

EARLY HISTORY OF THE FREE WILL BAPTIST MEETINGHOUSE



Lecture presented September 13th, 2009 for the Epsom Historical Association

EARLY HISTORY OF THE FREE WILL BAPTIST MEETINGHOUSE

Lecture presented September 13th, 2009 for the Epsom Historical Association

There has never been a comprehensive history written about religion in Epsom, nor is there a complete history of the town. It would, before delving into the history of the old meetinghouse, be helpful to know what resources are available and the sources used to gather information about the subject.

The earliest article about religion in Epsom was by Jonathan Curtis and predates the forming of the Free Will Baptist Society. The original records of the Congregational Church and many of its later records are housed at the NH Historical Association in Concord, parts of which were later transcribed by Priscilla Hammond in the late 1940's, but many of the later records following Tucke's pastorate have yet to be transcribed. There are a few vital records from Rev. Hazeltine, who followed Tucke, in the town books at the NH Archives, but a great many of his records remain missing. Jonathan Curtis, already mentioned, followed Hazeltine, and during his Congregational pastorate the Free Will Baptists organized here in Epsom.

John H. Dolbeer compiled the most complete history to date prior to 1900, John Mark Moses did a brief history of the early church after 1900, but does not include the forming of the Free Will Church. Three sermons were given in 1899 by Rev. John Woodbury Scribner on the 75th anniversary of the Baptist Church and an article on the meetinghouse and church was done in 1961 on the 100th anniversary of the building of the church by Rev. Donald E. Macomber. Both Macomber and Scribner relied on information from Dolbeer and Moses. They also were able to view records of the minutes of the Free Will Baptist Society, of which two of the three books have made it to the Epsom Historical Association's archives. Minutes for the years 1861 to 1891 remain missing, and probably contain information that could add to our knowledge of the history of the building, but for now we have only that information that Scribner and Macomber supplied. Finally there are the diaries of Rev. Moses A. Quimby, which supplies interesting information as he was the pastor at the time the meetinghouse was built. He also provided additional historical information alluded to by Macomber, the original which remains among the missing. I should also note that the writings of George H. Yeaton provided later insight into some of the later improvements made to the structure.

The history of the structure is relevant to us now since the building was saved and moved to its new location, thanks to herculean efforts of a few and contributions of many. Its future use and completion are still pending. With all that being said, this is what can be ascertained about the history of the Free Will Baptist Meetinghouse.

The Free Will Baptist meetinghouse was built in 1861, and was the seventh meetinghouse built in Epsom. Previously on Center Hill was the first meetinghouse of 1733, then its replacement in 1764. The Congregational Society built one on Center Hill in 1821 and in 1845 built a new one at Slab City. The Baptists built the first meetinghouse off of Epsom Center in 1834, and the newly formed Christian Society at New Rye dedicated their new building in September of 1861. On Christmas Day

1861, the Free Will Baptist's dedicated the replacement of the 1834 church with the one we know today, a scant three months after the Christian Society opened the doors to their building, replacing the use of the old Allenstown Meetinghouse.

First some background. According to the FREE BAPTIST CYCLOPAEDIA 1889, Rev. Arthur Caverno "was born in Strafford (then Barrington), N. H., April 6, 1801. When seventeen years of age he became a Christian, [and] after a severe struggle with unbelief occasioned by deep conviction of sin, he was baptized by Rev. Enoch Place, Oct. 11, 1818. He attended Gilmanton Academy six months, and afterwards studied in the academy at Newfield's village in Newmarket. He obtained what was, in those days, an excellent academic education and taught school successfully in various places. He yielded more cheerfully than many to the call to preach, and began at the age of nineteen. Aug. 23, 1822, at the age of twenty-one, he was licensed by the New Durham Q. M. He was ordained June 17, 1823, in an oak grove on his father's homestead by a council consisting of Rev's Samuel B. Dyer, Moses Bean, David Harriman, Enoch Place and William Buzzell. He was married December 23d to Mrs. Olive H. Foss of Strafford. The next year he taught school in Epsom. Rev. D. P. Cilley and two other ministers were converted during this time." The Epsom Free Will Baptist Society was established July 1, 1824, and the revival during the first year, was extensive and he remained pastor until the autumn of 1827. He was succeeded by the Rev. James McCutcheon, who remained in town assisting through several pastorates. During the year 1834, Elder Benjamin Manson came down from Meredith for an extended and highly successful revival. It was this year that the first meetinghouse was built. The Society had previously held meetings between the Center Hill Schoolhouse and the meetinghouse across the street. In addition, some meetings were held in Marden's barn, the site where Duncan Donut's currently stands at the Epsom Circle. There has been no deed or information as to how the site for the new church was acquired, but it is assumed permission was given by Col. Daniel Cilley, who owned the property, and it was his son, Daniel Plumer Cilley, who was converted by the Rev. Caverno. Several pastors followed Manson, all preaching in the 1834 meetinghouse, but discussions about its replacement did not begin until the arrival of the Rev. Moses Quimby in 1850, the original meetinghouse being only 16 years old.



