Bridgewater's 1843 Town House

1885 Image of the 1843 Town House and Fire Station

Development History and Utilization

Carlton D. Hunt, Ph.D.

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Prologue

As I write this in 2023, I find the history of Bridgewater's Town Hall development, known from 1843 through 1915 as the Town House, provides great lessons. I find the Town House history fascinating from the perspectives of social need, a community coming together, upgrades to stay abreast with technologic advances especially in the 19th century, and its functions as recorded in the handwritten Town Meeting records through 1846 and Annual Town Reports beginning in 1847. I started this work during the 2020-2023 Covid-19 Pandemic when I researched the Town records for the development of Bridgewater's first library, the 1883 Memorial Building. That research used only the handwritten Town Meeting warrants and minutes which drew me into researching the history of the Town House. The research is now closing as my wife, Marilee Kenney Hunt, Bridgewater Town Clerk since 2015, leads the effort to repurpose the Town House since its neglectful use in 2016 when the 1898 Academy Building was restored and upgraded for Town offices. My interest in Bridgewater's history became foremost in 1986 when I and my family relocated from Rhode Island to Massachusetts in pursuit of my career as an oceanographer at Battelle Ocean Sciences in Duxbury, MA. Little did I know or even suspect I would trace my family's history in these United States to the early proprietors of Bridgewater, John Washburn and his extended family. John arrived in Plymouth Colony in 1631, established himself, then brought his family from England to the Colony in 1634. They became residents of Duxbury, where I worked for 25 years. In 2018, my daughter Rebekah gave me Ancestry.com which began one of my journeys in retirement. I knew growing up in Nebraska my mother's family traced its history to the Burnham's in Maine so understood I had New England roots. Little did I know my genealogical research would bring me to Bridgewater, MA where I found links to the 1656 Washburn proprietors of Bridgewater who were heavily involved in the 1830 and 1843 Town House developments. I hope you enjoy this history as much as I enjoyed the research and writing.

Abstract

Bridgewater's Town House, aka Town Hall, was constructed in 1843 for Town Meetings, cultural functions, and probably municipal administration although this function is not expressly stated in the Town records for nearly eight decades. The building, especially the upper hall, generated revenue by hosting 20 to 40+ events including entertainment, organization meetings, and various society/club meetings per year. Each of these activities was relevant to the Town's cultural experience in the 19th and 20th centuries. From its inception, the building was managed by a three-member Town House Committee. This ended in 1915 when the building was renovated for Town Offices. Handwritten Town meeting records and published Annual Town Reports, begun in 1847, document revenue from rental of the House, mostly the "upper hall". This revenue funded care, maintenance, and repairs in the 1800s. Building upgrades in its first 80 years capture the major technological advances of the 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, lighting progressed from kerosene and oil (likely whale) to gas and then electricity. Sanitation was addressed in the late 1880s and early 1900s with construction of a cesspool (1888) and tying into the Town's developing sewer system and installation of "modern toilets" in 1915. Upgrades in heating reflect the available choices of the time: wood, coal, fuel oil, and gas. An early use of the telephone (1887) is noted in the record. The 19th century Town House Committee's annual compilation of monthly uses establishes the Town House's historic cultural value and its development as the seat of Bridgewater's Town Government. The latter was solidified in 1915 when the Town voted to renovate the first floor for Town offices after which hall rental revenue which peaked at ~$1,100 in 1913 fell by 1935 below that of the Town House's first 20 years of existence. Historic use of the Town House as cultural center can be characterized as learning (e.g., readings, lectures, conventions), performance and entertainment (bands, concerts, operetta, dramatics, theater, such as Gen. Thom Thumb and wife), and society get-togethers (dances, festivals, fairs, and exhibits). The Town House was unoccupied from 2016 to now, its use as Town offices being abandoned due to renovations and repurposing of the Academy Building. In 2020, the Town's Cultural Commission won a grant to study the potential reuse of the building. The Town Hall cultural reuse feasibility report *Findings and Recommendations to the Town of Bridgewater MA* in the *Adaptive Reuse of Old Town Hall* published in 2021 states the building "*can be effectively used as a cultural center that includes exhibit, retail, learning, and performance*". These are consistent with the Town House's historic cultural function which is as important today as in the 1800s.

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Introduction

Bridgewater's 1843 Town House, conceptualized in 1840/1841 and constructed in 1843, has served a range of functions. Handwritten Town Meeting warrants and proceedings between 1835 and 1843 document votes and actions taken to develop the building and its predecessor Town House at the corner of Bedford St., Church St., and Central Sq., directly across Bedford St. from the iconic Academy Building. Town Meeting votes to acquire land and construct these buildings include appointment of committees which considered feasibility and developed design concepts and costs. Once constructed, building maintenance, repairs, improvements, and technological upgrades are documented in the Town Meeting records and Annual Town Reports first published in 1847.

The Annual Town reports, recently digitized by the Town Clerk's Office in searchable format, convey many uses of the building, especially the upper hall, fee revenue, and building care/maintenance/improvements and costs. Much of this information is documented in Town House Committee reports and report abstracts. Importantly, the information provides a sense of the Town's social and culture values, thus the importance of the Town House as a center of Town activity. The information also provides a lesson for its future use as the Town works to revitalize the center of Town.

Figure 1 shows the "first Town House" where the Swedenborg church, constructed in 1871, (https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=brd.14) now stands on Bedford St. across from the Academy Building and south of School St. across from the 1843 Town House. Notice the grassy islands in the center of the intersection. Those have been replaced with concrete structures today, but the walkway remains.

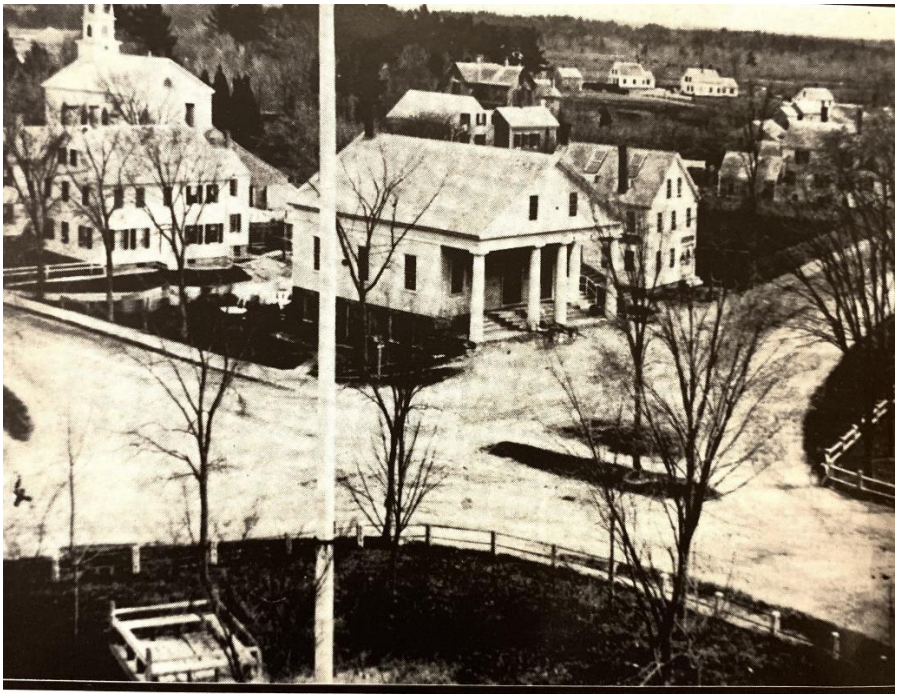


Figure 1. The first Bridgewater Town House (built circa 1836).

This research clarified the history of the "First Town Hall"[1] built in the mid-1830s (as stated in MACRIS BRD 53 (https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=brd.53). Considerations below demonstrate this structure was proposed and approved by Town Meeting in the mid-1830s. This "Old Town House" is clearly absent in an 1895 image (Figure 2) which looks westerly toward the back of the Town House, Fire Station, Central Square Congregational Church (on the right with its magnificent spire), and the 1871 Swedenborg church spire barely visible in the center looking towards the Academy Building (left center) originally built in 1868 as a private school[2] and expanded in 1898. In 1875 the Academy Building was leased to the Town as a school. The building has served several functions during its life including as a high school before conversion to Town offices in about 1952 and for police use in 1973 before reverting to Town offices in 2003, and after a short hiatus during two-year restoration ending in 2016.

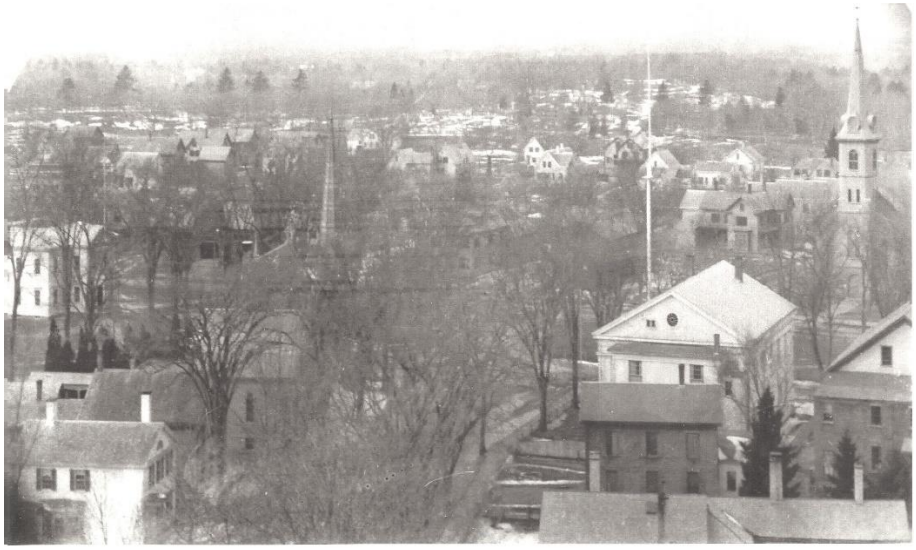


Figure 2. 1895 image of Town House and vicinity looking west.

Close examination of Figure 2 shows the 1880s Memorial Library to the right of the 1868 Academy Building which only had two windows on either side of the main entrance[3]. A circa 1879 image of this building can be found at https://vc.bridgew.edu/bridgewater_images/1. In contrast, today's Academy Building, expanded in 1898, has five windows on either side of the

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary definitions: **town hall**: "A building used for the administration of local government, the holding of court sessions, public meetings, entertainments, etc.; (in early use also) a large hall used for such purposes within a larger building or set of buildings. **city hall**: "(The name of) the chief administrative building or offices of a municipal government. ... Originally and chiefly North American. Municipal officers collectively; city government."[6]

[2] Education in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, 1900-1910 Benjamin A. Spence (2008) (https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=spence. P 13. *"Classes first met in the Centre School on Grove Street, but in the spring of 1869 moved to quarters in the Old Town House (Hall) on the comer of School and Bedford Street, a site that was soon chosen by the New Jerusalem Church on which to erect their new sanctuary. After a year or so of putting up with unfavorable conditions, including "the odors of cabbage, onions, and the like coming from the tenement below the school!... ," and the impending dismantling of the Old Town House, the high school class returned in September 1870 to expanded quarters in the Centre School."*

[3] A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRIDGEWATER ACADEMY BY MAURICE K. WALCH (1938) https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=local_histories

entrance; this Academy Building expansion occurred with the addition of its front wing in 1897/1898 (https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=BRD.52). Note the Centre School mentioned in the footnote has a well-documented history and was moved from its original location on School St. to the Mitchell Block on the east side of the Common.

Records show the 1835 Town House was used as the Normal School (1940-1946) before the first State Normal School was erected[4]. The structure and use are described in the 1976 Bridgewater State College publication: *As We Were … As We Are, 1840-1976* by Jordan D. Fiore and David K. Wilson. Page 7 states "*The school opened on September 9, 1840, when twenty-eight students, seven men and twenty-one women, presented themselves to Nicholas Tillinghast, the one-man staff, at the old Bridgewater Town Hall, on the site of the present day Church of the New Jerusalem. Here in a one story wooden building, forty by fifty feet, were constructed three rooms, an ante-room for students, an apparatus room, and a classroom 'which had a board partition so constructed that the lower half could be raised and lowered so as to make one or two rooms, as the school exercises might require'.*" (See Figure 3).

Note the two windows in the peak of the roof, stone basement, single floor, chimney at the rear of the building, and piazza extending across the entire front of the building and its reported dimensions. Also in Figure 3 is a building to the rear of this structure with window features consistent with the image of this building taken in 1870 (compare to the image in Figure 1).

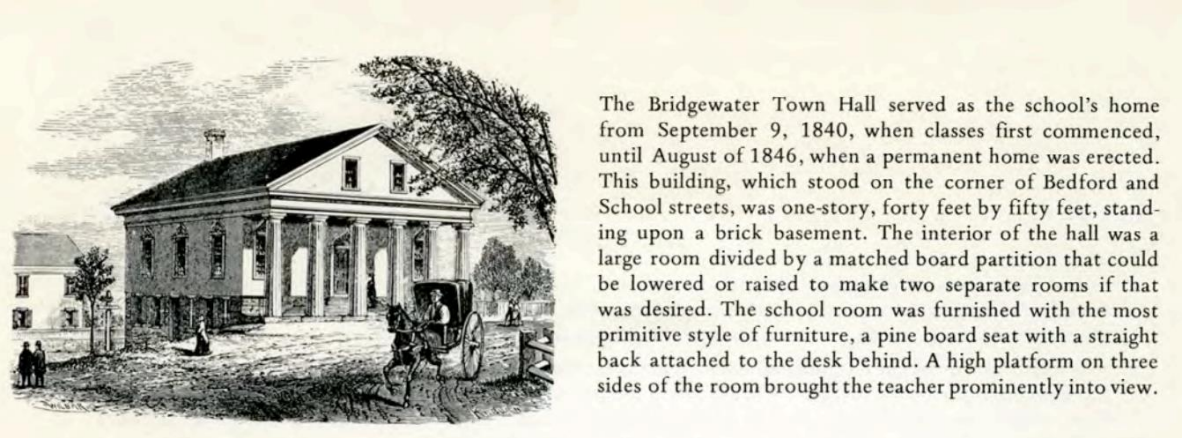


Figure 3. Old town Hall from As We Were … As We Are, 1840-1976 by Jordan D. Fiore and David K. Wilson (1976). https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=bsu_histories .

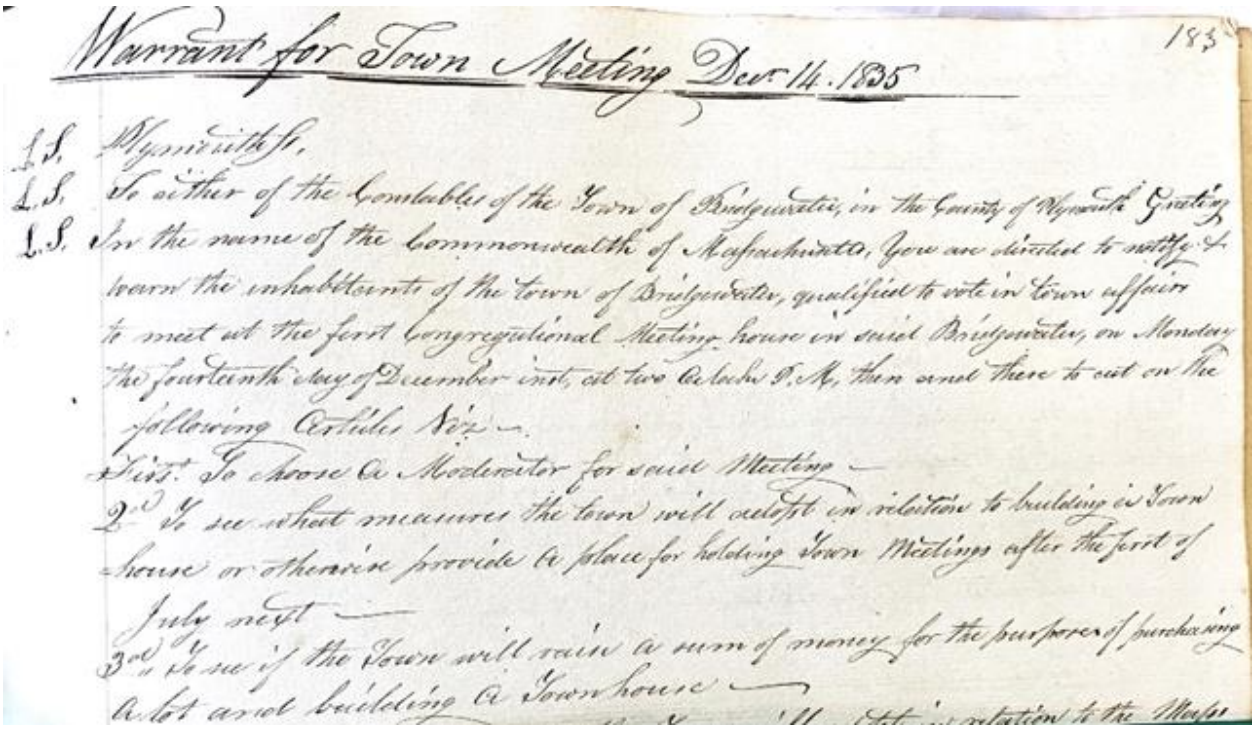
The development of the Old Town Hall is first considered to clarify published information regarding the 1843 Town Hall. The development history of the 1843 Town House, based on handwritten, detailed Town Meeting records and various uses gleaned from the Annual Town reports is then considered.

