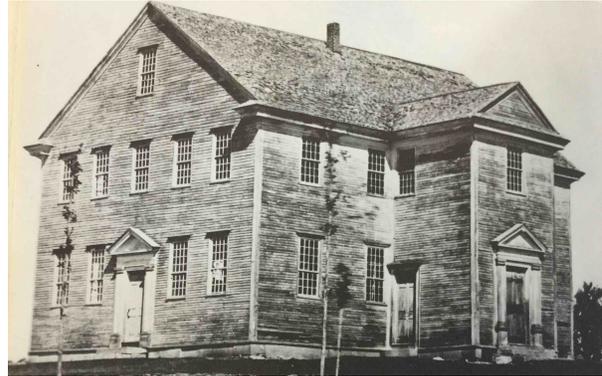


## DUNBARTON TOWN HALL RESTORATION PROJECT

This is the first of what is planned as a monthly article about the ongoing Dunbarton Town Hall's history and efforts to restore the large upstairs meeting room so residents can once again enjoy that wonderful space. The first floor of the Town Hall currently houses the library, but it hasn't always been so!

There's actually quite a history behind that beautiful old structure, beginning with the original, and very modest, "meeting house" that was built circa 1760. That one story building was replaced in 1789 by a much larger, two story building, which served the town until 1908, when a fire destroyed the entire structure. Exactly one year later the building had been completely rebuilt and once again provided for a variety of community needs. Among those needs, it has served as the office for town officials, a community gathering place, the police station, a school house, and a library. Not so many years ago it even housed a commercial kitchen for community suppers.



Old Town Hall circa 1860

The following stories are compiled from an interview with long time Dunbarton resident Bill Zeller, who grew up in Dunbarton and was both a teacher and Principal of the Dunbarton Elementary School. Bill was kind enough to sit down and share some of his memories of events that took place in the upstairs of the Town Hall building.

"As a student here I remember when the kids from the Montalona School and the Center School (both held grades 1 through 8) used to join up to put on a Christmas Concert (on the stage). There was also a Spring program put on by the kids from both schools as well as other school activities up there. The older boys always looked forward to this as we seldom got to see the kids from East Dunbarton. The pretty Morissette triplets were always there along with their older sister who had a beautiful singing voice. We had our 8th grade graduation up on the stage and I got to sing a solo, that was a very special moment for me."

"After the new elementary school was opened in 1972, the hall and stage were still used for our Christmas and Spring concerts. The night before an event it was the Principal's job to build a good fire in the wood stove upstairs to be sure it would be warm for the kids the next day. (You can still see marks on the floor where the wood stove stood.) That afternoon I would have each of the kids in my grade 6 class, I think there were 25 students, go down to the basement and carry up two logs for the fire, that was about all those little arms could hold, but that gave us plenty to keep the fire burning. Then so it wasn't all work, I would show them how I used to slide down the banister when I was a little kid. Of course they all got a big kick out of that! - and had a

chance to try it themselves.“ (Restoring the Grand Staircase is one of the long term goals of the Town Hall Restoration effort.)

“The Grange was an organization that held monthly meetings upstairs and was always well attended. They were somewhat secretive and had a lot of rituals. If you’ve ever been upstairs and wondered what the round hole cut in one of the doors is about, that was so a member could peer through the hole and determine when they were supposed to enter into the meeting. In the summer of 1953 I was 16 and Allison Vallieres and I were inducted into what was considered the junior Grange.”



L-R Bill Zeller, Reba Powell, Ralph Walker, ?, Alison Adams Vallieres and State Grange Official.

He said that children’s programs weren’t the only recitals held up there. Local adults were showcased in both musical and vocal concerts, usually to sold out crowds.



L - R Bill Zeller Sr. and Jack Grady - Manchester Policeman



Charlotte Sweeney, Emily Venator, Greta Bartlett, Marion Zeller and two in front at right ??

“Another ceremony that packed the citizens in was the 200th Anniversary of the Town of Dunbarton, that took place in 1965. The Mayor of Dumbarton, Scotland, (that’s the Scottish spelling - honest!) our town’s namesake, came over to help mark the momentous occasion. He wore a kilt and full Scottish attire and dutifully marched in to the drone of bagpipe music.”



Bill also talked about the WWI cannon that sat on the Commons in what is now the site of the Vietnam Veterans memorial monument. He told how the kids would crawl all over the cannon and the cement cannon balls stacked pyramid style in front of it, spending many a happy hour playing imaginary games there.

The Town Hall Restoration Committee would love to hear from you if you have any interesting stories or memories of events in this historic building or photos you would like to share. Please contact [EnidLLarsen@gmail.com](mailto:EnidLLarsen@gmail.com) or 774-3600.