Left: Only known portrait of the original 1834 meetinghouse. Right: the original meeting house as the second story over what was later the Gossville Store and used as the GAR Hall.

Rev. Moses A. Quimby first preached in the first Baptist meetinghouse on September 9th 1850, and was discouraged, as due to the weather, only a few people were in attendance, and in his diary for that day described the building as an “old ill-constructed thing, hardly fit to worship in.” In addition to his preaching that first year, he also taught in the Fowler District School. While here in his first pastorate, he was married in Concord on August 1, 1852 by the Rev. Daniel P. Cilley, to Naomi Leavitt of Pittsfield, the daughter of Stephen Leavitt and Sally Morris. During the winter they boarded at the home of Jonathan Ayer Knowles, who himself was preparing for the ministry. May 1st of 1853 they began housekeeping at the home of John Wallace. On August 7th John Wallace married his second wife (his first wife having passed away the same day the Quimby’s were married) and moved into the home of Albon W. Perkins until “the Society completes the parsonage.” As a side note, it is interesting that the meetinghouse now sits between the Albon Perkins house, now Carole & Ken Brown’s, and the John Wallace house on the corner of New Orchard Road and Route 4, both early residences of Rev. Moses Quimby and his wife Naomi. December 1st, still 1853, they moved into the new parsonage house, and his diary entry is as follows:

“Moved into the new Parsonage. During the season past the Society sold the old Parsonage at the Short Falls and bought here near the Meeting house, and have fitted up a very comfortable and convenient house, and we feel quite at home since we have a place of permanency to reside in. Before the Parsonage was some two miles from the place of worship, and now it is only a few rods. Every society ought to have a parsonage for their minister; for who wants to be moving from place to place every few months? And then it is desirable to have it near the meeting house where it is possible.”



The parsonage circa 1919.

Though the Society had a parsonage somewhere at Short Falls, apparently it was not used by the Quimby's. The Free Will Society bought about an acre of land from William P. Cilley in March of 1853, the land being west of the church and across Black Hall Road and on the corner of Route 4. Across the street was the home and store of Aaron Estabrook, originally from Concord. In April of 1853, according to a deed from Estabrook to Thomas Tripp, 'a certain building attached to my dwelling house in said Epsom commonly designated as the store part, thereof, being thirty feet in length by twenty feet in width, two stories in height, to be removed at the pleasure of a committee chosen by the free Baptist society in said town for that purpose.' The land was purchased for \$100.00 and the building for an additional \$500.00. Scribner gives the overall building of the parsonage as \$800.00.

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources describes the parsonage 'of Greek Revival styles, standing 2 ½ stories high with a sidehall plan, a gable end façade oriented east facing the Baptist Church. The wood framed structure is supported by a granite foundation, flat board trim around the windows and entry, as well as wide corner boards. In the corner of the house and wing is a 1 story porch with scroll brackets and a railing of square balusters. The existing wing replaced a smaller 1 ½ story wing shown in historic photographs. The photographs also show a small carriage barn connected to the south end of the wing.'

