lock

Good strong bolts to be put on the other outside and hall doors

Suitable hangings for such doors and door handles and latches to all of the doors

Chimney to be built on a suitable foundation on the ground

To be 16 by 20 inches and of brick of suitable quality for that purpose and plastered inside.

The bigness of the chimney to be in the entry and Selectmens office with two suitable thimbles for the stove pipes and an ash mouth in the entry to be leaded at the roof
all the rooms except the wood room to be lathed on the walls and overhead with half inch boards and plastered in a good plain thorough and workmanlike manner
To be a scuttle made and finished with a door with proper hangings and fastenings to go from the Selectmens office into the roof,
The floors all to be double and both planed
The top floors to be of merchantable hard pine,
floor in the Hall to be elevated for the seats 8 inches to each row of seats agreable [sic] to the plan,
Seats to be made of plank 1½ inches thick by 12 inches wide with backs of inch boards 14 inches high of lumber of suitable quality for that class of work
Seats to be made around the Selectmens office, both sides of the Hall and between the doors in the Hall against the walls with bearings not over 5 feet apart
The 8 seats on each side of the Hall to be set on 2 inch plank (or frames of hard wood) suitable for the seat and back substantially fastened to the floor, three bearings to each seat[,]
to the two between the doors to be the same with four bearings to each seat
A Stage to be made at the back end of the Hall 8 x 13 feet
The floor to be elevated 16 inches above the Hall floor with a step at each end boxed ~~boxed~~ out to be against the wall and 4 feet long[,]
the finish all to be of suitable style and quality for a building of this class
The work and nailing to be well and faithfully done in a good and workmanlike manner and to be governed by the plan adopted by the town January twenty fifth 1873 except so far as changed in these specifications by the building committee
To be furnished with the following furniture and fixtures[:]
one table for the stage, 2 feet wide 13 feet long and 3 feet high
two tables and six arm chairs for the office, all to be first quality, good and substantial office furniture
two stoves with necessary 6 inch pipe [of] english iron, the one for the Hall to be of the size and quality and like the one now the stove of D. Foss & Son, fire brick lined and cast top to swing
the one in the Selectmens office to be a cast iron box stove top to turn back 30 inches long
and also that he the said Wilson Gray his executors administrators and assigns shall and will at his and their own proper expense find and provide all the stone brick lime timber and other material necessary for the making [sic] and building of the said House and furniture as specified.
In consideration whereof the said town of Strafford by their building committee authorized to superintend the building of a new town House doth covenant and promise with and to the said Wilson Gray his executors administrators and assigns well and truly to pay or cause to be paid unto the said Gray (by the hand of J W Jewell) his heirs executors administrators and assigns the sum of seventeen hundred and thirty seven dollars in manner following to wit four hundred dollars, part thereof when the underpining [sic] shall have been set the frame raised and boarded four hundred dollars more thereof when it is shingled clapboarded and windows in four hundred and thirty seven dollars more thereof when the mason work and painting is done and five hundred dollars in full for the said work at the time the same shall be fully completed each of the abovementioned payments to be made if the work already done when they are made is accepted by the building committee and the understanding of this indenture is and shall be that the work is accepted only so far as the work is done at the time of each payment and that none of the

payments being paid shall have any bearing on the acceptance of the work not already done at the time of said payment but that the committee may cause to be withheld any or all of said payments until the work specified under each payment shall have been done in an acceptable manner and for the true and faithful performance of each and all of the covenants and agreements aforesaid the said Wilson Gray bindeth himself his heirs executors and administrators unto the Town of Strafford and also the Town of Strafford by their building committee bindeth itself unto the said Wilson Gray his heirs executors administrators and assigns in the sum of four thousand dollars to be taken as liquidated and stipulated damages firmly by these presents. In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seals the day and year first above ment[ioned] the figure 9 and word feet in the 10th line of the specifications interlined before signed

Signed sealed and delivered
In presence of us
George W. Tasker Wilson Gray
Abram Evans

Paul Perkins	to the committee	Abram S. Clark	Building committee
Joshua Otis	on (illeg)	John D. Parshly	for the Town of
		Joseph C. Caswell	Strafford

A true copy attest Haven B. Foss Town Clerk