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TAMWORTH TOWN HOUSE
TAMWORTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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The following report is based on a brief inspection of the Tamworth Town House on the afternoon of April 8, 2003, made at the request of the Tamworth Historical Society. The purpose of the inspection was to ascertain the evolution of the building subsequent to its remodeling as a town house in 1852, and to evaluate its present condition. The inspection did not extend to the basement or the attic of the building. The first inspection was followed by a second on the afternoon of April 24, 2003. Also present at the second inspection were Christine Kurtz-White, president of the Tamworth Historical Society, and Robert Cottrell, director of the Remick Country Doctor Museum and Farm in Tamworth and a member of the historical society. With the help of ladders supplied by Mr. Cottrell, it was possible to inspect the attic and roof framing of the building.

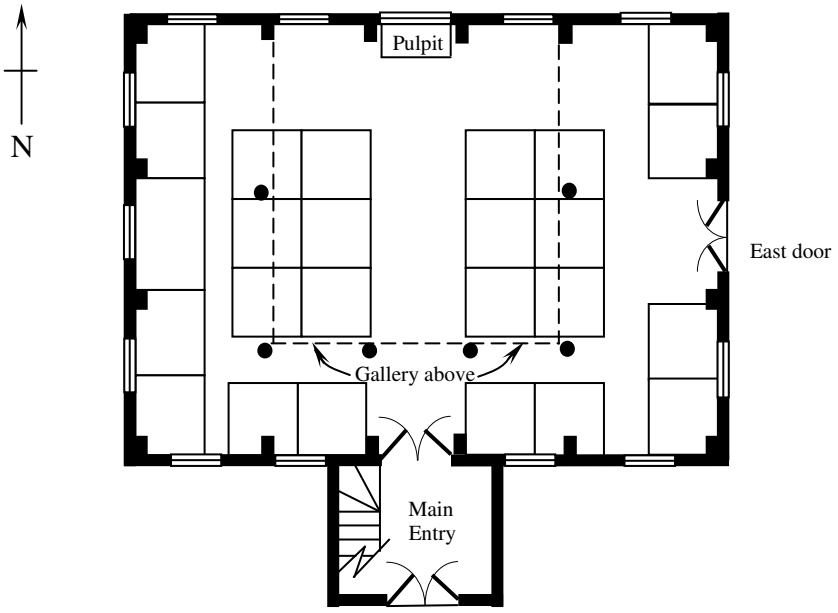
The present Tamworth Town House was built in 1794 as a meeting house. The building was originally located on present-day Cleveland Hill Road near Hollow Hill Road, not far from Ordination Rock and across from the old burying ground. Its original site is marked by a bronze tablet mounted on a boulder. One of the most detailed descriptions of the building in its original location and condition was provided by Charles H. Dow in 1913:

> I suppose it is known to most of you that the old church sat upon the hill opposite the old burying ground. It was a large, irregular, two-story building with a gallery on three sides. The main entrance was on the south side, leading into an entry from which stairs ascended to the galleries. It also had a door on the east, and facing the burying-ground. From the south entrance was a broad aisle, running from the door to the pulpit. The pulpit was raised seven or eight feet, with stairs on both sides; over-head was a large sounding board. The pews were square pens, with plain board seats on three sides, so that a part of the congregation sat with their backs towards the minister. The seats were hung on hinges and made to turn up, giving the occupants a chance to lean against the backs of the pews. This was rather necessary as Parson Hidden made very long prayers. The

> congregation always standing during prayer time got so tired that at the word Amen, the seats went down with such a rattle as made the old building tremble. The choir were stationed in the southeast of the gallery, accompanied with a bass-viol, and, on special occasions, a melodeon.[1]

Internal evidence indicates that the building was constructed as a small but staunchly built structure. Its length and depth conform approximately to the dimensions of 44 feet by 37'-6" that were specified in the original votes to build the structure, but the house was built a full two stories in height rather than the ten-foot, one-story height that was originally specified.[2] The building was, and is, heavily framed. Most of its wall posts are deeply flared at the level of the original gallery, now the level of the first-floor ceiling. The corner posts display no jowls, nor do the two posts that frame the modern doorway at the center of the southwest side elevation of the building. The absence of this treatment of these two central posts suggests that the pulpit and pulpit window were originally located on this wall, and that the gallery framing did not intersect these two posts.