The parsonage was enlarged with left-over money from the building of the second meetinghouse in 1861. Rev. Quimby bought additional land in 1858 behind the sheds of the old meetinghouse. Part of this was later sold to New England Telephone in 1953. On April 27, 1933, fire destroyed the barn, and badly damaged the ell and main house. Insurance paid for repairs, with the barn being replaced with a garage. The parsonage was later sold into private hands in 1991, and later bought by the State and removed for the widening of Route 4. Some photos of the interior are available through the Library of Congress website.



Two photos from the Library of Congress Collection, one exterior view and one interior room.

Rev. Quimby and his wife Naomi had two children born here, Delia August 8, 1854 and Alida, born August 31, 1855. He left this pastorate in Epsom in April of 1858 for West Lebanon, Maine, and

returned for a second pastorate here in Epsom commencing in April of 1860. He had two things on his agenda, a revival and a new house of worship. Fundraising began almost immediately and during the fall and winter raised over two thousand dollars toward erecting a new house of worship. The building committee was appointed and the timber for the frame was in readiness for use, with some workmen engaged to do the work. In the spring things did not look so favorable as there was some division in the church as to the location of the new edifice, and the membership became aware of the bombing of Fort Sumter and the beginning of the Civil War. The decision was made to locate the new meetinghouse on the same spot as the original, and it was described this way in Rev. Quimby's diary entry for May 16, 1861:

"For a few days the people have been moving the old meetinghouse - so to be able to build another on the same site. Bro. Wm. Goss has bought and moved the house off; we expect to worship in it till the new house is completed. Last Lord's day, the 12th, we held our meeting in the old house in the road. The house is now on the spot and the old site is clear of this encumbrance. I hope we shall succeed in erecting our contemplated house for God, but it looks dark."

A great deal of credit for success of the building seems to be given William Goss, who was baptised June 25, 1848 and a member of the church. He was clerk from 1845 to 1871 and Deacon from 1855 to 1871. In his biography in the Merrimack County history it says "In the building of the new church in Gossville, too much credit cannot be given Mr. Goss for the energy, perseverance and persistence with which he advocated and assisted the enterprise. When others were discouraged and ready to abandon the matter altogether, he took the leadership and bore, for the time being, the burden himself, and carried it forward to completion." He bought the old building and it was moved to some of his property which in what was later named Gossville. This building cost about \$2,200.00, according to some church records, besides donated labor and material. Rev. Quimby, as stated in his diary, says the church raised about two thousand dollars the previous fall and winter.



Left: Rev. Moses A. Quimby; Center: Naomi Leavitt Quimby; Right: William Goss

The building was moved by oxen. When they reached the place where Anna Smith now lives, the church stuck fast in mud and could not be dislodged. It was Saturday night. The building was so badly tipped that when the worshippers sat in the pews on Sunday morning, some became seasick because of the angle at which they were tilted. The work was commenced in the latter part of May and completed in December. Brother James B. Stanton of West Lebanon, Me. was the master workman and won high esteem as a workman and manager. By June 21st the frame was up. The services were still held in the old building, and by October, several of the Sunday gatherings were being held in the Congregational Church. By November 30th, James Stanton, who was boarding with the Quimby's, returned to West Lebanon, Maine, and during that month Rev. Quimby was busily getting fixtures for the new house. On December 3rd and 7th the members met to sell pews, at \$50.00 each, and sold all but two. On Christmas Day, 1861, the new meetinghouse was dedicated. As stated by the Reverend, "Two blessings, I sought specially at the hand of God when this year commenced: one the salvation of souls, and the other success in building a house for God. I have lived to see my prayers answered in these two respects, in a way that I doubt not that the Lord has been with me to prosper his work in my feeble hands." The following Sunday, on the 29th, the first Sunday service was held, the first communion season on January 5th, 1862, on the 19th in the meeting house, Alfred Kimball of Haverhill, Mass and Mira B. Chesley of Epsom were married. On March 16th, Rev. Moses and Naomi Quimby lost their first born daughter to diphtheria – her funeral on March the 18th, was the first in the new house of worship.

A deed was issued January 10th, 1862 to the Free Baptist Society in said Epsom by William Goss. The reason for the deed is unclear; if there was no original deed from when the first church was built in 1834, and since there was an arrangement between Goss and the church to remove, keep and move the old structure, it might have been issued for the future security of the church. As mentioned, the records for this period, covering 1861-1891 are missing, and would probably shed light on the reason. The deed, for the sum of fifteen dollars, gives the one half acre lot 'on which the new Free Baptist Meeting house now stands' and 'when said premises shall cease to be occupied for a Meeting house the same shall revert to the original owner'. Perhaps it was really for the security of William Goss.