Importantly, the 1843 Town House siding and windows were removed/restored, and bathrooms and counters upgraded for accessibility in 2010 with ~$800,000 of Community Preservation Act funds.

[4] Education in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, 1900-1910 Benjamin A. Spence (2008) P17 "on land a short distance from the comer of Summer and School Streets, donated by Colonel Abram Washburn, one of Bridgewater's leading civic leaders, the first state Normal School building in the United Sates was erected in 1846."

1835 Town House Development

The earliest nineteenth century mention of a Town House is found in Bridgewater's December 14, 1835, Town Meeting warrant (Figure 4). The proceedings state the meeting was held in the "*first Congregational Meeting house*". Article 3 was "*to see if the Town would raise a sum of money for the purposes of purchasing a lot and building a Town house*".



Warrant for Town Meeting Dec. 14. 1835

L.S. Plymouth ss.

L.S. To either of the Constables of the Town of Bridgewater, in the County of Plymouth Greeting

L.S. In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, You are directed to notify & warn the inhabitants of the town of Bridgewater, qualified to vote in town affairs to meet at the first Congregational Meeting house in said Bridgewater, on Monday the fourteenth day of December inst, at two o'clock P.M, then and there to act on the following Articles viz —

First. To choose a Moderator for said Meeting —

2d To see what measures the town will adopt in relation to building a Town house or otherwise provide a place for holding Town Meetings after the first of July next —

3d To see if the Town will raise a sum of money for the purpose of purchasing a lot and building a Town house —

Figure 4. December 14, 1835, Town Meeting warrant.

This meeting voted for three actions with respect to a Town House (Figure 5): 1) to Build a Town House, 2) form a committee of seven to carry out the vote to build, and 3) gave specific instructions to the committee. The committee included three of my relatives: Capt. Abram Washburn, Col. Abram Washburn, and Seth Washburn plus Philo Leach, Solomon Alden, Jr., Isaac Fobes, and Col. Samuel Leonard.

Capt. Washburn and Seth Washburn appear to be brothers. They are my 4th cousins 4 times removed. Their father, Col. Abraham "Abram" Washburn, passed in 1785 so cannot be the Col. Abraham Washburn recorded in this Town Meeting record.

My genealogical relationship to committee member Col. Abram Washburn is as follows. Col. Abram Washburn's father was Nathanial Washburn, Sr., born in Bridgewater to Col. Abraham Washburn (death 1785). Nathaniel relocated to Vermont after his marriage in Bridgewater in May 1790 (the 1790 census lists him in Pomfret, Windsor, Vermont in August). He returned to Bridgewater between 1820 and 1830 per the census taken those years. Various records show his son Col. Abram Washburn, the subject committee appointee, was born in Vermont in 1795 and

came to Bridgewater in 1811 and worked under his Uncle Capt. Abram Washburn[5]. This Col. Washburn is my 5th cousin 3x removed.

I also likely trace to the Leonard genealogy as records show the Leonard and Washburn lines had marriages going back to the pilgrims. That demonstration is beyond this endeavor.

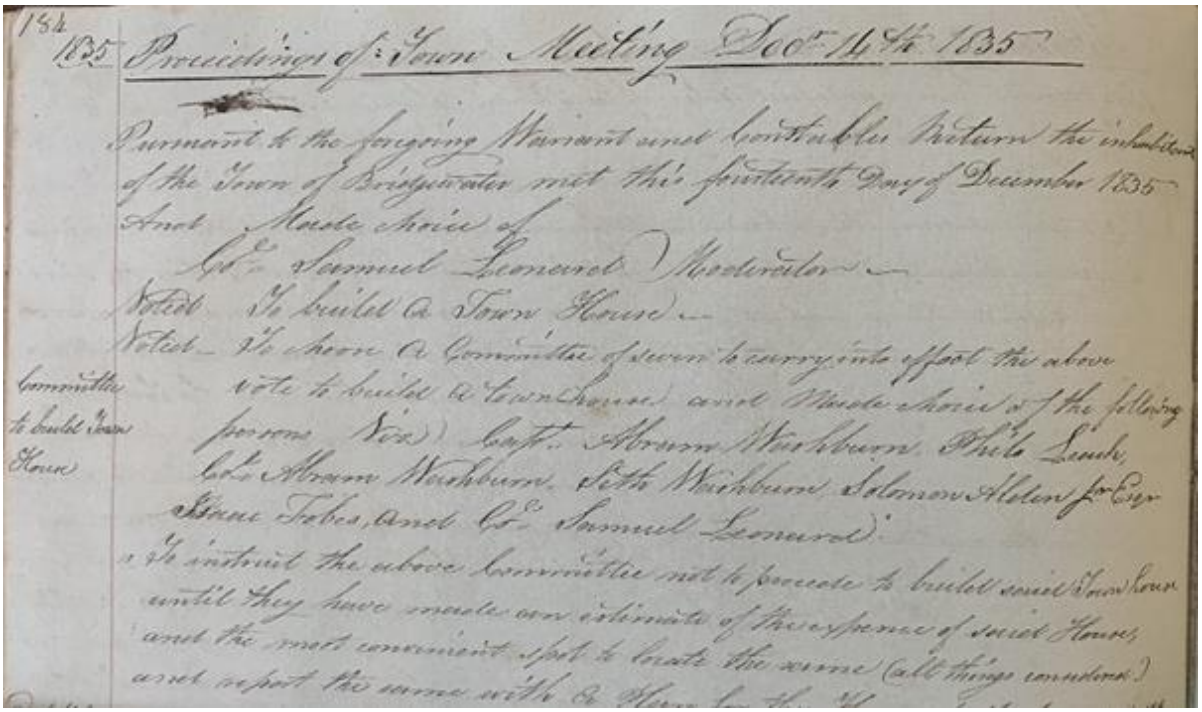


Figure 5. Town Meeting vote to build the Town House, form a committee of seven, and instructions to the committee, December 14, 1835.

On January 4, 1836, the appointed committee reported to the Town Meeting an "*estimate of the expense of building a town house*" and locating it. The meeting record conveys the Town agreed to accept the report "*so as far as to accept the offer made by Capt. Abram Washburn of a piece of land to erect the same upon*". His recorded offer states "*I will give the Town of Bridgewater a lot for the situation of a Town house upon my land opposite Academy on the east side of the turnpike provided the Town will allow me as much as it would cost to build a foundation for the house elsewhere say seventy two Dollars and the Town erect a building in as good a style as the elevation which is here presented, the basement story to extend to the piazza and no further and I have the privilege of building a basement story underneath the house for my use and the privilege of building a chimney up through the end of the hall where it will last least into the house the town to have the use of the land forever provided they keep and maintain such a building as above referred to for the use of the Town ~ the size of the house to be 40 feet x 52 feet 14 feet high the basement story to be in proper proportion a piazza on the west front ten feet the width of the building. Abram Washburn*"

[5] His obituary states: he came to Bridgewater and became of service to his uncle, Capt. Abram Washburn, an active citizen of his day. He was thus early connected with the business of Carver, Washburn & Co. in the development of the manufacture of the cotton gin, … . Col. Washburn was deeply interested in all good objects for the promotion of the public welfare and though never in prominent public life, he was a participant in local enterprise. He was, ..., active in the organization of the local rifle company of 1819, and under Col. Samuel Leonard, who was at that time captain, he first served as its lieutenant. …. He was a most eminent advocate of the temperance reform and early sympathized with the principles of the anti-slavery cause. For his firm adherence to his espoused principles of Christian living, Col. Washburn was highly esteemed and though a man of strong prejudices, possessed a wide circle of devoted friends.

The meeting then voted *to build the house* of the above dimensions including a piazza on the west front of the building as specified by Capt. Washburn. It was further "*voted the internal construction be left to the building committee, to raise the sum of fifteen hundred sixteen dollars eighty cents for the purpose of building a Town House*; *to raise the above sum into a tax on the polls and estates of the inhabitants of the Town of Bridgewater according to law; to excuse Solomon Alden, Col. Abram Washburn, and Col. Samuel Leonard from serving on the building committee; chose Bushall Bassett (sp), Holmes Sprague, and Capt. Edwin Keith to fill the excused members".*

A May 2, 1936, Town meeting voted an additional $200 dollars above that raised at the last meeting to defray the cost of building the Town House.

Two reviews of Town Meeting records between May 1836 and November 1840 did not reveal any record of actions regarding a Town House. Based on this and the information contained herein and in Figure 3, it may be presumed the subject 1835 Town House is the one shown in Figure 1 as the structure's dimensions and characteristics described the Town Meeting votes and Figure 3 are consistent. Further discussion of the Town House is not recorded until November 1840. Interestingly, 1840 is the year the Normal School began to occupy the building under an agreement with the Town.

The Nov. 9, 1840, Town Meeting warrant includes an article "*to consider and act on the proposal made by Capt. Abram Washburn to purchase the Town House*[6] *and instruct the selectmen and treasurer"* to sell the property. The Town Meeting vote was not to sell the Town House to Capt. Washburn for one thousand dollars.

This meeting also "*Voted to form a seven-person committee, to choose a committee of seven to consider what manner and at what expense the Town can be furnished with a Town House suitable for the accommodation of the Town and report at a meeting to be called in the future*." Solomon Alden, Jr., Artemus Hale, Col. Abram Washburn, John Hayward, Philo Leach, Holmes Sprague and Solomon Hayward, Esq. were chosen for the committee.

1843 Town House Development

"Architecturally, the Town Hall or Town House and the First Parish Church on School St. are Bridgewater's finest Greek Revival buildings. The Town Hall, along with the New Jerusalem Church, Bridgewater Academy, and Congregational Church, provide a visually strong, architecturally distinguished southern enframement for the Common. The Town Hall's main facade is characterized by robust elements and a high degree of symmetry. Its monumental Corinthian and Doric pilasters divide the flush board covered main facade into three segments. Surmounting its modern metal doors are large wooden panels and bracketed door hood. The main facade's pilasters "support" a heavy classical entablature and a fully enframed attic/pediment which contains a date plaque which reads "1843"." https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=brd.53

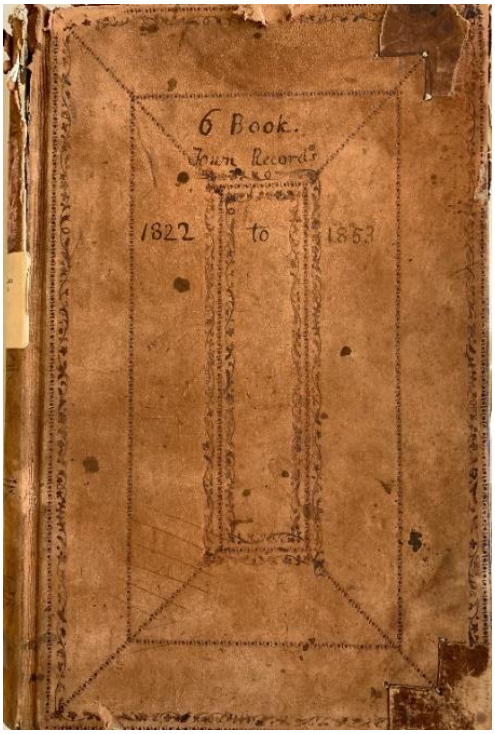
The Jan. 4, 1841, Town Meeting held at the Congregational Meeting House ~two months after the prior meeting considered the following warrant articles:

[6] It is possible Capt. Washburn having donated the land to the Town in 1836 and factors related to the opening of the Normal School as it occupied the building between 1840 and 1846 (See Figure 3) was the reason for his offer.

To hear the committee report for the purposes of making inquiries regarding the prospective future accommodations for the Town holding Town Meetings – and act thereon.

To see if the Town will sell their Town House to Capt. Abram Washburn at his proposal to purchase.

To see what measures the Town will adopt in relation to purchasing or building a Town House.



After 378 eligible citizens (i.e., men owning land) cast votes for U.S. Congressional Representative for the 10th District and elected Nathanial Borden (219 to 158 to 1) as 10th District Representative, the meeting heard the Town House Committee report and voted to lay it on the table.

The Meeting members subsequently voted to sell the Old Town House to Capt. Washburn for one thousand dollars. It also voted Mitchell Keith, Treasurer, "*to make, execute and deliver on behalf of the inhabitants the deed to the Town House to Capt. Washburn."* The deed order was to take effect April 1, 1842, and *reserved and conveyed all the rights and privileges granted by the Town to the Normal School for the use of the House*.

The meeting went on "*to vote that Solomon Alden, Jr., Col. Abram Washburn, Col. Samuel Leonard, Francis Forbes, Esq., Doc. Calvin Pratt be a committee to make inquiry* into *what kind of a house the town needs and where a suitable lot or lots can be procured and on what terms, and also to receive proposals from the first Congregational Society as to the terms on which they will sell their house for the use of the Town and receive any other information relative to procuring a House suitable for the Town use and report their doings at the adjournment of this meeting."*

The meeting then *voted to adjourn and meet at this place* (e.g., Congregational Meeting House) *in three weeks at 1 PM*.

On Jan. 25, 1841, the adjourned meeting was opened and heard from the above committee. The report was accepted; the minutes only record the findings were on file in the Clerk's Office. The report is not available to this author. Thus, details of the committee's work are unknown.

Town Record Book 6 (1822 to 1853) does not record any activities related to a Town House for the remainder of 1841 nor 1842.

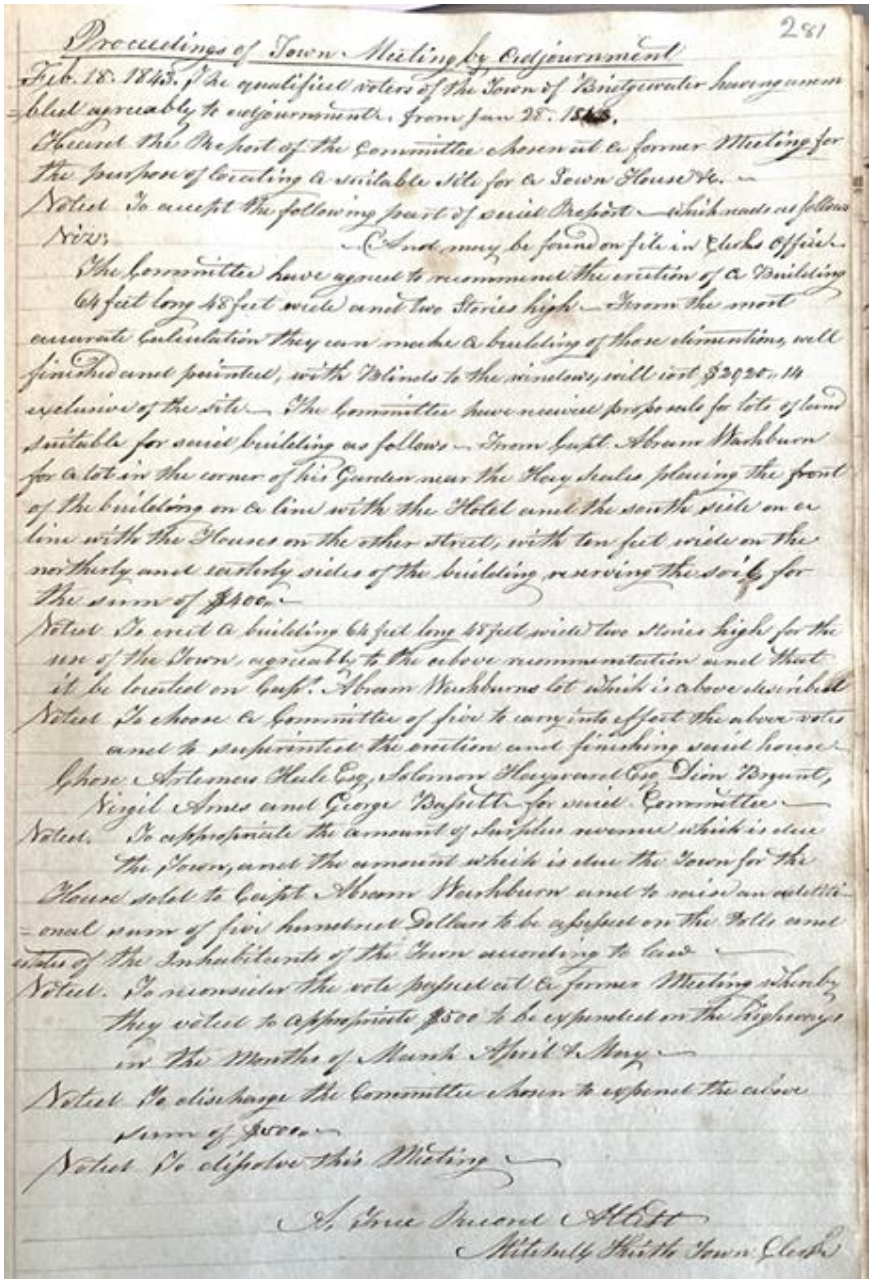
The Jan. 28, 1943, Town Meeting chose Col. Abram Washburn as moderator. Article 2 was : "*To see what measures the Town will adopt for building Town House or providing a place for holding Town meetings ~ and to act and do anything in relation to the same and to raise any sum of money for that purpose the Town may think proper*."