Meeting house pulpits were almost invariably placed on the north walls of the buildings, accompanied by a large window located halfway between the levels of the first floor windows and the gallery windows. Dow's description suggests that this was the case with the Tamworth building. On that basis alone, it may be assumed that the present southwest side wall of the building was oriented toward the north when the structure stood in its original position, but that the building was turned nearly 180 degrees during its one-mile move to the village. Perhaps the contractor wanted to take advantage of the fact that the building had a door on the eastern end, and rotated the structure in order to convert that entrance to the front doorway of the remodeled building.



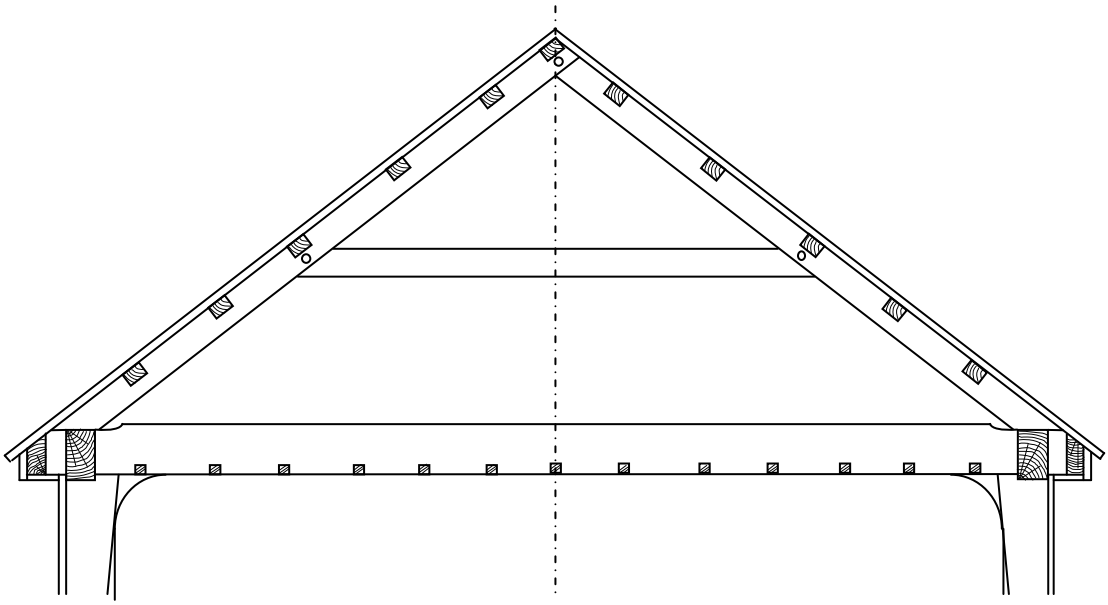
Conjectural Original Floor Plan, Tamworth Meeting House

[1] Charles H. Dow, "Reminiscences of the Old First Church in Tamworth and Its Early Ministers," *The Granite Monthly* 45 (1913): 152-154.
[2] Marjory Gane Harkness, *The Tamworth Narrative* (Freeport, Me.: Bond Wheelwright Company, 1958), pp. 87-91. See pages 121, 182-3 for information on the moving and remodeling of the building in 1852.

A study of the roof frame reveals much about the character of the original meeting house and strengthens the supposition that the pulpit was originally located as shown above, in the central bay of the present southwest elevation, now facing the parking lot.

The roof frame of the meeting house was, and is, composed of six sets of common rafters, including the two sets at the gable ends. Each pair, including those in the gable ends of the building, is connected at about its mid-height by a heavy collar tie and at its feet by a still heavier tie beam. All these members were hewn with a broadaxe, and some were further smoothed with an adze. All these members are of massive dimensions.