There is no description of the interior of the original 1834 meetinghouse, other than it being ill fit for a house of worship by Rev. Moses Quimby, and the only depiction of it is a sketch of an earlier depiction. As poor as it was reported to be, it was still deemed good for use, as William Goss bought it, and it was later raised and used as a meeting hall by the later Grand Army of the Republic, and below it, what was later the Gossville store. It all still stands, and apparently there are still marks visible on the second floor of its early use. The new structure built in 1861 certainly did not have the striking appearance it has today. There are no pictures of it earlier than about 1895 that are known, and the best description of its first appearance is from Rev. Macomber, the source unknown. He states that there was no vestibule, instead of the present central door into the sanctuary, two doors led immediately outdoors. Inside between the doors was a raised platform for the choir, high enough to house the Sabbath School library underneath. The congregation turned around to face the choir when singing the hymns. At one time a melodeon was used, then a

reed organ. The windows were plain and smaller than the present windows. The pews were white with brown tops and painfully straight backed, but one could bring his own cushion and a cricket for the feet, if desired. At the front on either side were facing seats for the deacons, who were active in assisting the pastor with the administration of the church affairs. Heat was furnished by large wood stoves at the rear with funnels the length of the room. Perhaps the habit of sitting as near the rear as possible was thereby promoted. The belfry and bell were later additions, with the vestibule.

Rev. Moses A. Quimby closed his second pastorate on March 30, 1863, having enjoyed the use of the new building for about a year and a half. His first pastorate was seven years and seven months, his second for three years. Here he saw the building of the parsonage, the church, was married, had two children, and lost one. Through the next several pastorates, improvements continued to be made, though again, with these records missing, it is hard to be real accurate as to the exact month and year that these improvements were made. The steeple had to be added the same time as the bell was purchased, and would include the addition of the vestibule. The first clue as to when this occurred was in the will of Mrs. Mercy Bickford, widow of Thomas Bickford, who left \$50.00 towards the purchase of a bell in 1867. In the record book which commenced in 1892, there is attached a list, apparently re-written from the original source of those who 'agree to pay the sum offered to our names for the purpose of paying for a bell for the Freewill Baptist Church.' Looking carefully at the list, many of those on it passed away or died as early as 1877, and the list included the contribution of Mrs. Thomas Bickford. Finally, under improvements made to the church, the Rev. Scribner in his history, simply states, '1868 The Bell'. Between those three sources, it would appear that the steeple, bell and vestibule were added in 1868.

Those listed and the amounts they pledged included the following:

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| William Goss \$25.00 | Mrs. Thomas Bickford \$50.00 |
| Mrs. Ruah Kinerson \$50.00 | Samuel B. Marden \$5.00 |
| Charles R. Burnham .50 | Mrs. Mary Green \$1.00 |
| Miss Nancy Green \$2.00 | S.M. Green \$5.00 |
| J.C. Burnham \$5.00 | Nathan Bickford \$25.00 |
| Morrill D. Bickford \$10.00 | Alfred P. Bickford \$5.00 |
| David Marden \$10.00 | Mrs. Miriam Robinson \$1.00 |
| Joseph L. Robinson \$1.00 | Daniel Yeaton \$5.00 |
| J.C. Hall \$5.00 | E.S. Dutton \$3.00 |
| Mrs. B.R. Dutton \$2.00 | Mrs. R.B. Sanders \$3.00 |
| William T. Sanders \$5.00 | Mrs. S.J. Robinson \$1.00 |
| J.S. Chesley \$5.00 | John Chesley \$5.00 |
| George Batchelder \$5.00 | Newell Brown \$2.00 |
| John Wallace \$1.00 | A.L. Locke \$10.00 |
| George Sanders \$5.00 | George Sanders Jr. \$5.00 |
| Jeremiah Tripp \$2.00 | Warren Tripp \$1.00 |
| Jeremiah Burnham \$1.00 | William Tripp \$1.00 |
| William Brackett \$8.00 | Samuel Fowler \$5.00 |
| Ephraim Locke \$15.00 | John Yeaton \$10.00 |



The bell, installed circa 1868 in the steeple, shown prior to the moving of the meetinghouse.