The proceedings record the Town "*voted to build or procure a suitable Town House for the use of the Town",* then voted a "*committee of five be chosen whose duty it shall be to locate a*

suitable site for a Town House and to agree upon the size of the same and make an estimate of the whole expense when complete or to propose any other manner of furnishing said House and that they be instructed to ascertain the terms on which the first Congregational Meeting House can be arranged as to accommodate the Town and Society. The meeting named *Artemus Hale, Esq., Dion Bryant, George Bassett, Nigel Ames, and Solomon Hayward to the Committee*".

The January Town Meeting continued on February 18, 1843, and heard the above committee's report and voted *to build a 64 ft. long by 48 ft wide two-story building, well finished and painted with curtains* (Figure 6). The meeting members then voted to construct the building on Capt. Abram Washburn's land and pay him $400 for the parcel.

Article 3 of the March 6, 1843, Annual Town Meeting warrant was "*to see if the Town will rescind the vote passed at the meeting held on the 18th day of February, inst, respecting (sp) building a Town House or adopt any other measures in relation to building a Town house*". The vote was "*to pass the third article indefinitely*". The language is unclear as to intent but events following the meeting clearly demonstrate the Town voted to continue the project. Specifically, the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, page 237 of Book 208, records the land where the Town House now stands was transferred to the Town by Abram and Mary Washburn on April 11, 1843 with their seals for the sum of $400 per the Town Meeting vote.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Proceedings of Town Meeting by Adjournment

Feb. 18. 1843. The qualified voters of the Town of Bridgewater have met according to adjournment from Jan 28. 1843.

Voted the Report of the Committee chosen at a former Meeting for the purpose of locating a suitable site for a Town House &c.

Voted To accept the following part of said Report which reads as follows viz: And may be found on file in Clerks Office.

The Committee have agreed to recommend the erection of a Building 64 feet long 48 feet wide and two Stories high. From the most accurate Calculation they can make a building of these dimentions, well finished and painted, with Blinds to the windows, will cost $2020.14 exclusive of the site. The Committee have received proposals for lots of land suitable for said building as follows. From Capt Abram Washburn for a lot in the corner of his Garden near the Hay Scales placing the front of the building on a line with the Hotel and the south side on a line with the Houses on the other street, with ten feet wide on the northerly and westerly sides of the building, reserving the soil for the sum of $400.

Voted To erect a building 64 feet long 48 feet wide two Stories high for the use of the Town, agreeable to the above recommentation and that it be located on Capt. Abram Washburns lot which is above described

Voted To choose a Committee of five to carry into effect the above vote and to superintend the erection and finishing said house.

Chose Artemus Hale Esq, Solomon Hayward Esq, Dion Bryant, Nigel Ames and George Bassett for said Committee.

Voted. To appropriate the amount of surplus revenue which is due the Town, and the amount which is due the Town for the House sold to Capt Abram Washburn and to raise an additional sum of five hundred Dollars to be assessed on the Polls and estates of the Inhabitants of the Town according to law.

Voted. To reconsider the vote passed at a former Meeting whereby they voted to appropriate $500 to be expended on the highways in the Months of March April & May.

Voted To discharge the Committee chosen to expend the above sum of $500.

Voted To dissolve this Meeting.

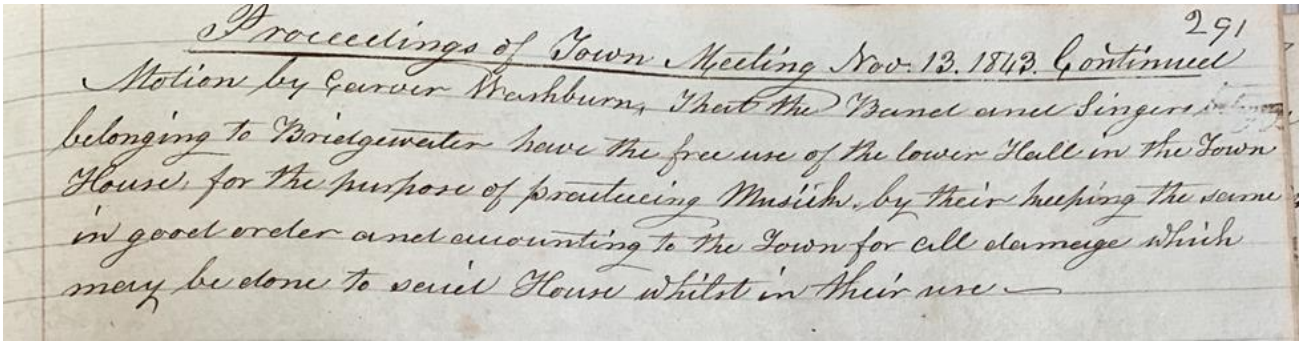
A true Record Attest

Nicholas Whitte Town Clerk

Figure 6. February 18, 1843, Town House specifications and land purchase votes.

The March 14, 1843, meeting warrant also had an article to see what measures the Town would adopt in relation to building a Town Pound.

The November 13, 1843, Town Meeting Warrant included an article by Carver Washburn regarding "*the Band and Singers belonging to Bridgewater have free use of the Upper Hall in the Town House*" (Figure 7). No action was taken at this meeting.



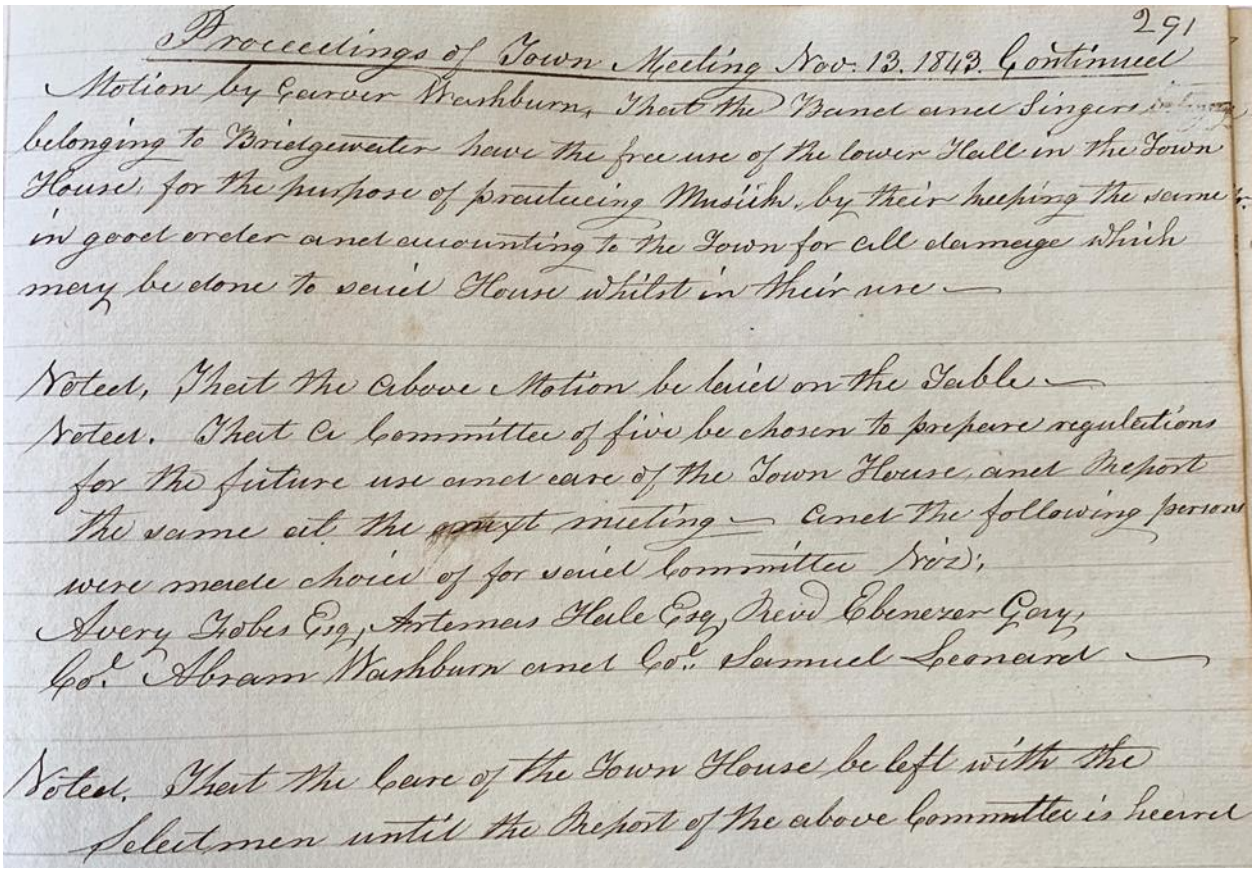
291

Proceedings of Town Meeting Nov. 13. 1843. Continued

Motion by Carver Washburn, That the Band and Singers belonging to Bridgewater have the free use of the lower Hall in the Town House, for the purpose of practicing Musick, by their keeping the same in good order and accounting to the Town for all damage which may be done to said House whilst in their use —

Figure 7. Nov. 13, 1843, motion by Carver Washburn regarding *"the Band and Singers belonging to Bridgewater have free use of the Upper Hall in the Town House"*.

This meeting's proceedings also document a vote to form a committee of five to prepare regulations for future use of the Town House and report on same at the next meeting (Figure 8).



291

Proceedings of Town Meeting Nov. 13. 1843. Continued

Motion by Carver Washburn, That the Band and Singers belonging to Bridgewater have the free use of the lower Hall in the Town House, for the purpose of practicing Musick, by their keeping the same in good order and accounting to the Town for all damage which may be done to said House whilst in their use —

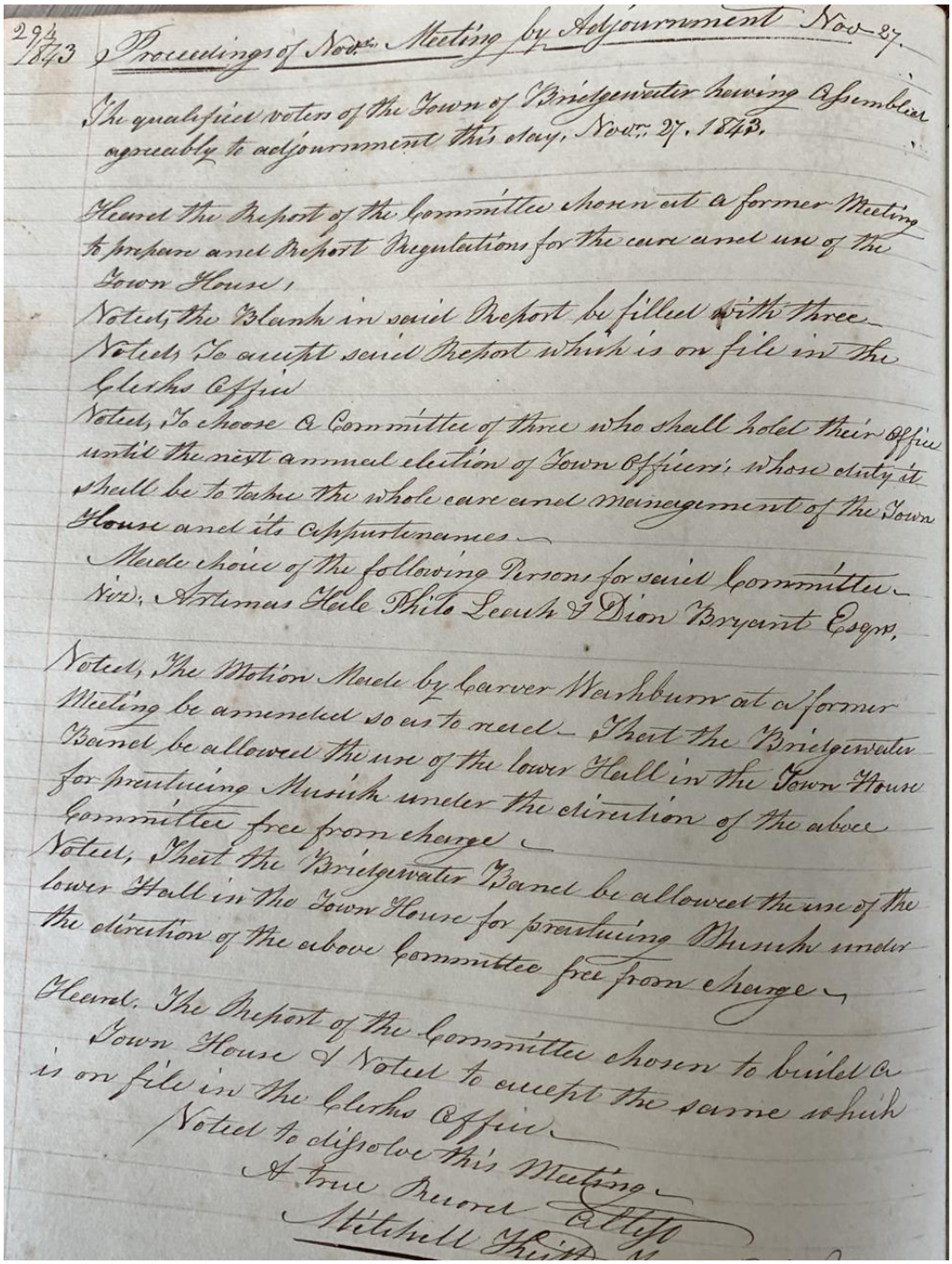
Voted, That the above Motion be laid on the Table —

Voted. That a Committee of five be chosen to prepare regulations for the future use and care of the Town House, and Report the same at the next meeting — and the following persons were made choice of for said Committee viz:
Avery Gobes Esq, Artemas Hale Esq, Revd Ebenezer Gay,
Col. Abram Washburn and Col. Samuel Leonard —

Voted. That the care of the Town House be left with the Selectmen until the Report of the above Committee is heard

Figure 8. November 13, 1843, town Meeting proceedings vote to form a committee of five to prepare regulations for future use of the Town House.

Two weeks later, on Nov. 27, 1843, the Town Meeting proceedings convey the committee chosen to prepare and report on "*regulations for the care and use of the Town House"* was heard. The meeting then voted "*the blanks in said report be filled with three* (Figure 9) (presumably three persons based on subsequent motions) and *to accept the report which is on file in the Clerk's Office*". The meeting next "*voted to choose a committee of three to hold office until the next annual election of Town Officers whose duty shall be to take the whole care and management of the Town House and its opportunities."* The meeting then named Artemus Hale, Philo Leach, and Dion Bryant, Esq. to the committee.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1843 Proceedings of Nov. Meeting by Adjournment Nov 27.

The qualified voters of the Town of Bridgewater having assembled agreeably to adjournment this day, Nov. 27, 1843.

Heard the Report of the Committee chosen at a former Meeting to prepare and Report Regulations for the care and use of the Town House,
Voted, the Blanks in said Report be filled with three
Voted, To accept said Report which is on file in the Clerks Office
Voted, To choose a Committee of three who shall hold their Office until the next annual election of Town Officers; whose duty it shall be to take the whole care and management of the Town House and its appurtenances
Made choice of the following Persons for said Committee viz: Artemus Hale Philo Leach & Dion Bryant Esqrs.

Voted, The Motion Made by Carver Washburn at a former Meeting be amended so as to read – That the Bridgewater Band be allowed the use of the lower Hall in the Town House for practicing Music under the direction of the above Committee free from charge
Voted, That the Bridgewater Band be allowed the use of the lower Hall in the Town House for practicing Music under the direction of the above Committee free from charge

Heard, The Report of the Committee chosen to build a Town House & Voted to accept the same which is on file in the Clerks Office
Voted to dissolve this Meeting
A true Record Attest
Mitchell Smith

Figure 9. Nov. 27, 1843, votes on use of the Town House.

