

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Bethel Town Hall is a two and half story structure with a corbelled and arcaded cornice supporting a gabled roof. This three bay brick veneer building, with Romanesque elements, has arched windows with granite keystones and sills. A projecting bell tower breaks the west pedimented gable, facing Main Street. The tower sits upon a projecting central pavilion. The pavilion has a recessed semi-circular arched main entrance on the ground level. The tower tapers above the horizontal cornice and is sheathed with stamped metal. The tower has semi-circular arched openings in pilastered balustraded bell chamber capped by pyramidal peaked roof.

HISTORY

In 1892, a vote was held to build a Town Hall on the site of the Old Ralston store, then known as the Beehive, for its role as a tenement house. A building committee was appointed with strict stipulations that expenditures should not exceed \$5,000.00. Henry O. Maxham of Pomfret, Vermont was hired to build the Town Hall (1891-1892). The Montpelier architect, George Gurnsey, may have designed the Town Hall.

The Beehive building and site was bought for \$800.00 and it cost \$75.00 to have the building removed and the site cleared. Lumber for the new Town Hall cost \$800.00 and the bricks cost \$800.00. The bricks were purchased from Dinsmore's brickyard in Lebanon, NH. The Vermont Marble Company supplied the marble. The tower was capped with a golden eagle weathervane. A hot air furnace located on the left side of the ground floor and fueled by wood and later on by coal heated the building. An iron fence enclosed the property. When the project was completed a number of townspeople were upset to find out that the Town Hall had cost nearly \$ 7,00.00 instead of the approved \$ 5,000.00. The grand dedication ball was held in January 1893 and was a great success. The First Figure, the French Four, was led by Uncle Dan Davis, 87 years of age and Mrs. Frank Bascom, who evidently did not wish to divulge hers.

During January and February of 1893, C. W. Henry of Manchester, NH painted the scenery for the stage. "About as clever a brush handler as Bethel has ever seen" read one report and each day while he worked, he was watched by an admiring crowd of spectators.

In August of 1893, Mary Harrington gave a 1,800-pound bell for the tower in memory of her late husband, Edwin Harrington. Meneely and Co. of Troy, NY made the bell.

On either side of the main entrance there were two large stairways that provided access to the Hall and Balcony levels. A large room at the rear of the ground floor served as the Library. The Library was reached by walking down the hall past two "lockups" located to the right of the main entrance. In 1904 a clock was installed in the bell tower. In 1909 the Library was moved to another site on Main Street so that the room could be used for meetings. In the 1920's, the Fire Department and its fire truck moved into the ground floor. At some point the south stair to the Hall and Balcony levels was remove. Sometime between 1922 and 1929 an exterior metal fire escape was installed on the south side of the building to provide egress from the balcony level. The "lock up" remained in the building till the late 1930's.