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Calvin Dowst \$2.00 | James C. Yeaton \$2.00 |
| Samuel Martin \$2.00 | Herbert Lovejoy .50 |
| Mrs. S. Fowler \$1.00 | Mrs. L. Fowler \$1.00 |
| Mary Kendall .25 | Blanchard Fowler .25 |
| M.B. _A Libbey \$3.00 | Mrs. A. Batchelder \$1.00 |
| Daniel P. Locke \$10.00 | James Yeaton \$2.00 |
| Daniel Bickford \$1.00 | Charles W. Leighton \$1.00 |
| Silas B. Bickford \$5.00 | John Sperlin \$1.00 |
| Charles W. Towle \$1.00 | Alonzo Wallace \$2.00 |
| Gorham Rand \$2.00 | Henry Haines \$1.00 |
| Solicited by John T. Cotterell | |



A portion of one of the several stain glass windows.

It was already mentioned that for music early on, the church relied on a melodeon, and later a reed organ, probably very similar to the one in the Historical Associations collection. From a newspaper article of 1871, we know an organ was installed, the article read "The Free Will Baptist Society of Epsom have holden two festivals for the purpose of raising funds to be appropriated in the purchase of an organ for their church. They were successful from a pecuniary point of view." The organ installed in 1871 was again with Rev. Moses Quimby at the helm, as he returned for a third pastorate in November of 1869 to January of 1872. There is no mention of it in his diary.

Throughout the records of meetings for the church from 1891 to 1938 there are several references to where repairs and work was done to the organ. At a special meeting in September of 1940, a motion was made that 'a sum of money not to exceed \$1500.00 be drawn from the Delia Marden fund for the purchase of a new organ', and at the annual meeting October 5, 1940, a committee of five, including the organist, investigate organs and bring in a report at a meeting called by the President. Members included Mrs. Cass, Rev. Edwards, Doris Stevens, Mrs. Nutter and Mrs. Bunker. At the next monthly meeting the Organ Committee gave 'a very fine and complete report, and gave in detail their visits to various places and their opinion of types of organs'. A recommendation was presented and accepted. The organ was purchased and installed, and records show that over time, the money was reinvested back into the Delia Marden fund. The treasurer's report for Oct. 1, 1943 to Oct. 1, 1944, included receipts for gifts for remodeling the church for the organ, with payments being made to E.E. Bartlett for labor and material, and to Allie and Clarence Bartlett for labor.

In 1882 the Ladies Sewing Circle was established with Mrs. Avery, the wife of the pastor at the time the first president, the Rev. Avery left and for the fourth and final time, Rev. Quimby returned from April 1885 to April 1887. In 1888, during the pastorate of J.B. Merrill, the vestry was added. The cost was \$500.00, was dedicated December 21, 1888, and paid for by the Ladies Sewing Circle. The original entrance faced to the south, and was later moved facing the west. The last major change which gives the church the look it has today was the addition of the memorial stain glass windows. Rev. Macomber tells us that the memorial windows were installed during the pastorate of the Rev. J. Woodbury Scribner in the 1890's, yet there is no mention of them in the church records covering his pastorate. The windows may have been a project of an independent church committee, or perhaps the Ladies Sewing Circle, therefore not appearing in any minutes or church record. Looking at the windows, and the people they memorialize, we find that the latest any of them died, was

that of Winthrop Fowler 1895 (or could be for his father 1861); Others include William Tripp, 1893; John K. Stokes and Ephraim Locke in August of 1892; others include John C. Hall, 1892; William Goss, 1887; Nathan Bickford, 1879; Deacon Thomas Bickford, 1865; Deacon Ephraim Locke, 1855; Rev. Samuel B. Dyer, 1846; and Rev. James McCutcheon, 1835. This information would date the memorial windows to likely after 1895.