The meeting next considered and passed Carver Washburn's amendment to his prior motion "*the Band and Singers belonging to Bridgewater have free use of the Upper Hall in the Town House* " to read "*the Bridgewater Band be allowed the use of the lower Hall in the Town House for practicing music under the direction of the above Committee free from charge*". The change conveys what was probably a discussion on how the Town House was used. The vote changed the band use to the lower hall from the upper hall, restricting it to the lower hall, but its use be free of charge, thus removing any requirement for the band to rent the upper hall. Rental became a key revenue source for the building's care and upkeep.

The April 1, 1844, Town Meeting warrant included an article to see if the Town would build or procure a pound in the cellar of the Town House. A committee of three was formed (Col. Abram Washburn, Col. Samuel Leonard, and Ebenezer Pratt) to procure a pound. The pound was accepted with conditions (Figure 10).

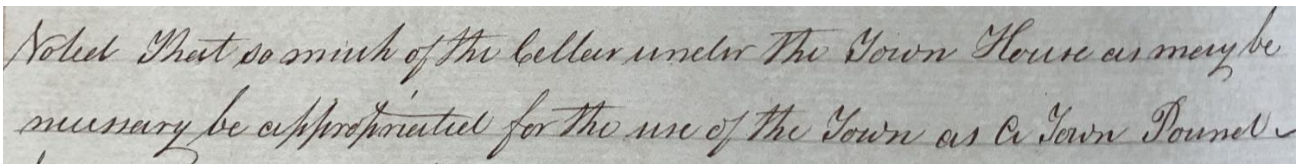
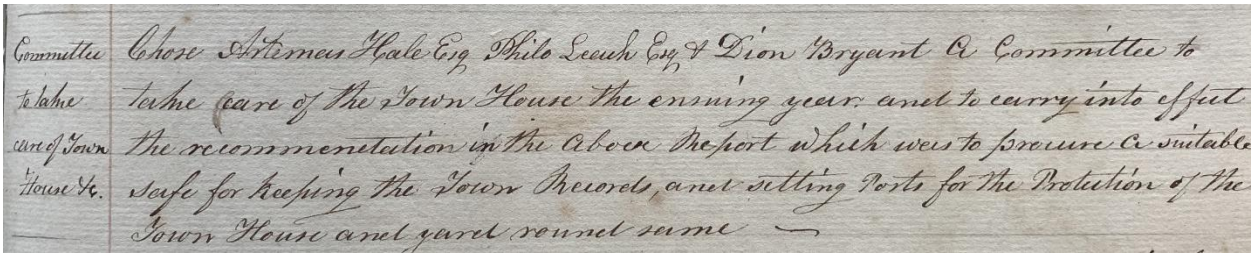

Voted That so much of the Cellar under the Town House as may be necessary be appropriated for the use of the Town as a Town Pound

Figure 10. Vote to apportion as much necessary of the Town House cellar for use of as the Town Pound.

Article 8 of the Nov. 11, 1844, Town Meeting warrant was "*to see what instructions the Town will give the Committee for erecting a fence around the Town House* ". The continued meeting on Nov. 25 voted the Committee "*be instructed to build the same with stone posts and iron rails agreeably to an estimate presented to the Town this day by said committee*" (Figure 11). The 1880 image of the Town House (Figure 12) shows the results of the Committee's work as does Figure 13.


Committee to take care of Town House &c.

Chose Artemas Hale Esq Philo Leach Esq & Dion Bryant a Committee to take care of the Town House the ensuing year and to carry into effect the recommendation in the above Report which was to procure a suitable safe for keeping the Town Records, and setting Posts for the Protection of the Town House and yard round same

Figure 11. A committee was chosen to take care of the Town House and procure a safe for keeping the Town records.

Figure 12. The 1843 Bridgewater Town Hall, about 1880. The town firehouse is in building behind the Town Hall. https://vc.bridgew.edu/bridgewater_images/15/ and https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=brd.53.

Figure 13. Circa 1871 image of the Town House and east side of Central Square.

1843 Town House Utilization

Since 1843, the Town House has been an important center of Bridgewater community life. MACRIS BRD 53 states "*Completed three years before the coming of the Old Colony Railroad to Bridgewater, this solid structure reflects Bridgewater's prosperity at mid century. By the 1840's important Bridgewater industrial concerns included Lazell, Perkins Ironworks, The Eagle Cotton Gin Co., and Bartlett Brothers Tack Factory. The first Town Hall (apparently built during the 1830s) stood on the site of the New Jerusalem Church. According to Hurd's History of*

Plymouth County (1884) David Bartlett was the Town House's architect[7]*. Flora K. Little claims that Solomon K. Eaton, architect of the First Parish Church (1845) and the Congregational Church (1862) designed this building. During the early 1900s silent movies were shown in the Town Hall's second floor hall by Charles Barb and John Cohrane*."

1845 -1854 Town Meeting Documentation

Early uses of the Town House were found in Town Meeting minutes from 1842-1853. However, specific uses were limited as considered next. These documents do not report revenue or expenditures relative to the Town House.

Few uses and other events were recorded in Book 6 of the Town record, but it does document votes by the eligible voters to name a "*committee to care for the Town House*". These years and committee members were:

1845 - Col. Abram Washburn, Philip D. Kingman and Philo Leach, Esq.
1846 - Lewis Holms, Philo Leach, George W. Pratt
1849 -Thomas Latham, Dion Bryant, Philo Leach.
1852 - Abram Washburn, Philo Leach, Caleb Hobart

1849 - The Sept. 1849 Town Meeting discussed and voted on several topics. One was whether to open the Town House for religious purposes on the sabbath (Figure 14). The first vote was to not open the Town House on the sabbath *except for the purpose of religious service and the use of the singing choir*. The meeting then voted to instruct the committee in charge of the Town House not to open the house on the sabbath for "*any purpose whatsoever*". The margin notes the vote was reconsidered on September 9th but not the outcome of reconsideration.

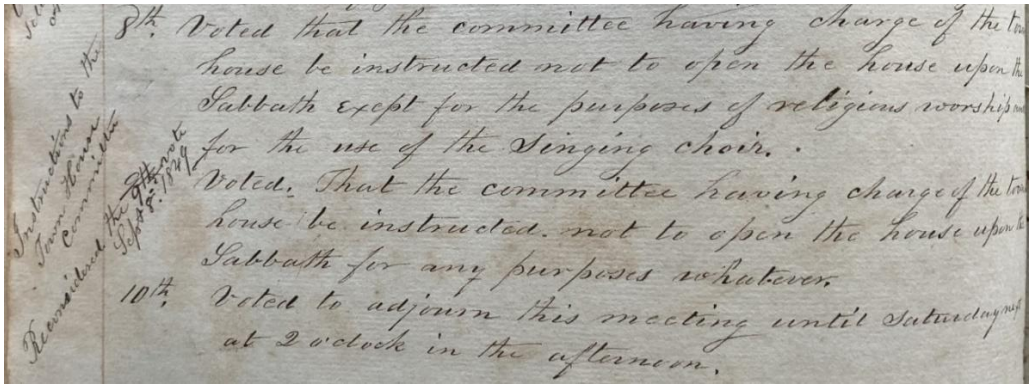

8th. Voted that the committee having charge of the town house be instructed not to open the house upon the Sabbath except for the purposes of religious worship and for the use of the Singing choir.
Voted. That the committee having charge of the town house be instructed not to open the house upon the Sabbath for any purposes whatever.
10th. Voted to adjourn this meeting until Saturday next at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.
Instructions to the Town House Committee
Reconsidered the 9th Sept. 1849

Figure 14. Town House Committee Annual Town Report 1875, religious purposes

[7] Page 818 of *The History of Plymouth County with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*. Compiled Under the Supervision of D. Hamilton Hurd. Copyright, 1884, By J. W. Lewis & Co. Philadelphia) states *David Bartlett was the builder*. The contrast between builder and architect, as used in this description, conveys different skills. The description stating Flora **K.** Little named a different architect may be an error as Flora **T**. Little is the well-known benefactor of many organizations in Bridgewater.

The meeting also voted for the Town House Committee to oversee repairs to the cellar and voted "*obtaining and placing blinds in the upper hall*" at the Town's expense be left to the Town House Committee.

1854 – 1899 Annual Reports

As noted in the introduction, various uses of the Town House were gleaned from the recently digitized, searchable historic Annual Town Reports. These reports first published in 1847 convey uses of the building, especially the second-floor area (often referred to as the hall or upper hall), revenue from fees (rent as characterized the late 1800s) and "*care of the Town House*" and building maintenance/improvement costs. This information is documented in the Town House Committee's reports and report abstracts. Even in a searchable format, gathering and summarizing the information was time consuming. The primary key words returning information were "*Town House Committee*" or simply house. Other key words employed to search the annual reports included Town House, uses, repairs, rent, etc.

When the Town began publishing an Annual Town Report, details on the use of the Town House, specifically the upper hall, were included under the report of the Town House Committee (THC). For example, the 1855 Annual Town Report records "*cash receipts for use of Hall*" were ~$425, expenses of $274 were paid, and "*Balance in favor of the Town $150.56*". The 1856 Annual Town report included ~$96 spent on the fence around the Town House. Receipts reported by the THC were $236.25 including payments from the Natural History Society and sundry persons. Reported expenses were $221.41 for various bills such as oil, wood sawing, washing, stove and pipe, and tables. The balance was $14.81 in favor of the Town.

Reports for subsequent years had similar levels of detail but contain such items as $24 paid in 1857 for erecting a stage with the THC balance paid into the Town's Treasury. Bills in subsequent years were for oil and care of the Town House. 1857 payments included sawing of wood, labor and repairs, horse and cart, transportation, setting glass, moving seats, stove and pipe, globes for chandelier, fence repairs, building stage, and three loads soil. The account balance for the year was ~$112. The documentation does not state if the balance was transferred to the Treasury, rather shows this was the starting balance for 1860.

Of note in 1860 were payments for lighting Halls, cleaning soap, tacks, painting the hall and Selectmen's room, carpentry work, labor for planks and joists, shingles, and hardware. Apparently, this was a busy year for improvements and care of the House, as THC reported a balance of ~$176 against an income of $190.

In 1861, Eli Washburn was paid to paint the Town House under a Town Meeting vote authorizing the THC to paint and make necessary repairs to the same. The THC received funds from the Treasury for painting the House (exterior), but also had the interior painted, covered the costs of various repair work including buying hardware such as a lock and knob, screws, purchasing lamps, and covered labor costs for mason work. An income of $381 covered payments for *care of the house, oil, and fuel.* The THC account balance at end of year was $200.

1862 saw limited use as reflected by receipts of only $107. Outlays included painting and repairs of the House and repair and painting of furniture and other expenses leaving a balance of $39 to close the year.

1863 showed low revenue and limited expenses. The THC transferred $43 to the Town Treasury.

It may be assumed the Civil War affected the Town House receipts in a negative way during the above years.

The 1864 and 1865 reports documented a surge in revenue, $284 and $323, respectfully. The THC 1864 expenditures were for repairs to the House and furniture, new furniture, wood and oil, and care of the building and grounds. The THC paid the Town Treasurer $100 and reported the February 1864 account balance was $100.

1865 expenses included the cost of oil, stove repairs, furniture repair, lock and keys, lighting, House and grounds care. The documentation specifically details purchase 2 ½ cords of pine and oak. The THC transferred $153 to the Town's Treasury.

This decade had limited detail on the uses of the Town House. Named fee paying users are few but appear to be primarily organizations. It also appears use of the Hall generated revenue from organizations needing a stage, which could include the Board of Selectmen, as detailed by payment for stage construction in at least two annual reports. There is one reference to the Selectmen's office so it's likely this and other Town Offices were on the first floor. The financial data clearly shows much attention to the building's care (cleaning?), purchase of new tables and chairs, maintenance (e.g., painting, shingling, entrance hardware), and repairs of both building and fencing including repair and painting of furniture.

Consistent listing of oil, fuel, and wood purchases point to lighting and heating the building. It's unclear what type of fuel was purchased and its use, but oil may refer to oil derived from whales. The "lighting" and purchase of a chandelier point to evening and nighttime activities since extensive use and notations of many windows implies dependence on natural lighting. The record is unclear about what type of lighting was installed. It was likely oil lamps as the first successful use of gas in the United States was in 1873.

The decade from 1865 through 1875 has less detail on the Town House utilization as most of the THC reports are abstracts of annual reports filed with the Town Clerk. These reports are not available. In summary, the abstracts showed a steady increase in receipts from $300 in 1871 to $735 in 1875. The THC paid expenses for shingling ($378 in 1866), painting, care of the House, lamps, hardware, locks and keys, and supplies. Expenses ranged from $110 to $286 in this decade and the THC transferred from $32 to $200 to the Town Treasurer. New expenses included in 1868 were curtains for both Halls and settes, bookcases and front steps. The 1871 report included expenses for "*work on the Common*". The THC also continued to transfer funds to the Town's Treasury ($155.45).

Notable exceptions to this list of general expenses in the first half of the 1870s are discussed next.

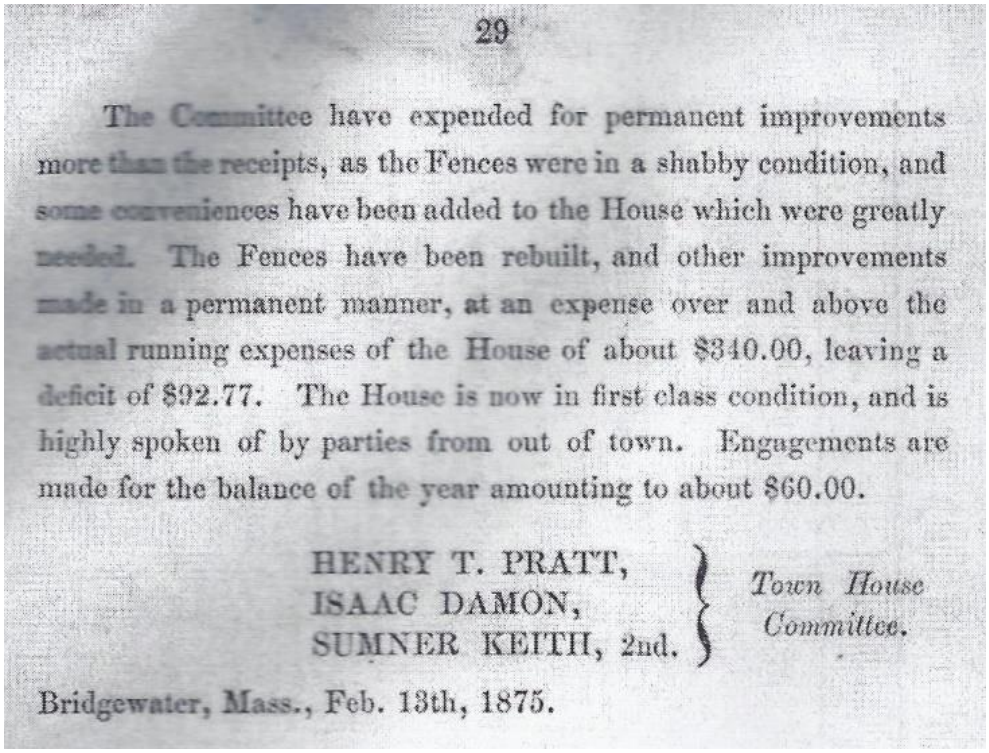
The 1872 report includes a warrant for the Town Meeting to fund a "*brick safe*" in the Town House which was funded for $500. The 1873 Town meeting warrant and vote funded replacing the stairway to the upper Hall, likely to accommodate the safe as it was installed next to the wall on right entrance to the building at the foot of the stairway.

The recapitalization in the 1873 Annual Town Report documents Town House repairs cost $764.31. Piping (for gas?) and lighting the Town House cost $951.95. Included was a line item for "*designs for the Town House"*.

The 1874 Annual Town Report conveys several major actions related to the Town House funding. One was costs for design and possible consideration of another Town House. Subsequent Town Reports did not include any specifics on an addition. Reported improvements included funding a

cesspool (brick and stone covering) with ~$1,000 and $100 for piping the building for gas. Revenues were $517 and bills paid $283.83 with $233.17 due to the Town.

The 1875 THC's report includes a monthly accounting of receipts including organizations and payments for Town House utilization and a detailed monthly expense report with categories such as care of the House, lighting, repairs, work in yard and common, heating, and sundries including putting a door for the selectmen's room and Hall. Revenue from forty-four events was reported. Several uses stand out: spelling matches, fairs, Warm Spring Indians (touring native American theater, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_McKay_(scout)), a supper, sociable, dancing school, and a Tableaux. Six events had multiple days for a total of seventeen uses. Three events were held in the lower hall. Revenue was $735.77. Categorized expenses included "*care of the house, lighting, heating, painting, fence, work in yard, pump, heating, and sundries*." The THC covered expenses of $564.30 of which $72.19 were for the Common. THC report also lists building a fence for $202 (on Common?). The fence's itemized costs were for labor, carting lumber, freight on lumber from Neponset, painting, hardware, drilling posts, sharpening drills, and disposal of the old wood. Care of the Town House totaled $174.90; lighting costs were itemized at $97.42. The THC also discussed permanent Town House improvements to address its "*shabby conditions*" and noted it "*is now in first class condition*" (Figure 15).