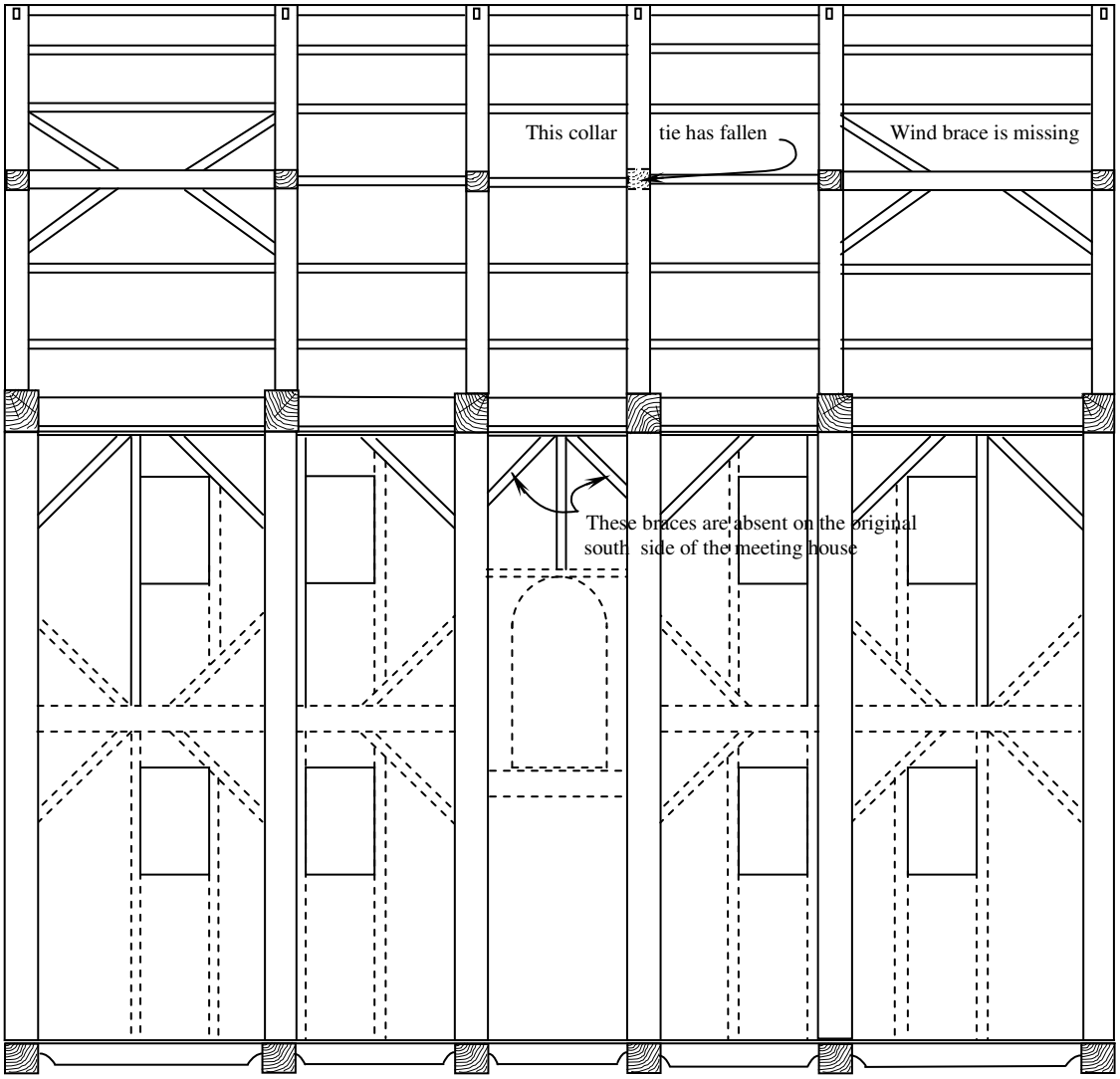
Most New Hampshire meeting house frames studied thus far utilize king post or queen post trusses that are connected longitudinally through the length of the building by horizontal ties. The Tamworth frame is the first to be seen in which the pairs of rafters are stiffened by collar beams and are not connected to one another except by the purlins that support the roof sheathing. The building therefore offers important evidence of a hitherto unrecorded practice in meeting house carpentry.



Section through roof frame

The cove of the ceiling in the upper hall, installed in 1852, permits some examination of the uppermost elements of the broadsides of the meeting house frame. It is possible to see the upper ends of the wall posts (which retain their original whitewash) and braces. Exposure of the tops of these framing elements, while limited, permits some conjecture about the original window placement below the ceiling level. For the most part, the original window placement seems to have matched the current window placement on the two long sides of the building. In the central bays of the two broadsides, however, differences between the two sides of the building suggest the location of the pulpit window on the original north side, now facing southwest. The second-story doorway leading from the porch to the gallery appears to have been located on the opposite wall.