In 1893 a woodshed was added to the parsonage, and the parsonage buildings were painted. The church voted in July of 1894 to remove two old chimneys and build one new one; remove the old singing seats and the two outside doors and make one outside door, and to put in new pews, new pulpit and a furnace. The work was completed and the committee in charge thanked for 'sacrifices made by them in time and money to prosecute said repairs.' This would seem to indicate that the rear choir area was removed and replaced by the double doors into the main hall that we see today, replacing the two single doors. This would also give us the year, 1894, when the current pews were installed. The records give a list of the Pew Holders as of Dec. 25, 1895, recorded by clerk George E. Warren.

- No. 1 Society
- " 2 Mrs. Lizzie Fellows
- " 3 Mrs. C.S. Heath
- " 4 ~~James Batchelder~~ (sold to Geo. H. Yeaton) & James Yeaton
- " 5 Mrs. James W. Fowler & Heirs of Winthrop Fowler
- " 6 George Tripp
- " 7 Zachariah Leighton
- " 8 D.G. Chesley
- " 9 Mrs. C.W. Leighton
- " 10 Fred W. Yeaton
- " 11 Samuel R. Yeaton
- " 12 ~~Benjamin Fowler & Heirs of William Fowler~~ B.H. Fowler
- " 13 John H. Fife
- " 14 George A. Pike
- " 15 Society
- " 16 Geo. E. Warren
- " 17 Hiram A. Holmes
- " 18 H.S. Knowles
- " 19 W.A. Sanders
- " 20 Silas G. Bickford
- " 21 M.D. Bickford
- " 22 Joseph Lawrence
- " 23 C.S. Hall
- " 24 D.M. Philbrick
- " 25 B.M. Towle
- " 26 Cyrus Marden
- " 27 J.M. Burnham
- " 28 Freeman Marden
- " 29 Society
- " 30 Mrs. G.H. Burnham



Left photo is a depiction of what the 1861 church looked like when it was built. It is actually a photo of the church at a later date, and using photo touch-up, the steeple and vestry have been removed. Right photo shows the Church circa 1895 with steeple and vestry.

- " 31 Mrs. Calvin Dowst & Sister
- " 32 N.G. Goss
- " 33 A.P. Bickford
- " 34 Roscoe Hill, MD
- " 35 Samuel Fowler
- " 36 Mrs. C.O. Brown
- " 37 Daniel Yeaton
- " 38 James Baker
- " 39 R.C. Brown
- " 40 Horace Bickford
- " 41 ~~Henry D. Haynes & Thomas J. Ames~~ 2 Whole pew sold to A.D. Sherburne
- " 42 Society
- " 43 Society
- " 44 Frank O. Burnham
- " 45 Hollis Hall
- " 46 Mrs. Lucy Sherburne
- " 47 ~~George Sanders~~ Sarah Bickford
- " 48 T.F. Kelley
- " 49 A.J. Silver
- " 50 Alonzo Batchelder
- " 51 J.T. Cotterell
- " 52 John C. Burnham
- " 53 ~~Charles W. Towle~~ Maurice Philbrick
- " 54 Walter Chesley
- " 55 Philip Fowler
- " 56 ~~James E. Eastman~~ Sold to James E. Marden



The reed organ owned by the Historical Association, probably similar to one used in the old meetinghouse.

The records also indicate that the Rev. J.W. Scribner, pastor during these renovations, had ‘taken some of the remnant material from Church repairs and caused to be finished a bedroom in the parsonage attic, also he had taken the old oil cloth carpet of the church entry and laid it upon the kitchen floor of the parsonage’. The church exterior was painted in 1897, and repairs were made to the parsonage stable in 1901. The Ladies Sewing Circle purchased a new stove for the vestry. As the times changed, the church continued making decisions and making improvements. In 1913 repairs were made to the parsonage and belfry; in 1923 the Trustee’s were to make a decision as to repair or remove the old horse shed. Permission was given in 1926 to the Ladies Sewing Circle to install electric lights in the church buildings and that same year the church switched from burning wood to burning coal. Bathrooms were added to the parsonage in 1929, and the interior and exterior of the church was painted. In 1936 significant changes were made in the church hall, with expenses for having the floor sanded, pews cleaned, erecting staging, and cutting and laying pulpit carpet. New steps were added to the vestry in 1935 facing the west, and the Sewing Circle paid for the carpet in the church building as well as for water in the vestry. In 1938 a new furnace was purchased which was converted to oil in 1945. At this same time, 1945-1946, the basement was added for \$1, 470. The following year, bathrooms were added to the basement. The interior was again redecorated in 1961, and as the church changed from Free Will to Epsom Bible Church, the larger addition with a gym and classrooms was added.