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The Committee have expended for permanent improvements more than the receipts, as the Fences were in a shabby condition, and some conveniences have been added to the House which were greatly needed. The Fences have been rebuilt, and other improvements made in a permanent manner, at an expense over and above the actual running expenses of the House of about $340.00, leaving a deficit of $92.77. The House is now in first class condition, and is highly spoken of by parties from out of town. Engagements are made for the balance of the year amounting to about $60.00.

HENRY T. PRATT,
ISAAC DAMON,
SUMNER KEITH, 2nd.
} *Town House Committee.*

Bridgewater, Mass., Feb. 13th, 1875.

Figure 15. Town House Committee Annual Town Report 1875.

It's from this report that the Town House uses as a cultural center are easily characterized (Table 1). The various uses, events, and number revenue generating days between March

1874 and February 1875 were 56. The THC states the total revenue from these events was $735. One event was for Gen. Tom Thumb[8]; another Sam Sharpley[9] the Minstrel.

Table 1 Town House Uses, 1875 Annual Town Report

Town House Uses, 1875 Annual Town Report		
Use category	Number of events	Muti-day event days
Readings and Lectures	2	
Band/Concerts	11	
Dances	12	6
Temperance Lectures	1	
Church Functions	1	2
Fair	5	4
Dramatics/Theater	3	3
Socials/supper	5	
Collation	1	
Spelling march	2	
Tabieax	1	2
Total	44	17
Number of times revenue reported	56	

Information from subsequent years is summarized rather than tabularized. New uses are called out in the discussion.

1876 - Fifty events were documented by the THC in the Annual Town Report with revenues of $666. The activities were basically the same as those shown in Table 1 with notable additions. These include Republican and Democratic Party meetings (5), non-specific parties (8), and conventions (3). The general ledger includes payment of $121.01 for the THC to pay for lighting and the cost of a janitor for Temperance Meetings (Good Samaritans) which was transferred to the THC accounting. The $121 paid for Temperance Meetings (versus $5 to $25 revenue per other events) suggests multiple meetings were held, therefore the number of event days could be as high as fifty-six Expense categories were the same as above, but streets lights were added. Total expenses were $666 with $51.75 and $23.58 paid for streetlights and the Common, respectively.

1877 - Only two items were reported: 1) *ventilating the Town House by vote of the town* and *painting the ventilators* and 2) *altering outside doors to the Town House to swing both ways*.

1878 – The Annual Town Report shows the Town paid $50.67 for Good Samaritan Club (temperance) meetings and payment for janitorial serves. Notably, the Town Meeting Warrant had an article *"to see if the Town will take any action to enlarge, alter, and improve the Town House and make an appropriation for the same"*. Clearly, there was a need for more space or added features. The Annual Report records unappropriated funds were paid for making plans, labor and materials, painting, and gas-

[8] General Tom Thumb, pseudonym of Charles Stratton, (born January 4, 1838, Bridgeport, Connecticut, U.S.—died July 15, 1883, Middleboro, Massachusetts), American showman noted for his small stature. He was the first major attraction promoted by the circus impresario P.T. Barnum. https://www.britannica.com/biography/P-T-Barnum

[9] https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=NYC18750703.2.5&e=-------en-20--1--img-txIN---------- Minstrel - a medieval musical entertainer, *especially*: a singer of verses accompanied by music

fixtures for an addition to the Town House; cost $591.01. Other recorded improvements included *concreting entrance to side door to town-house* and *putting in rubble-stones south side of town-house*. The THC reported revenue of $522.29 and expenses of $489.18. The THC revenue was derived from thirty-eight events, down from the prior two years. Revenue was dominated by lectures (11) and dramatics/theater performances (12). One previously undocumented use was for an auction. The most notable expenses were "*blinds for the upper hall"* and "*piping stage for foot-lights."* Other expenses were as reported in prior THC reports. Namely, for care of the Town House, lighting, heating (coal), streetlights, sundries, and the Common. There was an outstanding bill for the Globe Gas Light Company indicating the Town House was being lit by gas fixtures.

1879 - The Annual Town Report documents payments of $591.01 for an addition to the Town House. The only other information in the Annual Town Report relevant to the Town House was $33.03 deposited to the Treasurer from the THC.

1880 - THC revenues were $303.50 and expenses $266.76. The report notes there is $39.50 due from the Town for library entertainment and an 1879 payment due from the Butler Democrats. No other details are provided. It also has a recapitalization for an "*addition to Town-House"*.

1881 - The Annual Town Report includes detailed information under the heading "*PREPARATION AND FURNISHING TOWN-HOUSE FOR COURTS*". Without appropriation, the major itemized cost was payment to Paul Smith & Company for furniture ($465.50). Another $473.58 was spent for carpeting and matting, inkstands and camphor, chairs, bookcases and boxes, freight, moving furniture from depot to Town House, and labor. Recorded Court Room expenses were $80.13. $129.84 was paid for goods, coal, gasoline, and labor on the Town House and Common. Other Town expense items included $191.97 for an addition to the Town-House, $2.50 for repair of ceilings the Town House, and $600 for Town library. Recall the Memorial Library Building was conceived in 1878 and constructed by 1881[10]. Per that report, the Town House apparently housed the library during this period. The THC reported $362.24 received and $349.21 in expenses with some outstanding receipts and expenses for a balance of $57.83.

1882 - Town costs for the court included items such as matting and coal plus janitorial services and labor. Expenses for labor, a patrolman, care lock up, and warming town-meeting were paid by the Town. The THC reported income of $436.86 and costs for fuel and gasoline, repairing and cleaning, police services, and work on common.

1883 - The first payment to the Chair of the THC ($25) was recorded and $73.75 for expenses for the court. Detailed accounting of THC revenue was not provided although the THC reported $415.56 was received with costs of $357.22.

1884 - Expenses for the Town House Committee Chairman, court, and library entertainment was reported in the general ledger. Reported expenses for the Court included moving furniture and setting up for the October court terms in 1883 and 1884 and storage of court furniture plus merchandise for the Town House. THC revenues were $739.93 with expenses of $801.70. The report also shows indebtedness of $214 for repairs to the Town House.

1885 - The Town Meeting voted $175 for repairs on Town House which was transferred to the THC ledger and formed a committee for sale of Court furniture. The ledger shows the Town received $1,694.94 from County Treasurer for expenses incurred for Superior Court and stationery for the Town House (presumably for Town Offices). The THC Chairman was paid $25. The THC provided the first detailed report of income since 1879. Included in the THC accounting was $10 for 1884 Public Library entertainment. Forty-eight events are recorded. The most frequent use was "rink" (20 events @ $5-$7 per event). This use is probably for roller skating which had become popular in the mid-1880s (*See Box 28 of Dr. Ben Spence's archived files at Bridgewater State University regarding roller skating*). Other

[10] Bridgewater, MA Memorial Library Formation History, By Carlton D. Hunt, Ph.D., Bridgewater, MA, August 2020 (Copyright CDHunt, September 10, 2021)

recorded uses include socials (9) and concerts (7) including a benefit concert. One time uses involved: lecture course; temperance lecture; high school scholars' reunion; normal school gathering; science practice; dance; panorama; sale for Trinity Church; temperance meeting, Salvation Army, entertainment, and splinters (characterization unknown). Four theater events were held. Mrs. Lewis Damon was paid for storing court furniture for 1½ months; hence it is assumed the Court was no longer hosted. The THC recorded $480.50 for use of Town-Hall; paid expenses including care of Hall and Common. Expenses included $214.27 for the indebtedness recorded Dec 31, 1884.

1886 - The Annual Town Report includes payment of $158.45 (with no appropriation) to G. Hayward for putting new gutters on the Town House under the direction of the THC. The THC report reported receipts of $365.02 and expenses of $299.26 for care of the hall and common. The High School's annual report referenced the possibility of *"carrying gas from the Town House or Public Library that it might have gas for its laboratory*" which shows "*great improvement*".

1887 - The Town's financial recap lists stone curbing - Town House $135.53. THC receipts were $489.28 and expenses $383.49. Receipts were from named individuals with no use category (8), theater and various entertainment companies (9), lecture Course (2), concerts/choral/ball (8), social events (4), County Convention (1), prohibition lecture (1), a church event in lower hall, and stereopticon (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereoscope**)**. Expenses included the usual costs (cleaning, washing, work on Common, repairs, coal, wood, oil, painting, gasolene[11] (Could gasolene have been for an internal combustion engine? Its function?), snow shoveling especially in March, iron work on Common, "*repairs on gas machine*," and the first report of a telephone expense.

1888 - The only Town House entry in the Annual Town Report was the THC's financial account. Receipts were $466.85 and expenses for "*care of the Town House and common*" $488.51.

1889 -Town Meeting voted to raise $600 for new seats in Town Hall. The report states the Harwood Manufacturing Co. was paid $576.48 for new seats for the *UPPER TOWN HALL* (page 7). Also reported was a $11.74 payment to W. McNeeland for putting up compartments in the Town House. The Bridgewater High School graduation was held in the Town Hall on June 20, 1889. The THC receipts were $331.50. Care of the Town House and Common expenses were $357.11. Revenue was generated by 33 events: churches (8), band/concerts (3), lectures (4), clubs/societies (9), theater (3), the High School on June 4th (graduation?), and five individuals whose purpose is not characterized. The revenue rates were typically $10 versus rates of $6-$7 in prior years.

1890 - THC receipts were $436.10 from 39 events. These were: churches [primarily the Trinity Church] (8), bands/concerts (3), lectures (1), clubs and societies (13), theater (1), high school graduation (1), and uncharacterized use by individuals (11). Expenses were as reported in prior years with thirteen individuals receiving funds for uncharacterized reasons. Twelve monthly expenses ranging from $5 to $33 ategorized as "*services*" were paid to Bart Flynn. Article 12 of the March Town Meeting warrant was "*to see if the Town will light the town house with electricity*". The meeting voted to electrify the Town House and "*directed the THC to lower the ceiling in the Selectmen's Office and the windows of same."* Article 2 of the December Town Meeting warrant was "*to see what action the Town will take in relation to lighting the Town House with electricity"*. Article 3 was "*to see if the Town will appropriate any money for the wiring and lighting the Ton House"*. The meeting voted a committee of three be raised "*to contract The Bridgewater Electric Company to wire the Town House for lighting*".

[11] gasoline, also spelled gasolene, also called gas or petrol, mixture of volatile, flammable liquid hydrocarbons derived from petroleum and used as fuel for internal combustion engines (Britannica). The first commercially successful internal combustion engine was created by Étienne Lenoir around 1860, and the first modern internal combustion engine, known as the Otto engine, was created in 1876 by Nicolaus Otto. "History of Technology: Internal Combustion engines". Encyclopedia Britannica. Britannica.com.

Voted committee members were Charles J. Mercer, Sumner Keith, 2nd, and Robert Ferguson. The members then voted "*to appropriate two hundred dollars for the purpose of wiring the town house*".

1891 - High School graduations in the Town Hall (e.g., Town House) continued in June. Other events included churches (9), band/concert (1), clubs/societies (17), individuals with uncharacterized purposes (10), and theater (3) for a total of 41 events. Two events were multiday. Revenue was $492.30; expenses were $518.54. Wiring the Town Hall ($195.20) is reported and the first expense in the building's history was recorded in March for electricity. A total of eight payments totaling $112.05 were paid to the Bridgewater Electric Co. The largest expense ($178.07) was paid to Bart Flynn for the care of the building (e.g., custodian). Shades for the Town Hall were also purchased. The Town Meeting considered whether the "*Town will give the use of the town hall with heat to the free sewing school."* The Town voted "*That the matter of furnishing quarters for the sewing school be left with the school committee, with full power to use the town hall, if found expedient, and free of expense*."

1892 - Forty events were recorded by the THC. Revenue was $410.13; expenses totaled $409.05. Three band/concerts were held and a minstrel show, the Spalding Bell Ringers, and Messmates paid rent to use the hall. The other events were as recorded in the prior two years: churches, clubs/societies, the High School, and Normal School plus a variety of uncharacterized purposes attributed to individuals. The expenses were dominated by payments to Bart Flynn. Seven electric bills were paid between February and December (total $114).

1893 - The THC report shows revenue of $365 and payments of $377.74. Revenues were from 28 events. Seven for uncharacterized individuals, clubs and societies (6), organizations (3), church functions (6), and the High School graduation. Expenses were primarily for the custodian and electricity with a few individual names with no specification of reason. The THC chair received $25.

1894 - Use and income was down as revenue was $237.40 from 21 events. Clubs and societies (6) and organizations (8) including church functions, theater and dramatics, and band and concerts made up the other revenue sources. Notable entertainment was Mrs. Tom Thumb and Palmer Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. Expenses were $299.50 primarily for the custodian and electricity. Shingling cost $95.

1895 - Thirty-three revenue generating entrees were recorded for $381.50. Half of these were from individuals with no reason identified. Clubs, societies, socials, and bands contributed most of the other uses. Theater and lectures made up the remainder. The single highest expense was for electricity with coal the second highest. Other expenses were for general upkeep and maintenance. A notable expenditure was on a piano and salaries for the THC chairs of which two were paid. Total expenses were $476 of which $210.77 was transferred to the Treasury.

1896 - Eighteen events raised $205. The highest revenue was from a 3-night Mechanics' fair. The remaining events were a mix of those reported in the preceding two years. Expenses appear to have been covered by the Town as $205 was transferred to the Treasury. The Annual Report documented $503.50 spent on the Town House including $25 to the THC Chair. No information on what the expenditures covered was found.

1897 -Twenty-three events raised $224. Thirteen were by individuals with no information as to why they rented the hall. Church Societies plus clubs and other societies (5), three entertainment events made up most of the other rent paid. A fair and the High School graduation were the other organizations paying rent. All funds raised were transferred to the Treasurer. The THC report included a Town House Manager, A.Z. Pratt, who was formerly on the THC.

1898 - Consistent with the previous years, only 24 paid uses of the Town House were recorded by the THC. All but one renter were individuals with no reason recorded for Town House use. The High School graduation was the only organization renting the hall. The revenue was $273 which was transferred to the Town Treasurer.

1899 - Receipts from twenty-three events were recorded by the THC. The rent revenue was $226 which was transferred to the Town Treasurer. The Town appropriated $275 for repairs and painting of the House. $393.80 was recorded as being spent on the Town House. The school committee reported "*an operetta "The Merry Milkmaids" given in the town hall by members of the school.* The success *"demanded a second performance which was given three days later."*

1900 - A slight increase to 28 events was recorded. Ten were organizations including the Ousamequin Club (6), Bridgewater Band, a High School dance, Widow Brown Co., and the Republican Committee. All others were individuals with no purpose listed. The $233 raised was transferred to the Town Treasurer. Expenditures on the Town House were $372.92 with no appropriation. Electricity costs $120.35. The other expenses were for the janitor, various repairs, and A.Z. Pratt, agent.

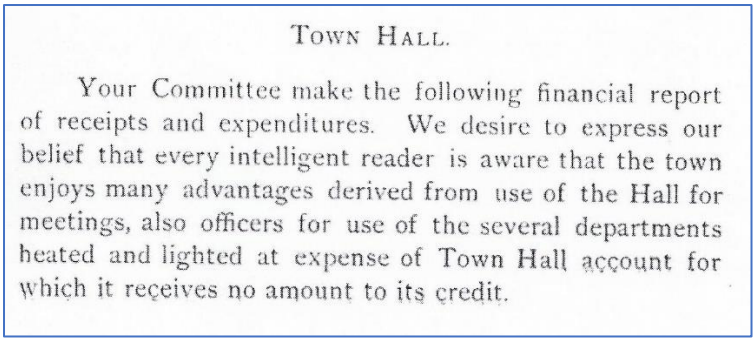
The last decade of the 19th Century ended with diminished use of the Town House for events and revenue. At the end of the decade, the revenue generating mixture trended away from organizations and entertainment and moved towards income from individuals renting the Hall for unknown purposes. Also, Town House expense accounting moved in the direction of the Town Treasurer. Major upgrades to the building and care of the Common with Town House revenues were limited or ended. Management of the Town House appeared to change with the appointment of a Town House Manager.

The 20th Century

While the 1901-1904 Reports had monthly accounting of specific revenue sources by the Town House Committee, beginning in 1905 the report documents the Town House Committee members but only reports total revenue and expenditures. Thus, documentation of the Town House cultural use was limited after 1905.