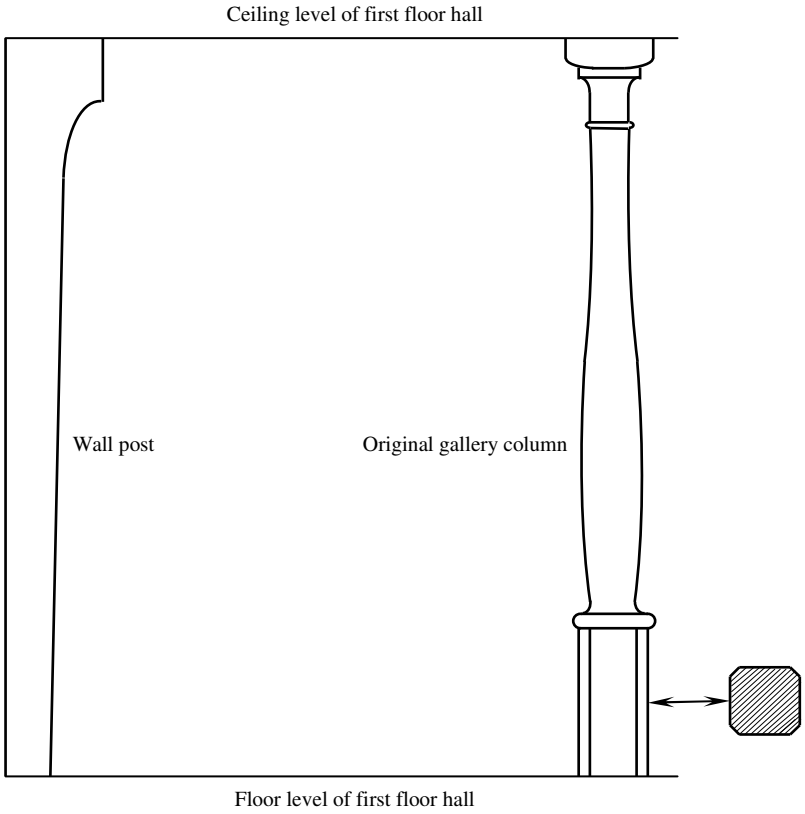
As indicated in the cross-sectional drawing below, the presence of a pair of braces on the original northern elevation was made possible by the dropped location of the pulpit window. By contrast, the absence of these braces on the original southern elevation apparently reveals the former presence of the wide doorway that opened upon the southern gallery from the entry or stair tower that Charles H. Dow recalled in 1913.



Longitudinal section through meeting house frame, looking to original north
Conjectural elements are shown with dashed lines

In addition to its basic frame, the present town house retains further evidence of its former character as a meeting house. The hall on the first floor retains several of the original columns that supported the inner face of the open gallery or balcony that encircled the west, south, and east sides of the original two-story auditorium. The

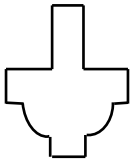
presumed original locations of these columns are indicated by circles on the floor plan, above. The general profile of these large, solid, turned columns is shown below.



These original columns are important survivors from the original meeting house. Such columns were sometimes left unpainted, as were most of the box pews in meeting houses. Sometimes, however, gallery columns were painted in imitation of marble or exotic woods. The remaining columns in the first-floor hall may retain some evidence of the original decorative treatment of the Tamworth meeting house under their current layers of paint.

Window sashes are important sources of evidence on the evolution of any building. Although the older sashes have been replaced on the second story of the Town House, a number of old windows remain on the first floor. These provide evidence of the character of the meeting house as well as of the character that was given to the Town House during the remodeling of 1852.

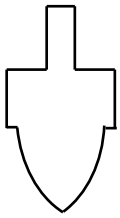
The oldest sashes to survive in the building are found on the rear (southeast) wall of the first story. One of these windows is a twelve-over-twelve unit; the other is a twenty-four-over-eighteen unit. Both of these windows display a muntin profile that is usually associated with the period from 1790 to about 1830. This profile is shown below.