There are probably many good stories still unknown, save the annual late night ringing of the bell to celebrate the Fourth of July, and more detailed information may come to light if the missing records someday appear. The recent history of the sale of the property, the gallant efforts of the 'Save the Meetinghouse Committee' and the last chance, last minute vote of the town which allowed the building to be moved to its new home, is still fresh on our minds. Many will not forget the February 2007 moving of the building from its original location to its current site, fittingly between two of the homes in which Rev. Moses Quimby stayed during his first pastorate. It sits looking much as it did when it was built in 1861, no horse sheds, no gym or classrooms, no vestry. How it appears today did not happen all at once. The steeple and bell were added in 1868; the central door entrance and new pews in 1894; stain glass windows about 1895; new pulpit staging in 1936; a new organ in 1941; and a remodeling a few years later to accommodate the new organ, give the sanctuary and church the look it has today. Its future place is probably secure, its future use still in doubt, but in the words of Rev. Macomber, "Let us cherish it, keep it clean and beautiful, filled with the sincere praises and fervent prayers of earnest men and women."



Interior of the Epsom Free Will Baptist Church, from the Epsom Woman's Club collection.

ADDENDUM: Current History

The Friend's of Epsom's Historic Meetinghouse committee included Dick Frambach, Glenna Nutter, Harvey Harkness, Sharon Burnston, Bruce Graham, Penny Graham, Charlie Yeaton, and Phil Yeaton. Their efforts raised enough money to move the meetinghouse, but before anything could be moved, the town had to vote to own the building. A deliberative session was held in January of 2007, and on February 13th a special town meeting was held, with the town voting in favor of the warrant article. The date of demolition had been set by the new owners of the property, Cumberland Farms, for March 1st. The committee had arrangements in place, should the article pass, to move the building. At 5 a.m. on Sunday, February 25, just days before Cumberland Farms' demolition date, Route 4 was closed to traffic, utility lines were dropped, and the 120-ton, 42-foot-wide building rolled along the 45-foot-wide roadway to its new home. It was a beautiful winter day, and the site of the old meetinghouse moving along Route 4 to its new home near the 1850 town hall and the new Public Library was both memorable and sentimental. With what money was still available, a new foundation was made and on October 16th, the meetinghouse was put into place.

The Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (**LCHIP**) awarded the Town a grant of \$191,000 on October 29, 2007 to secure, preserve, and initiate rehabilitation of the structure. From these funds much of the main restoration was begun which included: the left side repaired and filled in where the vestry was attached and a window framed to match the stained glass windows; the roof was repaired and shingled; exterior siding was repaired and painted; lower level exterior was finished to match the upper level and windows and doors were installed; support posts were installed under the building; drainage work was done around the foundation; steps and deck were constructed; site work to construct a handicap ramp was done; electrical power was run underground from the Old Town Hall; two furnaces with a propane tank were installed along with heat registers for the auditorium. Some of the money also went to an architect and for the foundation. An additional Moose Plate grant for \$10,000 went toward the repair of the stained glass window in the front and the last one on the right side. These windows were vandalized prior to the town taking ownership. Protective storm windows were installed on these two windows with a screen for the one on the right side. The LCHIP portion of the work was completed at the end of May 2009. The building is still not usable because there are no bathrooms, water or handicapped parking. As part of the LCHIP agreement, there is an Epsom Historic Structures Stewardship Committee set up to run 15 for years. The membership of the committee to include the following: no less than 5 members and no more than 7 members; terms of 1-5 years; no more than 2 alternates; to include at least a member of the Friends of the Meetinghouse, a member of the Epsom Historical Association, a member of the Epsom Library trustees, a citizen familiar with historical structures or knowledge of Epsom history, and a member of the BOS or their designee.