The terminology about the Town House shows utilization of both upper and lower Halls. Financial tracking also changed to an "Incidental "account where Town Hall receipts were tracked, and an annual incidental budget was set by Town Meeting. Expenditures were generally tracked under the regular Town Accounts.

The 1905 report, under the heading Town Hall, appears to be a demarcation point as the report includes (as shown in Figure 16) a "Town Hall" section and records concern the Town House Committee was not receiving proper credit. This statement is followed by expense accounting. The details are described under the specific year's report below:



TOWN HALL.

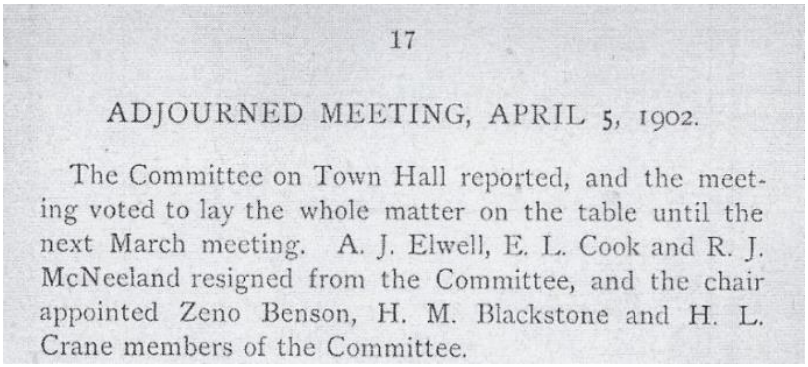
Your Committee make the following financial report of receipts and expenditures. We desire to express our belief that every intelligent reader is aware that the town enjoys many advantages derived from use of the Hall for meetings, also officers for use of the several departments heated and lighted at expense of Town Hall account for which it receives no amount to its credit.

Figure 16. . 1905 Town House Committee's expression of poor crediting of its work

1901 – The Town Meeting warrant had an article "*to see if the town will appoint a committee to consider the matter of building a new town hall or engaging the present building. (By petition).* The vote was *the chair to appoint a committee of five in relation to building a new Town Hall or enlarging the present building, and report at some future meeting, or at the next annual town meeting*. The subject of providing

better accommodation for the town teams was left to the same committee. The chair appointed A.J. Elwell, John H. Hall, Robert J. McNeeland, Ernest L Cook, and William H.H. Andrews. The Town House receipts were $304, paid to the Treasurer, raised from 33 events: 17 individuals, seven dances, six organizations, two band/concerts, and one show. Expenditures were $477.33 primarily for electricity, janitorial services, coal, wood, the manager, sundries, and repairs. A.Z. Pratt is listed as the manager who also performed janitorial duties and care of the office.

1902 – The THC reported forty-four revenue events (two for several days) generated $397. Fifteen Club/Organizations and 24 uncharacterized uses by individuals were recorded. No detailed expenses are reported although expenses of $597.55 are listed in the Town's Recapitalization of Appropriations and Expenses table. A note in the THC report records revenues of $29 for use of the piano, tuning it for $2, and transfer of $27 to the Bridgewater Savings Bank Piano Fund Account(see below for more on this topic). The Town Meeting Minutes record a vote to "*table the Town Hall Committee report until next March*" [i.e., 1903]. The text shown in Figure 17 suggests there may have been some controversy about the report as three members resigned, and three others were appointed to the committee.



17

ADJOURNED MEETING, APRIL 5, 1902.

The Committee on Town Hall reported, and the meeting voted to lay the whole matter on the table until the next March meeting. A. J. Elwell, E. L. Cook and R. J. McNeeland resigned from the Committee, and the chair appointed Zeno Benson, H. M. Blackstone and H. L. Crane members of the Committee.

Figure 17. Town Hall Committee vote 1902.

1903 - The THC reported 33 revenue events generated $300.15. Twenty-two Club/Organizations and five uncharacterized individual's uses are recorded. One, Foresters of American, had a 4-day event. One dance and one lecture ("Red Men") occurred. The THC report records revenues of $27 for use of the piano, tuning it for $2, and transfer of $25 to the Bridgewater Savings Bank Piano Fund Account. Characterized THC expenses of $583.54 were primarily for the janitor, wiring electrical lights, and lighting expenses along with typical expenses such as labor, awnings, wood and coal, and stove repairs. One uncharacterized expense was $274 for material and labor paid to Henry G. Prophett. One revenue source related to the Town House was the "sale of junk " for $75. The Committee on the Town Hall "*reported through Mr. Elwell, plans were submitted and estimates given* "and "*the matter of the new Town Hall indefinity postponed and the committee discharged.*" This closed consideration of providing better accommodation for the town teams as stipulated two years previously.

1904 – The Annual Town Report carries sections for both the Town Hall and Town House. The THC reported revenue of $397.50 which was included in the Town Hall record where expenses were characterized. The THC revenues were from 5 events, two of which are firsts: one is a "moving picture" on Dec 2, 1904 (see note below); the second the mention of a "Village Improvement Society". Twenty events were for clubs and organizations including one business. There are five events labeled as B. H. School including the June 25th graduation. Recorded Town Hall expenses were $441.01 primarily for the janitor, electric lighting, coal, and several individuals. The THC report records $28 for use of the piano and $3.50 for tuning and moving. $24.50 was paid to Bridgewater Savings Bank, presumably to the Piano Fund Account. NOTE: The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System. (MACRIS) BRD-53 entry includes the following characterization: "*During the early 1900's silent movies were shown in the Town Hall' s second floor hall by Charles Barb and John Cohrane. These enterprising men*

later relocated to the Princes's Theater on Broad St. (no longer existent, formerly adjacent to Larry' s restaurant)."

History records the first public projection of movies was on December 28, 1895, by the Lumière brothers in Paris. The projections almost always featured live music, starting with the guitarist. Wikipedia states "*The term "silent film" is something of a misnomer, as these films were almost always accompanied by live sounds. During the silent era that existed from the mid-1890s to the late 1920s, a pianist, theater organist—or even, in large cities, a small orchestra—would often play music to accompany the films. Pianists and organists would play either from sheet music, or improvisation. Sometimes a person would even narrate the inter-title cards for the audience. Though at the time the technology to synchronize sound with the film did not exist, music was seen as an essential part of the viewing experience. "Silent film" is typically used as a historical term to describe an era of cinema prior to the invention of synchronized sound*" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_film#:~:text=Showings%20of%20silent%20films%20almost%20always%20featured%20live,Lumi%C3%A8re%20brothers%20on%20December%2028%2C%201895%20in%20

1905 – A revenue accounting by the THC in the annual report was not included. Rather, as noted in the section's introduction, there appeared to be some disgruntlement on recognition of the THC's work and credit given. The recapitulation table does include Town House revenues ($497.50) and expenditures ($487.98). Reported Town Hall expenses were for the Town House Manager ($25), janitor ($161.63), use of the piano ($30.50), electric lights ($114.70), coal ($32.62), and various repairs and labor including pipes, clock, furnace, gutters, and the vault.

1906 – 1916 Summary

Details of specific THC uses, revenues, and expenses in the Annual Town Reports changed dramatically in 1906 and subsequent years. Basically, financial accounting was reported under a category called Town Hall although the THC revenue was acknowledged. Also, the incidentals account had an appropriation, typically $1,200 to $2,000, under which THC revenue was added and expenditures made. The Annual Reports continued to refer to the Town House or Town Hall in other sections including the Report of the Board of Selectmen or School Committee and Town Meeting warrants and proceedings. Regardless, these reports provide information on improvements to the Town House and who occupied the building. Table 2 summarizes revenues and expenditures of the Town House by year. The table includes the number of Town House Committee members.

In 1914 the Board of Health recommended the town vote to authorize the Selectmen to provide its office in the Town House. The Town Meeting warrant included an article "*to see if the Town will authorize the Selectmen to provide such rooms, in the lower Town Hall, for the Town Officers as are necessary and appropriate money for the same*." The vote was "*That the matter be left to the Selectmen and Board of Health, and it be voted on at a future town meeting*."

The 1915 Annual Town Report includes an account "*Town Hall, Special*" specifically for remodeling the Lower Hall ($1,400 appropriated). The costs are detailed in the report as $1,364.48. The project was specifically for building offices in the Town Hall and was authorized by a Town Meeting vote "*authorizing the Selectmen to provide such rooms in the lower Town Hall for Town Officers as are necessary*". The same Town Meeting considered a recommendation by the Board of Health "*that modern sanitary plumbing be installed in the Town Hall as soon as connections can be made with the sewer. The present conditions are abominable.*" The warrant was "*to see if the Town will raise and appropriate $500 or the purpose of installing modern sanitary toilets in the Town Hall*". (See Box 9 of Dr. Ben Spence's

files https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=spence), for information on septic, sewage, and sewage issues 1880s to 1924. The Trustees of the Public Library indicated a desire to replace its heating system and noted a change was made at Town Hall the prior year with "*very satisfactory results*".

Table 2. Town House/Hall revenue and expenditures reported in the 1906 Annual Town Report

Year	THC Membership	Town Hall Revenue	THC Transfer	Expenses
1906	3	$471	Paid to the Treasurer	$1,560 [a]
1907	2	$424	NA	$479.46
1908	3	$425	To Contingent account	$412.32 [b]
1909	3	$301	To Contingent account	$371.88
1910	3	$892.96	To Incident Account	NA [c]
1911	3	$797.50	To Incident Account	NA
1912	3	$1,123.40	To Incidental Account	$690.60
1913	3	$979.88	To Incidental Account	$726.23
1914	3	$809.05	Unknown	$691.93
1915	3	$690.85	To Contingent Department	$584.33
1916	3	$739.40 [d]	To Contingent Department	$825.50

a. The Town Meeting authorized $1,200 for repairs to the Town Hall to which the THC revenue was added. The 1906 recapitalization shows the total appropriation for the Town House was $1,729.50 ($78 was added from rental of the piano and various entertainments rent due). The repairs are detailed as costing $1,069. Hence, the other expenses included here were those normally assigned to the care and upkeep of the Town Hall. **The Board of Selectmen reported the repairs were a new floor in the upper Hall and front entrance, new treads on the stairways, a new wood ceiling in the lower hall overcoming problems with the former plaster ceiling.** Various other expenses such as coal and the salary for the Town House Manager were included in the Town Hall expenses report.

b. New Town House Furnace paid ($185.13) from Contingency account.

c. Various expenses include $252.5 for chairs for lower hall, repairs, and cleaning railing of cellarway.

d. The Town Hall revenue entry report $900 for "*Rental of Town Offices*". The 1911 Fire Department report states "one hand fire engine and two one-horse hose reels not in commission and stored in the basement of the Town Hall (**note the change from Town House to Town Hall**).

There were two funding votes in 1916 totaling $650 for the sanitary toilet upgrade in Town Hall. In addition, $25 was appropriated for a "*Special Stage*". Roland M. Keith, signing for the Committee in Charge (Figure 18), wrote of the need for departments occupying the Town House to pay rent. Two points stand out: 1) as other Towns do and 2) **Town Offices occupy half of the building**. Revenues and expenses were accounts under the Contingent and Incidental accounts with $1,700 from Town appropriation from which bills were paid including for the Town Hall. The by-laws recorded in this annual report state the Chief of Police "*shall have his office in the Town Hall*".

While the receipts from the Hall have been $48.55 more than 1915, the added expense of needed repairs and a higher cost of coal and a larger amount, also an increase in light consumption, have increased the cost of maintenance in excess of previous years, but if rentals of the town offices is charged to the several departments at a fair price, as is done in other towns, it will show a good balance in favor of the town, for it must be evident to all that if the town occupies one-half the entire building, it thereby diminishes its rental opportunities in a like amount.

R. M. KEITH,
Committee in Charge.

Figure 18. Evidence of Town Paying rental for use of the Town House for Offices in 1916.

1917- 1950 Transition

The Town's Annual Report conveys many changes between 1917 and 1940. Some changes are explicit. Others are recognizable through the structure, type, and level of detail provided in the reports. In general, financial accounting shows more detail for growing budgets and expenses. Figures 19 and 20 convey THC concerns in 1920 and 1922. These reports confirm Town Offices occupied the entire lower floor. These also note the building had not been painted since 1904 and was developing condition issues. No reports from the THC are included thereafter, even though the Town House Committee is listed in the annual reports through 1929 when the function was transferred to the Board of Selectmen from 1929 -1931. The Annual Report does not document the change nor why. A Town House Committee is no longer referenced after 1932.

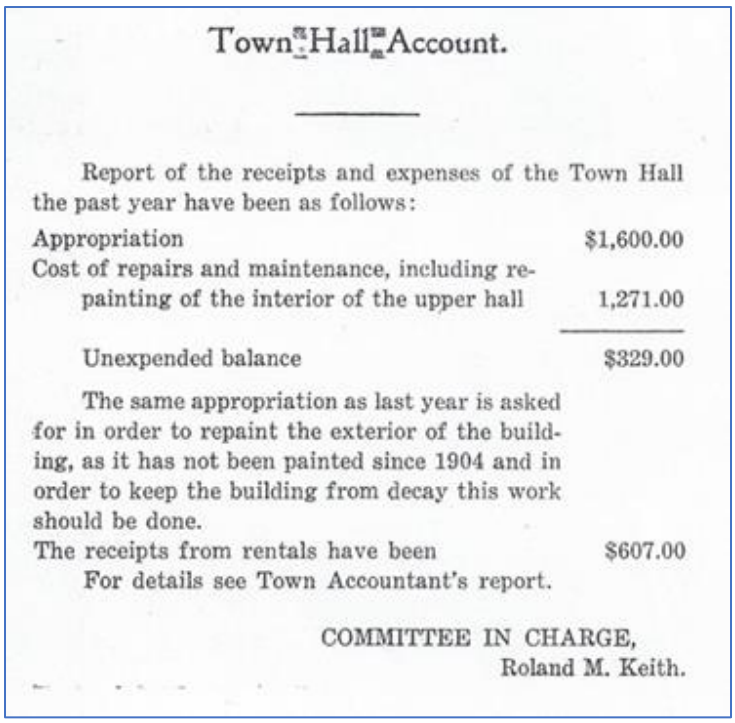
The Report of the Town House Committee for 1920 is as follows:

Appropriation,	$1.400.00
Expended,	1,298.29
Unexpended balance,	$101.71
Receipts of the Hall the past year have been,	$986.00

Much of the additional cost of the operation is chargeable to the increase in cost of coal from $6.00 in 1910 to $19.00 the past year. Repairs to the Hall are urgently needed, which will be asked for this year by special appropriation, as the exterior has not been painted since 1906 and something should be done on the interior along these lines to keep the building in proper condition, as it is the only meeting place the Town has. It should be remembered also that the Town has the use of all its offices, both heated and lighted, for which no rental is charged, all of which would cost the Town around $1,000.00 were they to get these accommodations outside. We trust the Town will grant the funds to make the improvements required. For complete financial statement see Accountant's report.

ROLAND M. KEITH,
Town House Committee.

Figure 19. Report of Town House Committee 1920



Town Hall Account.

Report of the receipts and expenses of the Town Hall the past year have been as follows:

Appropriation	$1,600.00
Cost of repairs and maintenance, including re-painting of the interior of the upper hall	1,271.00
Unexpended balance	$329.00

The same appropriation as last year is asked for in order to repaint the exterior of the building, as it has not been painted since 1904 and in order to keep the building from decay this work should be done.

The receipts from rentals have been $607.00

For details see Town Accountant's report.

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE,
Roland M. Keith.

Figure 20. Report of Town House Committee 1922.

The terminology transition from Town House to Town Hall was complete by 1920. Narrative reports by the Board of Selectmen and School Committee provide detail on town happenings and direction during this period including Town Hall.

The Annual Reports in the 1930s included insurance costs on buildings and an itemized list of Town buildings and building equipment valuation. For example, the Town Hall valuation was $20,000 - $25,000 in the mid- to late-1930s.

With respect to Town Hall use after 1920, the only year with details of the THC is 1922. Only revenue from rental and expenses paid regarding the Town Hall are recorded. In contrast, the records show the Town appropriated funds for the upkeep, maintenance, and care of Town Hall.

Similarly, no record of the rental funds expended for upkeep or improvements to the Common was found although a ***Committee for a Village Improvement Society*** is noted in the 1904 Town Meeting proceedings. The Bridgewater Improvement Association (BIA), founded in 1901, superseded the Village Improvement Society in 1904, and eventually received proceeds from the Flora T. Little Trust Fund. The BIA is specifically funded for the beautification of Bridgewater including the Common.

Due to these changes, the remainder of this section focuses on revenue generated from Town Hall rental as reported in the Annual Town Reports. These revenues are best conveyed graphically (Figure 21). The revenue is not adjusted for inflation or otherwise manipulated to convey the buying power of these revenues.