Muntin profile, 1794 windows

It is quite probable that these surviving early sashes date from construction of the meeting house in 1794. In fact, it seems likely that the larger window unit was the original pulpit window of the meeting house. It was probably salvaged from its original location in the north wall of the building and placed behind the enclosed dais in the new Town House. Although most pulpit windows have arched tops, this large rectangular window, with its forty-two lights of glass, would have provided ample illumination for the pulpit, as it does for the dais. Examination of the upper sash may reveal that it originally had an arched top.

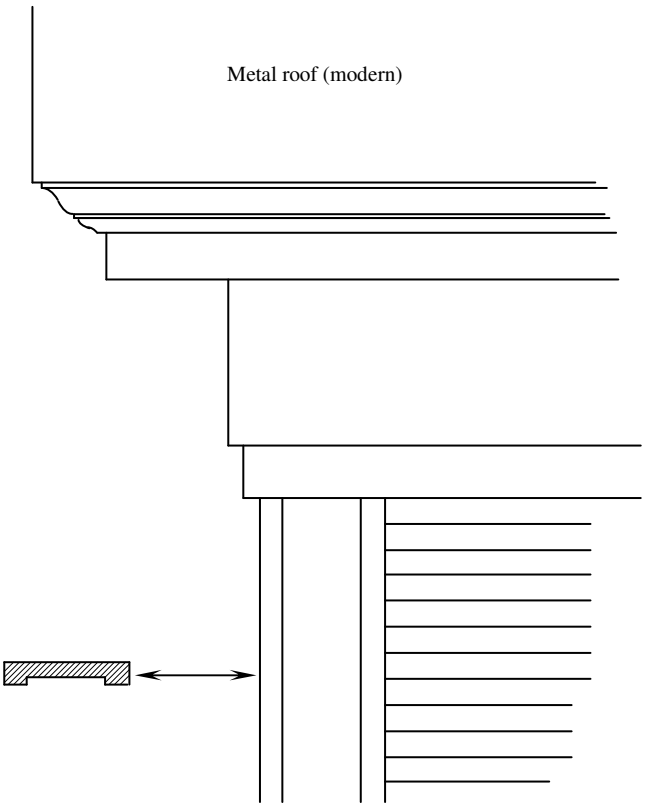
Most other window sashes on the first floor of the Town House are of a style that was current between about 1835 and 1870. Their muntin profile is shown below.



Muntin profile, 1852 windows

These windows are six-over-six sashes, having larger lights of glass than those in the few original windows of the building. They would have been considered modern windows when the structure was converted from meeting house to town house in 1852.

The remodeling of 1852 was intended to impart a strong Greek Revival style to the exterior of the relocated building. By placing the principal entrance in the gable end, the contractor brought the structure into conformity with one of the norms of the Grecian style. A second means by which the Town House was given a modern character was through the application of a deep entablature to its eaves, along with wide corner boards that suggest Grecian antae or columns:



Detail, upper front corner of Town House
(The raking eaves on the rear are flush with the wall plane)

An examination of the first floor framing of the Town House suggests that the present floor system retains most of the elements of the original meeting house frame. This frame is composed of a series of heavy, hewn girders spanning the building from its original north sill to its original south sill, with one girder below each pair of wall posts. The floor boards are supported by a series of sleepers that span the intervals between the girders. Sleepers are sections of tree boles, hewn flat on their upper surfaces to receive the flooring but otherwise left naturally rounded. The ends of each sleeper are hewn to form square cogs that rest in notches cut in the upper edges of the girders and sills.

Because the meeting house was less than sixty years old when it was moved to the village and remodeled, its first floor frame had not deteriorated. Placement of the frame over a full cellar undoubtedly helped to prevent the condensation that is the main agent of decay in first-floor frames. Thus, the first floor membrane remains in good condition today.

Most of the subflooring of the lower hall is obscured by acoustical panels that have been applied between the sleepers. Near the present front of the building, in rooms used for fuel oil storage and a furnace, the subflooring can be seen. Where visible, the subflooring is original, being composed of boards sawn in a reciprocating sawmill, like all the original boards that are visible elsewhere in the structure. In a few locations, holes are visible in the subflooring, apparently aligned with one another and in a few cases

retaining fragments of wooden pins. These may be remnants of the anchor points for some of the box pews of the meeting house. The perimeter pews in most meeting houses were raised one step above the level of the main floor and of the central ranges of pews. Being located near the outside wall of the building, these holes may therefore relate to the raised perimeter floor rather than to the walls of the pews.