The graph portraying the Town House/Town Hall rental revenue since 1854 is informative. On a raw dollar basis, the data can be described as comparatively constant between 1854 and 1910. For comparison, the buying power between 1854 and 1940 decreased ~ 82% (i.e., $1.00 in 1854 was equivalent to $1.82 in 1940 (*in2023dollars.com*). That is a dollar in the mid-1900s bought

less than in the 1800s. Note, a dollar 1854 is equivalent to $35.62 in 2023. Also note the rate of inflation did not increase sharply until the mid-1960s (Figure 22).

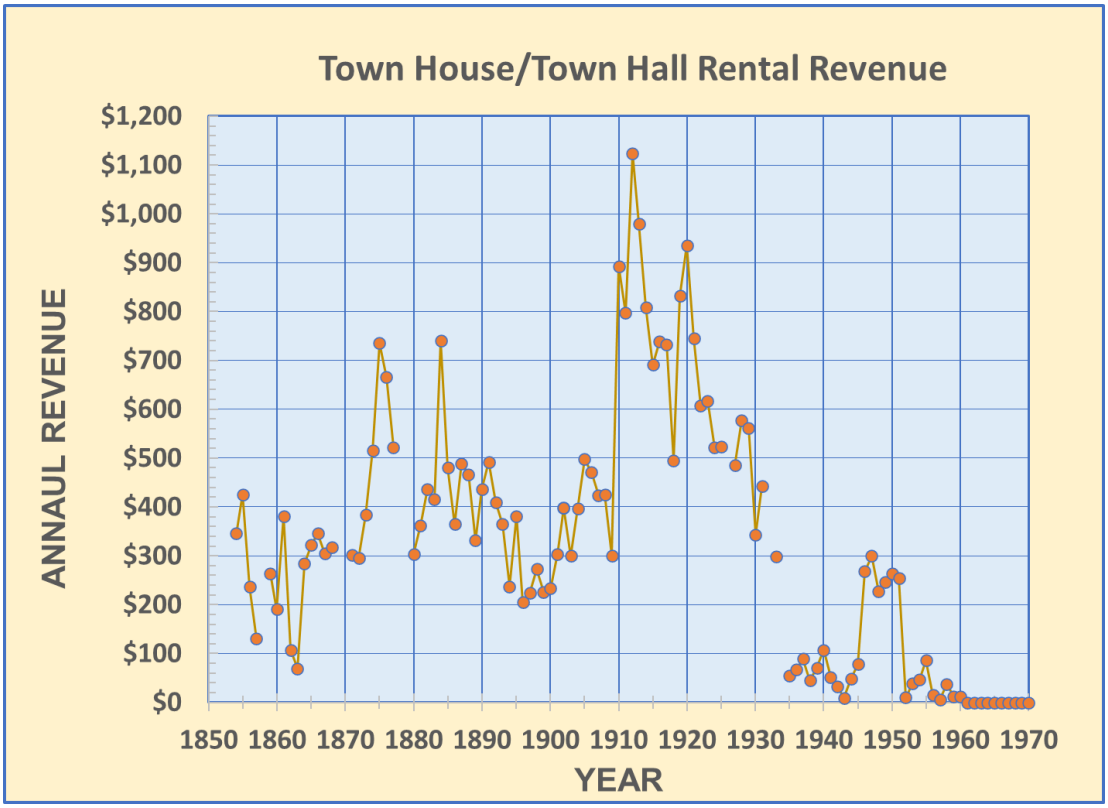


Figure 21. Revenue from Town House/Town Hall Rental 1854-1960.

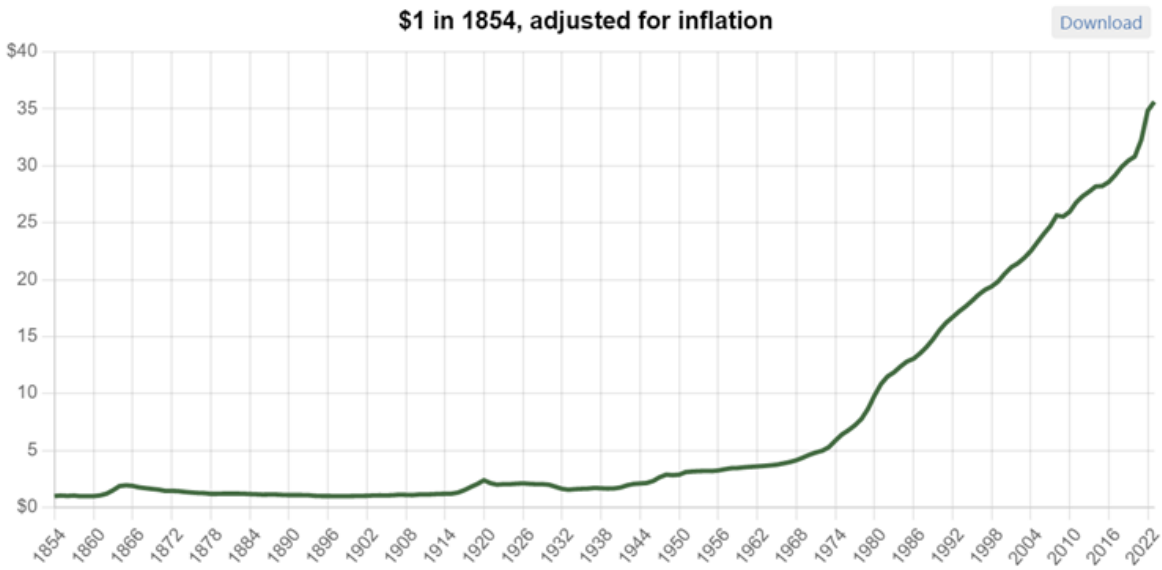


*Figure 22. Buying power of $1 from 1854 to 2023 (*from *in2023dollars.com).*

Close examination of the revenue data (Figure 21) reveals possible reasons for some of the extreme deviations in revenue.

- The first is the downturn in the early 1860s which corresponds with the Civil War. Also observed as a small inflation increase in Figure 22.
- The revenue increase in the early 1870s may reflect an increase in use as 40 to 50 events were recorded in a couple of years in this period, several were multi-day.
- The peak revenue in the early 1880s likely reflects the hall's use as a courthouse, then as a rink when roller skating became popular in this period. The record shows the hall was rented as a rink 20 times in 1884.
- Based on the number of events, the smaller revenue between the mid-1890s and 1900 was driven by less frequent use of the hall (20 +/- per year).
- Town House use and revenue increased in the first decade of the 20th Century then accelerated with the showing of silent movies in the House which began in 1904 and ended in 1916.
- The large revenue increase in 1910 probably reflects occupation of the building's lower floor by Town Offices as the increased revenue corresponds with offices occupying the building during that period. One report suggests the Town was renting space in the building. Unfortunately, the record does not provide details of the upper Hall. Regardless, the decline in reported revenue is nearly linear from 1912 through 1940.
- Rental revenues from 1935 through 1945 were under $100/yr, less than the lowest revenue year in the 19th century (1863), suggesting reduced rent generating events, likely due the depression, World War II, and possibly development of and competition from other spaces for meetings.
- The period between 1945 and 1951 saw a sharp increase in revenue which then decreased to the level generated during WWII at less than $10/yr. before going to zero in 1960 when rental data was no longer recorded.

The reports concerning the Town Hall in the 1942 through 1952 Annual Town Reports are essentially fiscal accounting of appropriations for salaries, heating, electricity, and repairs[12]. For example, the 1942 report carries $2,334 for repairs under Town Hall expenditures including the janitor's salary and other expenses. This level of detail, rather lack thereof, is carried forward through 1948 with repair costs typically ranging between $500 and $1,650.

1950 -1964

The repair costs in 1952 were $3,234; costs fell to $63 in 1955. Reported repair costs of $287, $740, $504, $147, and $1,287 were reported in 1958, 1959, 1960, 1963, and 1964, respectively.

1965 – 1990

Annual Town Reports from 1965 through 1990 continued to focus on revenue and expense through the budgeting and accounting process which became increasingly complex with less specific details during these 25 years. During the late 1960s the need for additional Town Offices due to Town growth was considered by a Municipal Building Committee including accommodation for the police, health department, and other departments including those housed in Town Hall. The Committee eventually recommended a Town Meeting vote for an addition or alternative to the Town Hall, which was defeated.

The Town voted in 1969 to repair the Town Hall Chimney, shingles, and to clean and repair the upper Hall. There was a vote of Town Meeting in 1971 to remodel the Town Hall and the Board

[12] Notable event: During the 1949 drought, water was provided in the basement of the Town Hall during winter to those beyond the reach of the water main

of Selectmen repeatedly conveyed a "dire" need to upgrade the building. It wasn't until 1974 that the Town Meeting voted ~$8,200 for Town Hall repairs "*for the benefit of the Town*". These were completed in 1975 with the help of CEDA (Clean Energy Deployment Administration) funds which provided labor to paint the exterior and interior of the Town Hall and in 1976 to insulate the attic, construct two rooms on the upper floor, and conduct a study for vaults for Town records storage.

1977 saw the expansion of the Assessor's Office and remodeling the Town Clerk's area to provide counters for interaction with the public. The 1983 Town Meeting voted for renovations and repair of the Town Hall, but details are not provided in the Annual Report. Administratively, the Town voted to fund an Executive Office in 1985. The 1988 Annual Report carried $29,469 in expenses for Town Hall renovations including the handicap ramp at its rear entrance.

1990 - 2016

The Annual Town Reports during this period have increasingly fewer details on the uses and upgrades to the Town Hall. The offices housed in the building changed as the Town grew. Interior modifications to accommodate these changes are noted in the financial records. A search of the reports using "*Town Hall*" returned fewer and fewer hits; the best information comes from the few reports referencing the Town Hall as noted in Table 3. For example, the Recreation Commission report lauds no longer having to meet in the unoccupied area in upper Town Hall or Academy Building.

Administrative changes included holding the Town Meetings at the High School on Mount Prospect Street starting in 1995, the Board of Selectmen began meeting in the Memorial Building in 1999. The Veterans Affairs' office was also relocation in 1999.

Technology upgrades included installing the first computer network (2002) and publishing the Town website Property Viewer via Bridgewaterma.org (2004).

Music Alley (Figure 23) was conceived for musical events and citizen enjoyment in 2016 by the Town Clark, Marilee Kenney Hunt, and built by Town staff and volunteers in 2017 with funding from gifts, grants and Community Preservation Act funds.

The major physical upgrades to the building were buttressing the roof support structure and an electrical wiring upgrade in 2002 (Figures 24 & 25) and the 2010 building envelope restoration and window replacements funded with Community Preservation Act dollars[13].

[13] The State legislature promulgated the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2000 as "*a smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational* facilities." https://www.communitypreservation.org/about#:~:text=The%20Community%20Preservation%20Act%20gives%20a%20community%20the,of%20Massachusetts%20residents%20live%20in%20a%20CPA%20community

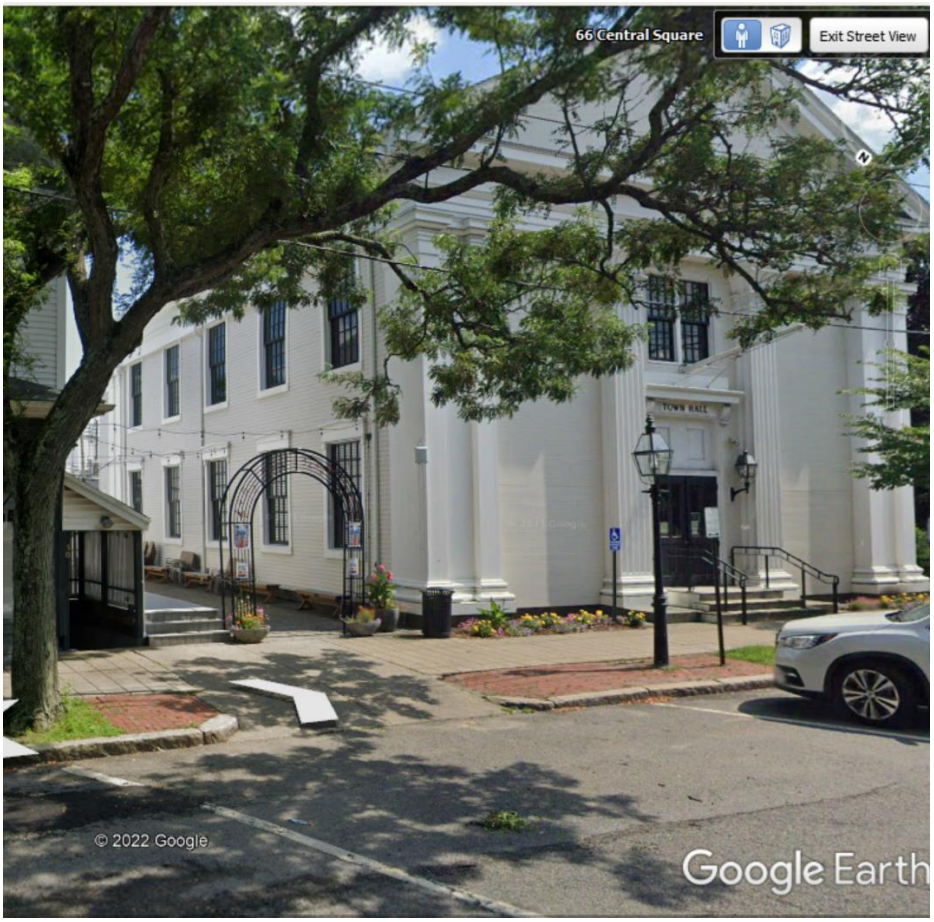


Figure 23. Restored exterior of Town Hall and Music Alley

Figure 24. 2003 Town Hall roof structure support side wall

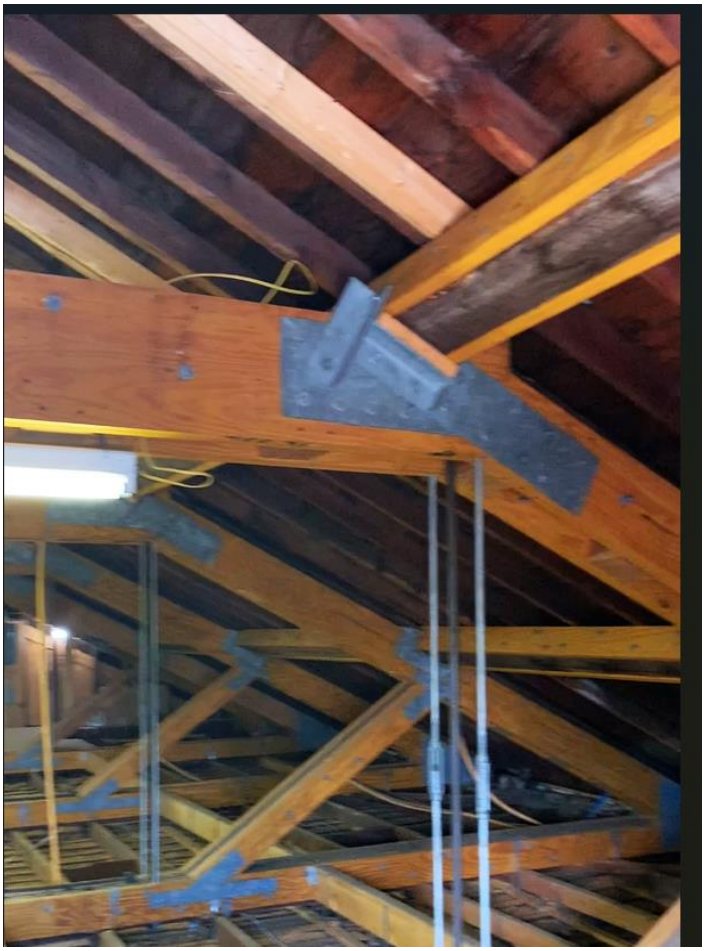


Figure 25. 2003 Town Hall roof structure support side.

The Town Hall is dedicated to two individuals. Mrs. A. Evelyn Nourse (1910-1989), who served the Town for 53 years, resigned as Town Clerk in 1972 and retired as the Town Accountant in 1977. Her service was recognized in 1977 with the Annual Town Report dedicated to her. In August 2015 the Town Hall was edicated to Mr. David L. Flynn (February 5, 1933 - December 9, 2015) long-time public servant including Bridgewater Selectmen and Dean of the State House Representative from the 8th Plymouth District (1964 to 1972 and 1998 to 2011) [https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/journal-news-independent/2015/12/10/longtime-bridgewater-state-rep-david/64912534007/.

Consolidated Town records from 2010 through 2015 are difficult to locate as the Town changed from Town Meeting to a "*city*" form of government (i.e., City Council and Town Manager) in 2010. City governments are not required by Massachusetts General Law to produce an Annual Report. Hence, other than the Charter, specific records of the transition process are not readily available in the Town's records. The record is available in Massachusetts' legislative records.

At the urging of Bridgewater citizens, the Town Council voted in 2015 for the Town Clerk to produce an annual report like those produced under the Town Meeting government form. These reports have been diligently produced since then and can be found on the Town's website at https://www.bridgewaterma.org/1388/Annual-Town-Reports.

Bridgewater's municipal offices housed in the Town Hall were transferred to the Academy Building in August 2016 after its $5.2 million restoration and renovation. The 1843 Town House has been unoccupied since then, serving as an unheated storge facility.

Restoration and reuse of the Town House would complete recommendations of the *2008 Town of Bridgewater Municipal Buildings Study* funded with Community Preservation Act funds.

Final Notes

This research identified a fiscal item variously called the Town House Piano or Town Hall Piano account held by various banks over time. In the late 1890s a piano in the Town House was rented for events and unspecified reasons. The rental funds were used to move and tune the piano. In 1902 the Town House Committee reports an external bank account was funded with a $27 transfer to the *Piano Fund Account* held at the Bridgewater Savings Bank. The record shows these transfers were from rental of the Town House piano and appeared to be for its care and tuning. Subsequent yearly reports record similar transfers to the account. There is little additional information until 1967 when the Town Hall Piano fund balance was listed at $1,231.01 in the Annual report. By 2008 the balance had grown to $10,022.69 from interest alone. The value increased to $10,352.14 in 2014 and was $10,580.24 as of this report. ***Should Town House reuse plan include access to these funds to support a music based cultural program going forward? If so, what and how?***

Many Town Meeting warrant articles and votes beginning in the mid-1800s concerned the formation of a fire department, School St. station construction, and various expansions. The records note storage of old equipment "*not in commission*" in the Town House basement. The first School St. station was built in 1857 (*Fire Service in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, 1844-1910,* Benjamin A. Spence, 2010 https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=spence). An important consideration of these deliberations was the ability to dry hoses. To that end a tower for hose drying was commissioned in 1895 and constructed at the rear of the Town House (Figures 26 and 27) between the original station and the hook and ladder truck garage built in March 1895 (https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=spence, p11). Note the tower is attached to the piedmont of the Town House and held a fire alarm. The tower no longer exists but its historical significance remains. Conceptually, as Town House reuse and restoration progresses a reproduction of this historic structure could become an important component of the plan. Specifically, access to the "*upper hall*" is required for all people per state law. How this is achieved must include consideration of external access to the first and second floors in the form of an elevator. **What better approach than restoring the Tower as the elevator to honor this historical element of the building and fire station?**

Figure 26. Hose drying Tower added in 1895.

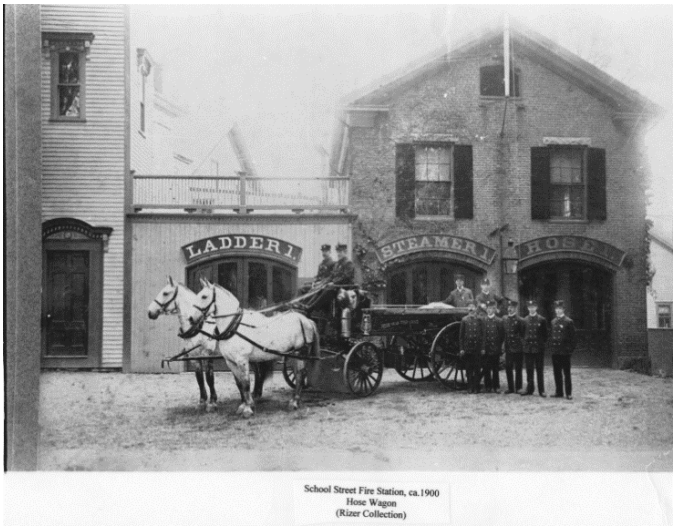


Figure 27. Original 1895 hose tower, Hook and Ladder Garage, and 1857 Firehouse on School St.

https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=spence

Summary

Bridgewater's Town House, first developed as space for Town purposes, specifically Town Meetings, also hosted events and meetings which served many of the Town's social needs through the 1800s and early 20th century. Table 3 is timeline of the Town House history relative to use, additions, renovations, upgrades, repairs, restoration, and some significant social events.

Table 3. Significant 1843 - 2023 Town House Upgrades, Restorations, and Events.

Upgrade/Event	Year
Built	1843
Cellar approved for pound	1843
Regulations for the care and use of the Town House voted	1843
Town House Committee named	1844
Fence in front of Town House approved	1844
Vote to not open the house on the sabbath for any "*purpose whatsoever*"	1849
Curtains added the upper floor hall at Town expense	1849
Stage in upper hall added	1857
Lighting Hall (likely kerosene)	1860
Roof Shingled	1866
Curtains added to hall	1868
Work on Common funded from rental income	1871-1890
Brick Safe Installed	1872
Gas piping installed	1874
Brick cesspool added	1874
Pump & piping (gas)	1875
Streetlights funded	1876
Rear addition authorized and constructed	1878-1879
Gas Lighting, ventilation installed	1878
Stage piped for lighting	1878
Housed a Court (Superior)	1881-1885
Upper Hall used as a rink for roller skating	1885
New gutters installed	1886
First use of a Telephone noted (telephone invented in 1871)	1887
Interior Compartments added	1889
New seats for upper hall purchase and installed	1889
Lowered ceiling and window in Selectmen's Office	1890
Wired for electricity/first electric bill	1891
Shingling	1894
Fire Hose Drying Tower Built adjacent the Town House East Wall	1895
First Town House Manager	1897
First "silent movie" shown	1904
New Upper Hall floor and front entrance, treads on the stairways, a wood ceiling in the lower hall overcoming problems with the former plaster ceiling	1906
New Town House Furnace	1908
New Chairs for Upper Hall	1910
Lower Town Hall converted to offices	1915
Sanitary upgrades and connection to sewer system; modern sanitary toilets installed	1915 -1916
Town House Committee becomes history	1929 -1932
Ground floor Offices paneled and painted	1966
Repairs and painting exterior and interior	1975
Attic Insulation, two new rooms upper floor, painting (CETA Support)	1976
Storage room added; women's restroom added; Assessors office expanded, Safe taken to basement; Town Clerk closet & bookshelves removed, counters installed; inadequate Town records storage identified, temporary storage at a local bank	1977
Various repairs and restorations; remodeling and reconstruction of Town Hall offices; facelift to Town Hall	1983-1986
Energy upgrades	1987
Accessible Ramp Installed	1988

Upgrade/Event	Year
Recreation Commission lauds no longer having to meet in unoccupied area in upper Town Hall or the Academy building due to gift of a 60-foot trailer for recreation use	1991
Town Meeting moved from Town Hall to High School auditorium	1994
Board of Selectmen Office moved to Memorial Library	1999
Town Meeting voted to fund "correction of heating system in Town Hall"	1995
Gas fired boiler installed	1995
Veterans' agent reports the office relocated to newly renovated facilities in Town Hall	1999
First Computer network installed including Town Hall	2002
Roof interior support structures buttressed; electrical wiring upgraded	2003
Bridgewterma.org Town Website established with Online Property viewer	2004
Town House envelope restored; windows replaced.	2010
1656 to 1956 Town Records Preserved with Community Preservation Funds	2008
Town Clerk organized records from 1700s, 1800s and 1900s; records placed on shelves in Town Clerk's basement storage unit Town Hall	2015
Town Hall dedicated to Mrs. A. Evelyne Nourse and Mr. David L. Flynn	1977, 2015
Offices in Town Hall relocated to the renovated Academy Building including historic records	2016-present
Town Hall used for unheated storage of records and other artifacts; black mold found	2016-2024
Town Hall reuse report developed with Massachusetts Culture Council Grant	2020-2021
Roof re-shingled, gutters, and rear pediment restoration with Massachusetts Historic Preservation and Bridgewater Community Preservation Act Funds	2023

Trends of the day are reflected in many events including roller skating, silent movies, temperance movement meetings, concerts, theater, and high school graduations. The Town House hosted organizations, fairs, conventions, individuals, and even served as court for a few years. Its history reflects technological transformations of America. Key examples are conversion of lighting from oil (likely whale) and kerosene lamps to gas to electricity. Sanitation improvements including a cesspool, installation of piping for sewage, and "*modern toilets*" are reflected in its history. Heating changes from wood and coal stoves to fuel oil to gas and more centralized heating are recorded.

Its history also mirrors the development of the Town's government as it served the Board of Selectmen, chief of police, assessor, and other offices.

The terminology changes from the House to Hall in 1915 is marked by the transition to housing Town offices and eventual dismissal of the Town House Committee by 1930 which had served as the manager of the House for nearly a century.

Rental of the House played a significant role in generating revenue for "*care of the house*" including maintenance and repair through its first seven decades and later for janitorial functions. Funding for major House developments voted by Town Meeting in the 1800's includes the rear addition, major repairs to the Hall, and various improvements noted above including the installation of partitions and construction of the Town's Offices in 1915. After 1915 the Town budget served to care for the House and maintenance although rental of the Hall provided some income.

The information developed during this research hopefully informs potential future uses of the Town House as the Town works to revitalize the center of Town. The historic uses are consistent with recommendations conveyed in *Findings and Recommendations to the Town of Bridgewater MA in the Adaptive Reuse of Old Town Hall* report (2021). The report found the building "*can be*

effectively used as a cultural center that includes exhibit, retail, learning, and performance". This recommendation is consistent with historical building use, especially the second-floor hall.

Particularly relevant is learning (historically readings, lectures, conventions), performance (bands, concerts, operetta, dramatics, theater, performances, entertainment such as Gen. Thom Thumb, dance), and exhibits and festivals. Unique Hall uses such as a rink (roller skating) does not fit with today's culture although a community theater is possibility.

Retail uses were not evident in the historic record unless one considers an auction documented in 1878 as retail and possibly fairs. An historic use not mentioned in the 2021 Feasibility Study is meeting space for organizations and other groups, such as political parties, civic groups, and non-profit organizations such as the Garden Club, Ousamequin Club, and Bridgewater Improvement Association.

Another potential use of the Town House is related to the various historic features of Central Square. For example, Figure 28 shows the Town House taken from South St. about 1900. During this research, a description of Central Sq. in the 1854 Annual Town Report (p14) was found (Figure 29). The Town House plays an important role in the description which may be relevant to potential future downtown redevelopment and modifications to Central Sq. This 1854 description of Central Square depends on knowledge of the historic locations of the *circa* 1735 Old Town House and 1843 Town House and various other named properties and buildings. Importantly, land transfer deeds recorded in 1822 and 1827 require the subject properties "r*emain as common ground forever'* (1822) and "*forever improved as common*" (1827) as reported in Attachment 3.

Figure 28. The Town House and southern Central Square circa 1900

SQUARES.—1.

Central Square. Includes the highway, and common ground in front of Mitchell's Hotel, to wit, begin in N. W. corner of old Town House lot, thence Northerly across road in line of new Town House lot and Hotel estate, on the West side thereof, to the land of C. Washburn & Co., near their store; thence across road to corner of Capt. Washburn and A. Hale's house lots; thence Westerly to S. W. corner of Crane's store; thence across road to N. E. corner of Perkins & Hobart's store; thence Southerly in line of road on W. side thereof, about 45 rods to a point opposite the N. W. corner of the Academy yard; thence Easterly across road in line of Academy yard, on the N. side thereof to the first bounds, having about 105 rods of highway.

Figure 29. Bridgewater Central Square description 1854

Attachment 1. Excerpts from the 2008 Town of Bridgewater Municipal Buildings Study

Town Hall - Synopsis & Recommendations (p 7-9). The Bridgewater Town Hall is a good example of an architecturally significant Greek Revival style building. Together, with the Bridgewater Academy, the Central Square Congregational Church, Memorial Building and the First Parish Church the Bridgewater Town Hall helps to comprise an outstanding historic complex located around the Central Square. The Town Hall is listed in the Bridgewater Center Historic District as a contributing building. State and federal tax credits are not available for structures unless they are listed individually as a historic building in the U.S. Department of Interior data base or contained within a recognized historic district. NCA recommends that the Town continues its effort to have the Bridgewater Center Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

With a few exceptions, the physical condition of the Bridgewater Town Hall is good. The overall exterior siding, trim, roofing, flashings, structural framing, windows and doors are in sound condition. However, there are some areas of the siding, trimming and windows with severe water damage. The exterior windows are good quality and are in fair condition, but they are single glazed and energy inefficient. The interior storm windows were installed in the 1980s to resolve this issue. Where possible, we recommend restoring the original 1843 single glazed windows and installing operable invisible storm windows, which are appropriate for historic buildings. If the replacement of the heavily deteriorated windows is required, we would Bridgewater Municipal Buildings Study recommend installing the replacement windows along the rear and side yard elevations. If the town should decide that new replacement windows are warranted on any of the historic buildings, then replacement windows must conform to the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties and match the original windows in profile, appearance, texture and materials. For historic buildings, the quality of windows and doors is paramount, and custom designed and fabricated windows will be required by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and other Preservation Agencies and Organizations. Original interior staircase, Bridgewater Town Hall.

The building is currently occupied by the town offices and has approximately 3,500 sq. ft. of space on each floor. Historically, the second floor was occupied by assembly space, but currently it is subdivided and used for the town's central computer, traffic management office and the Zoning Board of appeals. According to the Preliminary Building Evaluation Report Draft of May 2007, none of the space on the second floor is used more than 10-15 hours per week, which leaves over 2000 sq. ft. Bridgewater Municipal Buildings Study of underutilized office space. These areas can be utilized as offices or rehabilitated as meeting space or other uses depending on the future use of the building.

The existing handicapped access to the building needs improvements. There is no ADA compliant method of access communications between the floors. The toilet facilities are not ADA compliant and are outdated. The electrical wiring within the building was recently replaced during the roof reconstruction in 2003. Information Technology Wiring has been done over the last five years. The building is currently heated by a gas fired boiler, which was installed in 1995, and a single pipe steam heating system, which was built in 1800s. There is no central alarm system or sprinklers in the building.

Existing conditions, Bridgewater Town Hall basement. The mechanical/electrical systems, plumbing, fire suppression systems and handicapped access issues will all require an upgrade to meet current codes, improve safety and improve the energy efficiency of the building. The degree to which these will need to be addressed will vary in accordance with the future use of the building.

Attachment 2. MACRIS Town House Record

https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=BRD.53

MACRIS BRD.53 Town House.pdf

Attachment 3. Deeds of Central Square

Library Corner – December 2011

By Mary O'Connell

There are many kinds of maps. There are road maps, aeronautical maps, Nautical map, hiking and bicycling maps, thematic maps, topographical maps and historical maps.

Today I was introduced to a new kind of map by our friendly historical room volunteer, Bob Wood, who also apparently, has cartography talents. I would call bob's map a giant, layered, multilevel historical map of downtown Bridgewater. Bob's map focused on East side of Central Square and his aim is to solve a great mystery – that is, who owns the Town Common?

Bob has lived in Bridgewater for 26 years and I've always assumed that the Town of Bridgewater was the natural owner of the Common. So theoretically we all own it and enjoy the benefits of its beautiful trees, plantings, benches and monuments. Not necessary so, according to Bob.

In the processes of collection deeds for other projects, he collected deeds for the east side of Central Square and sorted them by date. In the process, one deed of two acres sold by Jane Lazell, widow of Isaac Lazell, had only one dimension. It took several tries to place where this property was located. Also, Abram Washburn and his wife Mary sold for $400 a quarter of an acre out of this two acre to the Inhabitants of the Town of Bridgewater. But where was the quarter acre located on the property? Using the dates and placing each property on an outline of the east side of Central Square, he was able to locate the position. This lead to some problems but by attaching each property to a strip of paper, he could "flip" the property on to the outline as each property was sold.

In the deed 178/210 – 1822) to Abram Washburn (and his Wife Mary) for the original Academy Building lot which burned in February 1822, is the following statement."From the last mentioned stake to that by the Road is North 48 degrees East and the remainder of the land conveyed and included in the first described premises which lies N. Westerly of the line drawn from the last described stake, shall not be occupied by the said Abram or any personly or under him in any other way **than as a Common & the same shall remain as Common land forever".**

In the deed of two acres, (New Barn Lot – BK 182 p 103 - 9/29/1827)was a statement: "said premises are conveyed on the express conditions **that none of the land lying between a line drawing from the corner where the said Meeting House Road (School St.) and the Turnpike intersect** (New Bedford and Bridgewater Turnpike – Chapter 91 of the acts of 1803)to a corner described in said Academy (1) lot (deed :178/210 – 4/18/1822)by the common and said turnpike **"shall ever be improved other than as a common the course from the intersection of said road is North about 48 degrees East".**

There are several other properties in Bridgewater that he cannot find deeds to property that the town should own, the Academy Building and the right side of the Fire Station. The Town Report had information that the Town should have deeds that should be recorded at the Plymouth Registry of Deeds