The present finish flooring in the lower hall is fastened with cut nails. These boards appear to have been laid over the original subflooring during the remodeling of 1852. The original finish flooring of the meeting house would probably have been broken up by the pew walls and the presumed raised floor of the perimeter pews. When converted to the Town House, the main floor would therefore have required a new and uniform finish floor.

The present floor boards are laid in uniform ranges or panels in which their ends often meet at a single sleeper. This method of laying a finish floor creates a series of unbroken end joints. The appearance of these joints contrasts with that of the modern practice of staggering the ends of floor boards to avoid such alignment. Such unbroken joints are called "beaking" joints. The practice of laying a finish floor with beaking joints persisted from the eighteenth century through much of the nineteenth.

The upper hall has a finish floor of maple. At the rear (northeast end) of the hall, the entire width of the room is floored with oak. It appears that the maple flooring was originally stopped against a full-width dais at this end of the room, and that the zone of oak flooring was laid when the dais was removed at some unknown time.

Eighteenth-century meeting houses had neither chimneys nor any fixed means of warming their occupants. Some people brought small sheet metal and wood footstoves that were filled with coals at home or in a nearby tavern. There is no clear evidence that the Tamworth meeting house had a chimney before it was moved to the village.

There is a break in the ridgepole at the center of the building, now mended. This could represent the location of an added chimney, which would have been supported above the tie beams and would have received the pipes or funnels from iron stoves in the auditorium below. Equally likely, this break may result from a ventilator that may have been installed in the roof after the building's conversion to the Town House. In keeping with standard practice in auditoriums and schoolhouses in the mid-nineteenth century, a ventilator would have released heated air from the upper hall. A search of available photographs may reveal the cause of this interruption in the ridgepole.

The building presently has a single chimney located against its front wall. This chimney rises beside the central doorway and beside a central window on the second floor. Upon reaching the attic, the chimney is slanted toward the center of the building, and emerges at the ridge. The slanted stack is supported by a heavy plank in the attic.

Prior to the construction of the current chimney, the Town House apparently had a chimney that rose vertically from the attic, directly in front of the front attic window, to the same exit point at the ridge. Evidence of this earlier chimney is seen in a shallow cut in the building's end tie beam. This cut retains remnants of lime mortar. Because it rose

along the central axis of the façade of the Town House, the chimney must have been supported at the attic floor to avoid blocking the central window in the upper hall or the central doorway on the first floor.

Early alterations to the Town House: It is clear that some changes were made subsequent to the moving and remodeling of the building in 1852. The steel door to the town vault bears the painted words "F. R. Morse Safe Co., Boston / Town of Tamworth 1886," showing the date at which the brick vault was added on the north side of the building. The pressed metal ceiling in the upper hall was probably installed at about the same time, or possibly as late as the early 1900s.

Most changes that took place after the late 1800s are likely to be documented in town accounts published in the annual Tamworth town reports. It would be a worthwhile effort to search through as many of these reports as can be found and to create a chronology of the recorded expenditures and changes to the Town House.

Recent remodeling: Although the Town House retains much of the architectural character that it was given in 1852, it has been altered somewhat within the past quarter-century.

A photograph of the Town House prior to the remodeling of 1976 is reproduced in the commemorative booklet that was published in 1966, on the occasion of Tamworth's bicentennial as an incorporated town.[3] This photograph appears to show the Town House essentially in the condition in which it was remodeled in 1852. Now-altered features that can be seen in this photograph include a doorway at the extreme right-hand corner of the façade, undoubtedly opening upon a staircase that led to the second floor and permitted independent use of the second floor hall. The double front doors were flush with the façade rather than being recessed in an alcove, as at present. To the left of the main entrance were two windows, probably lighting an office that formerly stood in the area of the present toilet rooms, adjacent to the door to the town vault. A slanted roof, supported by diagonal wooden braces, sheltered the main entrance; there was no shelter for the door leading to the upper hall. The exit door that presently opens from the first floor hall through the south wall of the building had not been installed.

The first story and basement of the Town House were remodeled during the bicentennial of the American Revolution, following a vote at the annual town meeting in March, 1976. Although not every change that was proposed by designer W. L. Smith of Whittier was carried out, the front portion of the first floor of the building was altered considerably. Certain features that had survived from 1852 were changed or removed. Among the changes that resulted from the vote of 1976 were the recessing of the front doors, which had formerly been hung flush with the plane of the front wall; installation of modern toilet rooms on each side of the vault door; the provision of a kitchen serving the first-floor hall; and the alteration of first-story front windows and the stairway leading to the

[3] *Commemorative Booklet, Bicentennial of Tamworth, N.H., 1766-1966* (N.p., 1966), p. 25.

second-floor hall.[4] The two first-story front windows are old, and are evidently the two windows that formerly lighted the office adjacent to the town vault.

Virtually all the original roof sheathing of the Town House has been replaced in recent times with pine sheathing, some of which is bandsawn and some of which is sawn on a circular saw. This replacement may be another aspect of the bicentennial project.

Suggestions for future treatment of the building: The Tamworth Town House is a remarkable legacy. It retains the staunch frame and a few of the architectural features of the first town meeting house. It exhibits the essential character that was imparted to it when it was moved a mile to the growing central village and converted to town use solely, with a new Congregational Church building placed across the road. It still expresses the strong and simple detailing of the Greek Revival style on its exterior. Despite the changes that were made in 1976, the building's interior retains much of the feeling of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, especially in the upper hall, which was left largely untouched in the bicentennial remodeling.

Some of the exterior character of the building was altered in 1976. The façade of 1852, with its asymmetrical but interesting arrangement of first-floor doors and windows, was made symmetrical, apparently for the first time since 1852. Because doors and windows were altered on the first story, there is a noticeable zone of new clapboards on each side of the front door.

Within the past few years, the original clapboards of 1852 have been replaced on the northeast side elevation and the southeast rear elevation. The new clapboards are resawn from clear, planed stock. Rather than being applied with their planed faces to the weather, these clapboards have been applied with their bandsawn reverse sides exposed.

As noted above, all the window sashes of 1852 in the upper hall have been replaced by modern sashes, as has one window on the first floor. The new sashes on the second story have spring balances and vinyl jamb liners.

Future custodianship of the building should concentrate on retaining all surviving early building fabric. The Town House embodies much of Tamworth's social and political history over a period of more than two centuries. Each surviving fragment of the building holds the potential of revealing hitherto unknown facts about the character and use of the building, both as meeting house and as town house. Similarly, each feature of the building, if studied and interpreted, has the ability of offer tangible insights into the quality of life in Tamworth over a long period.

Future treatments of the building would do well to focus on preservation of what survives. If changes are required, they should be made in the spirit of sympathetic adaptation, with as little loss or change to the building as possible.

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[4] Plans of proposed renovations, drawn in 1975 and 1976 by W. L. Smith of Whittier, N.H., are reproduced in Mabel Hidden and Barbara Lloyd, eds., *The Celebration Booklet of the Tamworth American Revolution Bicentennial* (North Conway, N.H.: Reporter Press, 1976).

There is a set of nationally accepted standards for both the preservation and the rehabilitation of historic structures. Adherence to these standards is required in any federally-funded project that affects a historic building. While these standards are not mandatory for privately-funded or locally-funded building projects, they offer sound guidance for such projects and guarantee the maximum degree of preservation of historic building fabric.

The broad set of federal standards is entitled the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Within that broad set of standards, two sets of guidelines are particularly appropriate for the Tamworth Town House. These are the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation* and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. They are given below.

STANDARDS FOR PRESERVATION

"Preservation" is defined as the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. New exterior additions are not within the scope of this treatment; however, the limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a preservation project.

1. A property will be used as it was historically, or given a new use that maximizes the retention of distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships. Where a treatment and use have not been identified, a property will be protected and, if necessary, stabilized until additional work may be undertaken.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The replacement of intact or repairable historic materials, or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate, and conserve existing historic materials and features will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon close inspection, and properly documented for future research.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. The existing condition of historic features will be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of intervention needed. Where the severity of deterioration requires repair or limited replacement of a distinctive feature, the new material will match the old in composition, design, color, and texture.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

"Rehabilitation" is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.